

Parental involvement in study abroad: A case study from the University of Minnesota

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Abstract

Parents have become key stakeholders in the study abroad experience. This study constructively examined how parents shape their role through relationships with the institution and their student. Specifically, this study focused on the case of the Learning Abroad Center on the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities campus. Using multiple methods, the researcher gathered perspectives from both the institution and parents of study abroad students to analyze how the office conveys a role to parents and how parents shape their own role. Additionally, this study examined whether the Learning Abroad Center's and parents' expectations align. Findings show that maintaining a relationship with the Parent Program Office, keeping communication open and establishing a parent role has been critical to the Learning Abroad Center's success with parent relations. Parents recognize the importance of study abroad and students' independence, but still appear uncertain as to what their role should be and where to access parent-specific resources.

Keywords: Study abroad, parental involvement, higher education, international experience

Abstracto

Los padres se han vuelto participantes claves en la experiencia de programas de estudio al extranjero. Este estudio examinó de manera constructiva como los padres forman su papel conforme a las relaciones con la institución educativa y sus estudiantes. Específicamente, este estudio se centró en el caso del Learning Abroad Center de la universidad de Minnesota, Twin Cities. Usando varios métodos, la investigadora obtuvo perspectivas de la institución educativa como también de los padres para analizar como el Learning Abroad Center transmite un papel a los padres y los padres cómo forman su propio rol. Además, este estudio examinó si las expectativas de ambos lados se alinean. Las conclusiones demuestran que mantener una relación con el Parent Program Office, mantener comunicación abierta con los padres, y establecer un papel para los padres ha sido crítico para el éxito del Learning Abroad Center con las interacciones con los padres. Estos reconocen la importancia de los estudios al extranjero y la independencia de los estudiantes, pero todavía parece que no están seguros de lo que debe ser su papel y donde se pueden obtener los recursos específicos para los padres.

Palabras claves: Estudios al extranjero, participación de los padres, educación superior, experiencia internacional

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Glossary

FERPA: Family Education Rights and Privacy Act

NAFSA: Association for International Educators

NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education

APD: Associate Program Director

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Ensuring a successful study abroad experience for students requires careful orchestration and planning. Key actors include not only students and the study abroad office, but parents as stakeholders in the study abroad process. Indeed, parents are emotionally, as well as financially invested, in their student's experience (Johnson, personal communications, 2009). Parents today have closer relationships with their children and keep in touch more frequently than in previous generations, lessening the impact of separation at college (Cutright, 2008).). In fact, studying abroad may be the new "going-to-college" experience (Savage, Johnson personal communications, 2009). The physical distance between students and parents is often much greater and internet or other cost-effective methods of staying in touch are not always readily available abroad. While the increase of communication technologies, such as Skype, allow for more frequent contact, the student is left more to his or her own devices. Moreover, studying abroad introduces added layers of complexity that neither student nor parent may be familiar with, such as encountering another language and a new culture.

Parents have many reasons for wanting to get involved and be informed about the study abroad experience. Safety matters are perhaps parents' primary concern during a sojourn abroad (Savage, 2009). Prominent events, such as the September 11th attacks and SARS epidemic highlighted the need for study abroad offices to ensure safety of their participants (Luegthe, 2004, p. 24). Additionally, if a parent takes a consumerist stance, study abroad may be seen as a "prepackaged consumer experience...like tourist

packages... [which include] arrangements for food, lodging, and visits to popular attractions in the country, and then add the educational components” (Bolen, 2001, p. 186). As a result, “parents feel that they have purchased knowledge of and responsibility for the safety, living conditions, and cultural experiences of their children by paying the program tuition” (Bolen, 2001, p. 194). Study abroad administrators must work simultaneously to satisfy parents’ concerns while also establishing boundaries to parental involvement. Moreover, study abroad offices must strive to encourage parents to see study abroad beyond the consumerist lens for the true purpose of study abroad, a valuable learning experience in and about another culture.

If parents are to be recognized in the study abroad process, the challenge for study abroad administrators is to be able to encourage parents to stay behind the scenes, allowing students to take ownership of their experience. Administrators struggle with some parents emailing or calling too frequently, parents that come into study abroad offices, and many parents that fill out paperwork for their students (C. Parcels, personal communications, November 2009). In attempts to counteract this perceived over-involvement, as well as to acknowledge parents’ need for information, many universities’ study abroad offices and third-party programs now offer information and resources specifically geared towards parents on their websites. As subsequent chapters discuss more in-depth, parents permeate nearly every aspect of a college campus today, suggesting that it is unlikely parents’ presence can be excluded from the study abroad process.

Currently, there is little in the way of sharing best practices among professionals

for interacting with parents in the study abroad process. Administrators tend to recollect more readily the negative or extreme interactions with parents, such as a parent taking their child overseas to set up the student's housing before a study abroad program starts (NAFSA Region IV conference, personal communications, October 2009). Consequently, there is little constructive evidence of appropriate channels to handle parent interactions. Sharing stories such as these with other professionals focuses the dialogue of parental involvement in study abroad around extreme circumstances. It is important that while study abroad administrators acknowledge parents will have some sort of role, offices must also recognize a continuum of parental involvement.

Thus, the purpose of this study is not to look at extreme circumstances and ponder the impacts of overly involved (i.e., helicopter) parents. Rather, this study constructively examines the parent's role as it is shaped by parents' relationships with the institution and the student, capturing both parents' and administrators' perspectives. In particular, this study focuses on the Learning Abroad Center on the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities campus. The Learning Abroad Center offers parents a variety of resources, including online, print, and in-person opportunities for parents to engage in the study abroad process.

Supporting Research Regarding Parental Involvement

There is no research focusing specifically on parental involvement in study abroad and limited study abroad research mentioning parents, but parents' presence on college campuses extends far beyond the study abroad office. As Kennedy (2009) notes, today, "the increase in parental involvement (or interference, depending on your point of

view) has been a topic in nearly every facet of higher education” (p. 16). To adjust to the increase in parent relations, many universities have established parent offices. Around 70% of four-year institutions have parent coordinators (Lum, 2006; Merriman, 2007), typically housed in student affairs or university development (Wartman & Savage, 2008).

Traditionally, colleges and universities have followed legal guidelines for handling parental interactions. From 1913 until the 1960s, *in loco parentis* was the norm for college campuses (Henning, 2007). This policy gave universities the responsibility for its students, serving as substitute parents and limiting the need for the actual parents to be involved. While *in loco parentis* focused more on taking away students’ autonomy by placing them under surrogate parents (the university), today’s legal framework regarding parents takes the opposite approach. Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), once students enter college, they assume legal rights of their educational records (Weeks, 2001). These records include finances (i.e., tuition bills), grades, etc. With this policy, many higher education administrators can use FERPA in attempts to keep parents from getting involved (Kennedy, 2009). Each institution, and even each office (including the study abroad office) on campus, has the ability to interpret FERPA as they wish. On the one hand, a more conservative interpretation allows institutions to refuse to release any information pertaining to a student’s academic record. On the other hand, others recognize that “the institutional relationship with parents is too important to alienate them” (Kennedy, 2009, p. 17).

The goal of many parent offices is to utilize parents’ influence and advocacy to ensure a more successful college experience for today’s students. These offices believe

that working with parents, rather than against them, is more desirable for college campuses, as it appears that students *want* interactions with their parents and often request their involvement in their college experience (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Moreover, research does show that parental involvement is beneficial for scholastic achievement in higher education (Wolf, Sax & Harper, 2009). If parental involvement is indeed a covetable component of a student's college experience, this raises the question of how parental involvement can be beneficial for the study abroad experience. Thus, to better understand a study abroad context, characteristics of parental involvement in the overall higher education experience must also be examined.

This generation of college parents' involvement in their students' lives challenges many college administrators. As mentioned above, a changing parent-child relationship is evident to university professionals, but there are many characteristics which shape these new relationships. One particular phenomenon taking place on college campuses is known as "helicopter parents." These parents take a very hands-on approach in their children's lives, "hovering" over them and intervening on the student's behalf (Lum, 2006). A parent taxonomy has developed in the popular press and throughout higher education professional circles. Helicopter parents, however, represent an extreme of parental involvement that is often perceived as being very negative and interfering in the student's development. Indeed, the words "helicopter parents" do not exude a positive connotation. Google the words "helicopter parents" and one finds even more phrases, such as *Blackhawk parents*, *Lawnmower parents*, and *Secret Agent parents* to add to the repertoire, leading these concepts to sound almost menacing.

These terms circulate through blogs and popular media, catching the reader's attention. Consequently, such conceptualization is problematic, as this information does not "tell the whole story" (Wartman & Savage, 2008, p. 4). If they assume that the majority of parents fall into one of the above categories, administrators neglect to take into account the positive aspects of parental involvement that much empirical research does. Needless to say, parental involvement does not sit at two extremes of overly involved or not involved at all. Rather, there is a continuum of involvement on which parents move (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Various student adjustment theories can provide a framework for examining both the benefits and disadvantages of parental involvement along this continuum, which will be discussed in Chapter Two.

Echoing the discussion on helicopter parents in higher education mentioned above, the same is true in the study abroad experience where negative and extreme occurrences are more memorable. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that similar to the overall college experience, there have been many changes in study abroad, consequently altering students' and parents' expectations of what a study abroad experience should be like. It used to be that "the *junior year abroad* or post-graduation backpacking trip put a finish on what you'd learned at college" (Deresiewicz, 2009, p.1). After World War II, the government began promoting study abroad through initiatives such as the Fulbright Act in 1946 and the National Defense Education Act in 1958, particularly focusing on area and language studies (Fels, 1993, p. 5). Since then, there have been great shifts in study abroad including host locations, program types and lengths. According to the 2009 Open Doors Report, "American students increasingly

seek non-traditional study abroad destinations,” stating that there has been an increase in students going to “China, India, South Africa, Argentina and Ecuador” (Institute of International Education, 2009, para. 2).

As study abroad becomes a more prevalent component of students’ academic careers, the destinations, program structures, and support services available will continue to diversify to meet the changing demands and needs of the student population. It is important to understand how study abroad uncovers a new set of concerns for both parents and students. Traveling across an ocean means increased unfamiliarity, possibly a foreign language, and maybe less access to health services, or a different standard of living. When a student studies abroad, a fluctuation of emotions and sensations is experienced in peaks and valleys, known as “culture shock” (Huber, personal communications, 2009). Study abroad professionals already understand the impact these added unfamiliarities can have on students and parents, but the challenge remains for staff to communicate these added challenges and necessary adjustments to parents who may not fully understand what an international experience entails. This may be even truer for parents who have not had their own international travel experience.

While the Learning Abroad Center and other study abroad offices provide a variety of parent-specific materials, there is no research to show whether study abroad offices are meeting parents’ expectations and needs, nor whether the parents understand their role in the experience. It is important that expectations align and relationships be established and/or maintained among all stakeholders in the study abroad process.

Deficiencies in the Literature

Anecdotal evidence and stories shared among professionals suggests the need to conduct research on the topic of parents, but it is important to move beyond anecdotal accounts. It is unknown whether certain levels of parental involvement actually hinder students' development and integration abroad, yet this is a common fear of study abroad professionals. This is not to say that the stories shared are irrelevant or misplaced, but there is a lack of concrete knowledge about how parents' involvement in the student's study abroad process may actually impact the student's experience. Therefore, this study aims to identify the strengths of current parent relations at the Learning Abroad Center, but also areas that warrant improvement based on the data collected from parents.

Personal Assumptions and Value Premises

The premises and assumptions in this study have been formed based on my experiences as both a student studying abroad and a professional working in the field. I have participated in study abroad programs and gone through the process with my own parents five times. As a student, my experiences were very independent, as my parents did not get involved except financially and to provide advice as requested. Additionally, several years of professional experience in the study abroad field has influenced this study. One professional experience, in particular, inspired this study. This position involved frequent interaction with parents who often completed paperwork and called on behalf of their students. Based on these professional and personal experiences, I assume that most, if not all, parents get involved to some degree; however, this involvement might be indirect or direct (i.e., giving advice to students versus directly interacting with

the university). For this research, it has been my intention to examine the continuum between indirect and direct involvement as a way to understand more deeply how and why parents get involved in study abroad.

Outline of the study

As this present chapter has explained, information on parental involvement in study abroad must, in part, be understood from an overall higher education context and then reinterpreted with the specific nuances of the study abroad experience due to the lack of research. Furthermore, by obtaining both the institutional perspective and the parental perspective, this study achieves a more comprehensive picture of parental involvement in study abroad as it pertains to the case of the Learning Abroad Center at the University of Minnesota. The following section outlines the body of this study.

Chapter Two contains a literature review examining several areas around parental involvement in higher education, including student adjustment to college and generational theory. The study abroad literature chosen for this study focuses on issues where parents may get involved, such as health and safety, and finances, as well as parents' influence on students' study abroad program choices. Chapter Three presents the methodology and methods of the research conducted. Chapter Four presents the findings for all methods utilized in this study, including the staff interviews, orientation observations, the survey results, and findings from the parent focus group. Chapter Five includes a discussion and analysis of the findings. Additionally, a set of implications for the Learning Abroad Center are presented, as well as suggestions for other institutions to consider and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The literature reviewed in this chapter frames parental involvement for study abroad through the broader lens of higher education. Within each section of the review, a concluding portion discusses aspects of study abroad (including the literature for those topics, when available) that align with parental involvement in the college experience. Due to the limitations with study abroad literature, particularly with parental involvement, an interwoven approach provides a more cohesive review between higher education and the study abroad experience.

The first section of the review examines theoretical frameworks, which explain parent-child relationships and students' resultant adjustment to college. Additionally, a brief discussion of the definition and conceptualization of adulthood will be presented, followed by an overview of generational theory. This latter theory establishes a contextual background based on the categorization and attributes of a generation as presented by Howe and Strauss (2003).

Second, the review deconstructs parental involvement in the overall higher education experience. When examined in detail, parental involvement (or lack thereof) at the college level is a result of many contributing factors, such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and parents' own educational experience. The review also looks at the ways universities and colleges have adapted to an increase in parental involvement in higher education.

Caveats

It should be noted that this review examines the literature through a primarily contemporary scope. The parent-child relationship theories provide a historical context for understanding parental involvement and student adjustment in college, but present day interactions and behaviors with parents are unique to this day and age. Using a contemporary lens better ensures that the review appropriately highlights modern-day parent behavior phenomena and the resultant impacts on the study abroad experience.

Furthermore, parental involvement is discussed broadly to encompass a variety of actions and behaviors. There is no clear-cut definition of involvement that the literature identifies. Thus for the purpose of this study, parental involvement is operationalized from an institutional perspective to mean either direct and/or indirect involvement. For this study, direct is understood to mean when parents intervene on the student's behalf, or interact directly with the university or college. Indirect involvement aligns with support to the student, whether emotionally, financially, or through seeking their own information from a website or guide.

Theories on Student Adjustment through Parent Relationships

The following theories offer different perspectives of parental involvement at the tertiary level. These perspectives offer both positive and critical interpretations of parent-child relationships as it relates to parents' influence in higher education. The tension between the theories can provide additional implications for parental involvement.

Separation-individuation theory

One lens for understanding parent-child relationships in college is through

separation-individuation theory. In this theory, the goal for students and parents is to establish “mutually validating relationships.” Essentially, students find a balance between their independent identity and recognition of this identity through their parents (Lapsley, Rice & Shadid, 1989; Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002; Tanner, 2004). Separation-individuation is likely to occur when students go to college, as they have to physically separate from their parents and begin to make more decisions on their own (Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002). Frequently, administrators view this theory as the dominant, or desirable approach for student development in college (Wartman & Savage, 2008).

Many studies utilized Hoffman’s (1984) Psychological Separation Inventory (PSI) to measure students’ sense of independence, which identifies four subscales: *functional independence*, *attitudinal independence*, *emotional independence* and *conflictual independence* (Lapsley et al., 1989; Rodriguez & Bernstein, 1995; Choi, 2002; Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002; Beyers & Goossens, 2003; Choi, 2002). As reviewed by many researchers, one of these scales, *conflictual independence*, or freedom from excessive guilt, resentment, and anxiety, demonstrates a significant and positive relationship with students’ adjustment to college (Choi, 2002; Lapsley & Edgerton 2002; Beyers & Goossens 2003). In other words, students will exhibit higher levels of academic and personal-emotional adjustment if they have higher *conflictual independence* from their parents (Beyers & Goossens, 2003).

In cultures where independence and autonomy are more highly valued, higher separation-individuation from parents may be a more desirable societal target. Choi’s (2002) review of the literature found that mainstream, Western psychology ignores the

role of interdependence and connectedness. Contrastingly, in collectivist cultures, people value family connectivity and interdependence; thus, adjustment and development in college may differ from a separation-individuation framework (Choi, 2002; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003). Choi (2002) asserted that there still is a positive correlation between *conflictual independence* and successful college adjustment, as with the rest of the population, but Choi also stated that “general dependence was positively associated with college adjustment” (p. 472).

As discussed in Chapter One, study abroad may now be the more dramatic transition for students and parents that going to college once signified. While abroad, students and parents can easily keep in touch through multiple communication technologies, but the physical distance is much greater. Coburn and Treeger (1997) acknowledged that while parents may have already dealt with their children leaving home when they drop the students off at college, the study abroad experience signifies “distant and unknown places. [When] thrown into a heightened state of anxiety and excitement, families play out the themes of separation once more” (p. 299). Additionally, increased independence and maturity are frequently assumed outcomes of an international experience (Rohlich, 1993; Coburn & Treeger, 1997). It is possible, therefore, that separation-individuation is more likely to occur for students and parents during a study abroad experience.

Attachment theory

Developed in the 1990s, attachment theory became a counter theory to separation-individuation (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Attachment theory explains how children

construct internal working models of the self and thus generalize subsequent relationships based on these models, specifically through the first relationship with parents (Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; Aquilino, 2004). Researchers originally used this theory to explain attachment through infants' and young children's distress from being separated from their parents (Bowlby, 1973, as cited in Wartman & Savage, 2008). The theory posits that infants can learn and explore better through their attachment to their parents—much like a support system.

In a higher education context, researchers find that a secure attachment to parents, in addition to having parental acceptance and support, actually fosters students' adjustment and success in college (Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002; Arnett & Tanner (eds.), 2004; Wartman & Savage, 2008). When students enter college, they separate from their childhood environment and are expected to learn how to be more self-sufficient (Kalsner & Pistole, 2003). Thus, attachment theory views college as a transitional period for late adolescents where ties to the family might offer more support for some students.

With regard to college adjustment, attachment theory may be more indicative for female students (Wartman & Savage, 2008; Sy & Romero, 2008), as well as students of various ethnic groups from collectivist cultures (Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; Phinney, 2004; Sy & Romero, 2008). For example, Latino and Asian ethnic groups tend to place high value on family ties. Sy and Romero (2008) explained the term *familismo* as “a cultural value emphasizing family closeness and loyalty,” which puts the family's need before the individual's (p. 214). Latina (women) college students, in particular, may experience a closer emotional connection to their families. At the same time, however, this sense of

family loyalty may affect the student's school performance if the female student has certain family obligations. Thus, some degree of independence is necessary for adjustment (Kalsner & Pistole, 2003). When looking at attachment between parent and child, viewing the relationship as a collaborative partnership may be more applicable to these groups (Kalsner & Pistole, 2003).

Echoing Choi (2002), Rodriguez and Bernstein (1995) found that while ethnic identity *alone* was not a significant indicator of college adjustment, ethnic identity did play a mediating role in various aspects of college adjustment. A strong group orientation does appear to differentiate among various ethnic groups. While recognizing that their results may only be relevant to their study, Kalsner and Pistole (2003) found that Asians identifying with their own ethnic group is a significantly lower variable for college adjustment than for Hispanic students. Further, ethnic identity appears to be a more indicative variable of "personal [adjustment], rather than the academic aspects of college adjustment" (Kalsner & Pistole, 2003, p. 105). This variance between ethnic groups leads these researchers to ponder the greater nuances of cultural identity among collectivist versus individualistic societies.

Combining the two theories

Attachment theory and separation-individuation theory cannot be viewed as dichotomous explanations of adjustment to college. Rather, the two can be understood on a continuum and in constant interplay. As Wartman and Savage (2008) stated, "it is ultimately both separation-individuation and attachment that lead to positive emotional adjustment" (p. 28). The combination of these two lenses is best applicable to the study

abroad experience. As stated above, students may be more likely to experience separation-individuation from their parents during a study abroad experience. Colburn and Treeger (1997) explained that relationships between parents and students might shift, noting that, “paradoxically, the distance of an ocean provides a safe cushion for intimacy” between parents and students when keeping in touch (p. 300). As a result, parents and students maybe develop closer relationships, while at the same time the student experiences greater levels of independence and self-efficacy.

Difficulties in defining adulthood

Considering the abovementioned theories, a major debate around parental involvement in higher education centers on whether universities view college-age students to be young adults. Legal policy dictates that college students (at age 18) are adults (Henning, 2007). Furthermore, the demise of *in loco parentis* signified a return of autonomy to the student with the removal of the university as a surrogate parent. The establishment of FERPA gave students rights to their educational records, restricting parents from viewing the records. Culturally, however, it remains unclear whether college students should be considered adults (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Many parents still financially support their child in college, paying for a range of fees from increasing tuition costs and housing, to groceries and spending money. Student affairs administrators are concerned that, as a result, “students come to college in a delayed state of development” (Merriman, 2006, p. xi). Wartman and Savage (2008) viewed this debate as a signal that perhaps administrators should stop seeing college as the transition marker from children to adults.

Arnett (2004) posited the concept of *emerging adulthood* to explain the time in college as an age transition, or rather, a stage in between adolescence and young adulthood. *Emerging adulthood* contains five main features to characterize the period: 1) time of identity exploration; 2) age of instability; 3) self-focused age of life; 4) age of feeling in-between; and 5) age of possibilities (p. 7). In a 1994 study, Arnett asked students whether they considered themselves to have reached adulthood. 27% responded “yes,” 10% responded no, and 63% “chose the ambiguous response, ‘in some respects yes, in some respects no’” (p. 216). These responses indicate that even fifteen years ago, students themselves were unsure of whether they should be considered adults. Students may want to see themselves as autonomous individuals, but financial and emotional ties to their parents blur the lines of adulthood.

The debate also corresponds to the study abroad experience when viewing study abroad as a more transitional time. In their guide, *Letting Go: A Parents' Guide to Understanding the College Years*, Coburn and Treeger (1997) clearly viewed study abroad as a turning point for many students, citing study abroad as a time of “growing self-assurance” where students are “left to their own devices” (p. 301). In her study abroad guide for parents, Hulstrand (2007) acknowledged that college students are not exactly children anymore, but that the word “child” is the most appropriate word to describe the relationship with a parent. At the same time, it is a “linguistic dilemma” to refer to college students as children (p. ii). As Savage (2009) stated, “although parents worry most about international incidents while their student is abroad, the greatest dangers students face abroad come from their own poor choices [e.g., alcohol]” (p. 222).

This is an example of the concern many administrators have with students' development when embarking upon a sojourn abroad.

Generational theory

A generational lens provides an additional template with which to understand today's college students, the 'Millennials' (Coomes & Debard, 2004, p. 5). Generational theory delves into the nuances of environmental, technological, developmental and other circumstantial influences that shape a generation, specifically the Millennials and Baby Boomers (the parents). Additionally, generational theory sheds light on how the college climate has changed to foster parental involvement. Howe and Strauss (2003) are the leading experts in researching generational traits.

In 2000, when Howe and Strauss first posited the term Millennials, the authors were sure Millennials would be the next great generation, made up of the "least race-conscious and most female-dominated generation, [with] increasingly less patience for the politics of boomer faculty members" (Brownstein, 2000, p. 1). Each new generation shifts away from the previous generation's traits. (Howe & Strauss, 2003; Coomes & Debard, 2004). By understanding these traits and their implications for college campuses, administrators are able to "better identify their students' needs" (Coomes & Debard, 2004, p. 7).

Howe and Strauss (2003) presented seven core traits of the Millennial generation: *Special, Sheltered, Confident, Team-Oriented, Conventional, Pressured, and Achieving* (pp. 51-52). Several key characteristics of Millennials correlate with parental involvement. Howe and Strauss (2003) refer to parents as "intrusive" (p. 3). Parents'

pride is also cited as being heavily influential in shaping the abovementioned traits (Debard, 2004). These characteristics could be attributed to the closer relationship parents and their children share, as the traits *Sheltered* and *Convention* refer to parents. Parents and today's college students get along well because "Millennials bask in the sense of being loved by parents" (Howe & Strauss, 2003, p. 58).

Furthermore, Millennial students and their parents are seen as "co-purchasing" education; therefore, colleges have adapted their recruitment to include appeal to parents, as well as students (Howe & Strauss, 2003, p. 69). Strauss views parents as having a perfection complex when it comes to their children's success (Brownstein, 2000). In turn, Millennials have high aspirations for academic achievement, being "the most educationally ambitious generation ever" (Coomes & Debard, 2004, p. 12). At the same time, however, Millennial students "demand that 'everything be spelled out' in detail and have trouble thinking for themselves" (quoted from Lucy Rollin in Brownstein, 2000, p. 5). Consequently, these students have lower expectations for what they need to do in order to reach high achievement.

As Wartman and Savage (2008) noted, generational theory is one way of examining parental behavior, but not the sole method, and not the most empirically supported. When used cautiously, as this method can lead to stereotyping, generational theory provides a conceptual perspective for how study abroad professionals can understand and adjust to the parent-child relationship.

Parental Involvement in Higher Education

Using this theoretical background may partially explain parents' behaviors that

administrators witness on college campuses today. For example, many authors refer to “mutual clinging,” meaning students and parents equally want parents to be involved (Cutright, 2008; Hoover & Supiano, 2008; Coburn, 2006). To respond to closer relationships and an inevitable parental presence on campuses, administrators have been adjusting their policies to meet parents’ demands while also striving to maintain institutions’ objectives of student-centered practices.

More recent literature acknowledges that much of the previous research on parental involvement in higher education tends to be based on anecdotal stories with a lack of clear definition of what it means for parents to be involved at the tertiary level (Wolf, et al., 2009). Furthermore, much of the research focused on quantifiable aspects of parental involvement, not the quality or type of engagement (Rowan-Kenyon, Bell & Perna, 2008). Within the last several years, however, studies are expanding their examination into parental involvement, looking not only at how frequent parents get involved. Now, studies also examine *who* is getting involved (e.g., race, ethnicity, educational background), *why* (e.g., social and environmental reasons), and in *what ways* (e.g., actively, supportively) parents are more involved in their student’s college education (Wartman & Savage, 2008).

There is no literature to suggest similar findings in study abroad for parental involvement’s impact on the success or hindrance on a student’s sojourn abroad. Anecdotal stories suggest that many professionals recognize that students ask their parents for assistance at various points during the study abroad experience. Parents’

assistance may come in the form of advice, query or actual interference in a crisis situation, or help completing paperwork. (C. Parcels, personal communications, 2009).

Positive and negative perceptions

The majority of the recent literature on parental involvement in higher education acknowledges the fact that parents do have an impact on their student's experiences in college—whether developmentally, academically, or socially (Carney-Hall, 2008; Wolf et al., 2009; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). A major query is whether the involvement is beneficial or detrimental to the student's progress into adulthood or hinders the overall college experience and this question is discussed below. As Wartman and Savage (2008) acknowledged, “it is important for both administrators and researchers to remember that [the helicopter parent] image only represents an extreme group, and parents—and their individual relationships with their students—are as varied as the students themselves” (p. 4).

On the one hand, researchers find that students whose parents become involved are more likely to succeed and be active in their college experience (Price, 2008). In fact, “students whose parents intervened on their behalf reported higher levels of support [and had] greater gains on a host of desired college outcomes and greater satisfaction with the college experience” (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2007, p. 25). Using data from the 2006 University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey, Wolf et al. (2009) conducted a study on students' perspectives of their parents' involvement. Specifically focusing on two indicators, involvement in academic aspects and parent-student communication, this study found that students recognize their parents taking an

interest in their academic progress, but students did not find this behavior as detrimental to their experience (Wolf et al., 2009). The majority of students want their parents' assistance and initiate contact themselves (Kennedy, 2009). Overall, students view their parents' involvement as the right amount (Wartman & Savage, 2008; Roarty, 2007 as quoted in Wartman & Savage, 2008, p. 7). These findings align with the above discussion on attachment theory; many students adjust successfully if they find they have a supportive relationship with their parents.

Negative perceptions about parental involvement surface with regard to parents intervening on their student's behalf (i.e., helicopter parenting), when administrators believe the students' should be handling matters for themselves (Cutright, 2008; Damast, 2007). These negative views tend to originate in the popular press, but also through anecdotal stories shared among administrators. The latter group sees parental interference as "disruptive events" (Merriman, 2006, p. 5), which does not "let [students] learn from their own mistakes, sometimes even contrary to the children's wishes" (Kennedy, 2009, p. 19).

Many of the accused helicopter parents assume they can "go straight to the top" and call a president or dean if there is a minor problem, such as making sure a student is getting to class on time (Cutright, 2008, p. 45). Most administrators would discourage this kind of behavior regardless of whom the parent is calling, but it is even more discouraged to call upper level administrators for this sort of matter. It is necessary to make sure parents are aware of the administrators' roles and the appropriate lines of communication (Price, 2008).

News articles capture what some of these administrators experience. An article in *Business Week Online*, titled “Invasion of the Helicopter Parents,” cited one occurrence when a set of parents set up an apartment, utilities included, for their student before he went to business school—something the university student affair’s administrator had never seen before (Damast, 2007). Some journalists say this “over” involvement is extending even into the job search process (*Christian Science Monitor*, 2007). One focus of these news stories is to blame technology and the ease of staying in touch through instant messaging, text messages, and cell phones. Journalists also illustrate the changes in parenting, quoting student affairs officials from various schools who are shocked at parents’ involvement and the lack of students’ self-sufficiency (Vanderkam, 2003, p. 11a).

Factors of Parental Involvement

Whether viewed as positive or negative, much of the recent academic literature also examines motivations behind parental involvement (Hoover & Supiano, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). Most research does not focus on viewing helicopter parents as the “norm” for all parents. Instead, these authors focus on the ways in which parents get involved, but they do not necessarily carry an interpretation of whether this involvement is negative. For instance, parents often get involved in choosing the college, financial support, academic decisions and personal adjustment support (Carney-Hall, 2008; Wolf et al., 2009). Carney-Hall (2008) extends the lists to an even wider range of possibilities where parents can have impact, from alcohol-related issues, to cognitive development, and staying enrolled (p. 5).

Several authors assert that today's parents are hyperaware about safety (Coomes, 2004), in part due to recent global events such as terrorism—in particular, September 11th—which increase parents' anxiety (Howe & Strauss, 2003; Merriman, 2006). Howe and Strauss (2003) suggest that students and parents are looking for the return of *in loco parentis* rules because of their need for safety precautions. Legal shifts have developed as a result of demand for assurance of safety. For instance, in 1990, the Cleary Act emerged after a student was murdered on a college campus. This act requires campuses to publically report campus crime statistics (Cutright, 2008).

Another major reason for increased parental involvement in higher education is rising tuition costs (Carney-Hall, 2008, p. 4; Merriman, 2006; Kennedy, 2009). Higher costs mean that many students must still be financially reliant on their parents, prolonging the students' dependency on their parents. This viewpoint of “consumer entitlement” posits that parents are invested both emotionally and financially in their child's education (Carney-Hall, 2008; Kennedy, 2009; Howe & Strauss, 2003, p. 70). Taking this consumerist perspective, parents want to make sure their investment is secure. Another media term in the typology of helicopter parents is the *consumer advocate*. These “consumer advocates consider themselves (co-purchasers) entitled to all the same information and staff access as their children” (Shellenbarger, 2007, p. D1). Parents have high expectations for not only their students' personal success, but also of the universities and all the support and services offered to the students (Carney-Hall, 2008). Administrators are therefore worried that the mutual failure of parents and students to “let go” of one another will hinder the student's ability to handle problems on their own.

Difficulty with letting go and high expectations stem not only from financial concerns, but also carry over from their experience in K-12 schooling where parental involvement was highly encouraged (Wolf et al., 2009; Kennedy, 2009). Often, parents are used to taking a “hands-on approach to managing their kids’ lives” that extends into the college years (Carney-Hall, 2008, p. 4; Coburn, 2006, p. 10). For instance, it is becoming a more common situation for students and parents to sit together in advising sessions and the word “we” being used far more than “I” (Coburn, 2006, p. 10). However, confusion with legal frameworks (i.e., FERPA regulations) emerges at college because in high school parents had legal rights to the student’s records. Consequently, parents might not understand the shift in students’ privacy rights and higher education institutions’ obligation to these rights in college (Price, 2008, p. 31). When issues arise, whether academic, social, or health-related, many parents are committed to making the college experience as successful as possible for their students, but might not understand that parents do not hold as much clout as they once did in K-12.

With regard to the study abroad experience, parents’ reasons for involvement (both direct and indirect) frequently align with those of higher education. For example, some parents view study abroad through a consumerist perspective, as often parents’ involvement comes in the form of monetary assistance. Professionals have been developing study abroad programs, paying particular attention to cost of study abroad (Fischer, 2008). International educators, nonetheless, dislike a consumerist approach (Fischer, 2009; Hoffa, 2007). Safety concerns, as mentioned, are another prevalent concern of parents. As Stubbs (n.d.) asserted, “concern about the health and safety of

students has been present throughout the history of U.S. study abroad” (“Safety and security issues and their impact on the study abroad field”). In Stubbs’ (n.d.) article, she reviewed official documents, guidelines, and statements on safety in study abroad.

Socioeconomic status and parents’ education

In addition to factors from the college environment influencing parents’ involvement on campuses, there are many characteristics specific to parents’ backgrounds which may influence their presence in higher education. For instance, traditionally, it was thought that only middle to upper-class, white parents got involved, but current (from within the past two years) examinations show that other types of parents do get involved (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Coburn, 2006; Wolf et al., 2009; Carney-Hall, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2009).

Two differentiating factors of parental involvement is the correlation between socioeconomic status (SES) and parents’ previous education. It is more common for parents with a higher SES and more education to be more likely to know how to interact with universities and colleges (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Price, 2008). As a result of previous experience, parents with a higher SES are likely to take a more proactive approach in the college experience. Contrastingly, parents with no previous college education are less likely to get involved because they may be unsure of how to navigate the campus culture (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Price, 2008). Lower SES parents may offer support to attend college, but not necessarily provide active involvement, as they do not know how to interact with the system (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Further, more highly educated parents recognize educational attainment as cultural, or social, capital—

that their children will have more opportunity and success in life if they go to college (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Wolf et al., 2009). Parents who do not have experience with higher education are likely to have difficulties actively supporting their students in college, having less social capital themselves (Sy & Romero, 2009, p. 214).

Senge (2006) further explained the ability of parents with previous educational knowledge to navigate higher education systems through the use of “mental models.” These models are “deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action” (p. 8). Ullom and Faulkner (2005) utilized this concept to explain how parents retrieve internal knowledge of college and thus have certain expectations about how college should be. Consequently, parents who did not go to college cannot use these “mental models” to interact with colleges and universities (Ullom & Faulkner, 2005, p. 22).

Ethnicity

Parental involvement also varies depending on racial and ethnic background. Wolf et al. (2009), for instance, found that immigrant parents are less likely to become involved, but more likely to communicate more often with their students. These researchers do not clarify why in their study, stating that more research need to be conducted to determine the reasoning behind immigrants’ parents lack of involvement (Wolf et al., 2009, p. 348). Differences also emerged among ethnic groups with regards to parents and students keeping in contact versus parental academic involvement. For example, “above-average contact between Mexican American, Latino/Other Spanish, Japanese/Japanese American and American Indian/Alaska Native students were paired

with below-average ratings of parental involvement in their academics” (Wolf et al., 2009, p. 348).

Latina students, in particular, might experience stronger family connections while at college because women are expected to help with family responsibilities at home (Sy & Romero, 2009). This scenario, however, creates a tension for Latina students, who, on the one hand are expected to help the family which may detract from their studies. On the other hand, a secure connection with their family may help the Latina students adjust more successfully to college (Sy & Romero, 2009). African American parents with students in predominantly White institutions may have more concerns, particularly with regards to personal safety of the student (Price, 2008).

In study abroad literature pertaining to ethnic student groups, family is mentioned as being influential when students are deciding to participate in a study abroad program (Brux & Fry, 2009; Burr, 2005; Cole, 1991). As Vice President for International Programs at University of the Incarnate Word, Burr (2005) interviewed Hispanic students to understand their barriers to study abroad, finding that these students did not think their parents would let them participate because parents did not believe students should travel alone and did not think students would have enough financial assistance (p. 1-2). One study found that overall attitudes of certain ethnic groups and low-income families have more cautious attitudes towards international experiences (Burkart, Hexter, & Thompson, 2001). African-American parents, for example, appear to be concerned about issues with racism and safety for their students (Cole, 1991). Ethnically and racially underrepresented students’ parents have concerns similar to all parents, but what the

study abroad literature expresses, is that these concerns come from a different context, similar to the overall college experience. Consequently, study abroad administrators need to take these cultural implications into consideration when advising under-represented students on study abroad.

Institutional Interactions with Parents

Kennedy (2009) states that “many institutions manage parents on an ad hoc basis, and actions are typically driven by a desire to prevent parental dissatisfaction (p. 22). Other institutions have formally established parent coordinators, who organize activities and materials specific to parents (Lum, 2006). In fact, many universities and colleges now hold family weekends and parent orientation sessions, and offer print materials outlining resources for students (Coburn, 2006; Coburn & Woodward, 2001). These resources include information on tutoring, advising, health, and counseling for students (Price, 2008, p. 35).

Administrators use in-person opportunities to educate, or inform, parents of proper communication procedures, as well as to identify resources for students that institutions think parents should know about (Coburn, 2006). Furthermore, administrators provide the learning outcomes universities and colleges hope students will achieve. The goal of these services assumes that by having more information, parents will have an “easier time appreciating [administrators] reluctance to notify them or to intervene in situations that [staff] think students should handle themselves” (Coburn, 2006, p. 12). Helping parents, but setting boundaries is a critical aspect of parent programming.

Events and materials primarily explain the parents' role in their student's college experience. Common designations for parents include coach (Coburn, 2006), supporter, and partner (Cutright, 2008). These terms emphasize the point that parents still have a valid role in their child's college experience, but it is now a secondary role, not the primary authoritative, directive role. NASPA, Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (Keppler, Mullendore & Carey, 2005), released a guide titled *Partnering with the Parents of Today's College Students*, which recognizes the high expectations and demands of today's parents. Additionally, the guide details the new relationships universities and colleges must establish with parents and the means with which to do so.

NASPA's guide (2005) focuses on setting explicit goals and expectations for parents. For institutions to be able to do this, they need to understand why parents get involved, the changing demographics in higher education today, and the legal boundaries which must shape parental engagement. As detailed earlier in this review, cultural diversity and ethnic background are resulting in a changing student and parent populations. Consequently, parent programs and materials must adjust to meet different demographics. By having mutual understanding, all stakeholders can work together to help the students' development, instead of fighting against one another (NASPA, 2005, p. 23).

As articulated in the literature, there is a diverse student population on campus and therefore a diverse group of parents. Administrators see the need to address this increase in cultural and ethnic differences on college campuses. For instance, first-generation Hispanic students might have parents who do not speak English (Price, 2008).

These parents might be unable to communicate with the university as a result. Providing materials in Spanish and understanding cultural differences would be critical in reaching out to Hispanic parents (Price, 2008, p. 39).

Similar to other college administrators, study abroad administrators have recognized the need to provide information targeted to parents specifically. Many study abroad offices' websites contain sections for parents. Additionally, there are a few guides (or sections of guides) targeting parents on study abroad (Savage, 2009; Coburn & Treeger, 1997; Hoffa, 1998; Hulstrand, 2007; Riley, *Study Abroad: A 21st Century Perspective*). These guides provide detailed information about all aspects of study abroad that parents should consider and discuss with their students. For instance, Savage (2009) acknowledged the difficulties with separating between parents and children, but asserts with the proper information, research and communication, parents' concerns can be calmed (p. 219-220). Hulstrand (2007) took an approach of telling parents in detail what the student needs to be asking study abroad offices and considering academically to prepare their students for study abroad.

Aside from providing general information on study abroad to parents, universities and study abroad offices understand the need to quell parents' safety concerns for their children's well-being. Policies and procedures are in place at all institutions (and third party program providers) offering study abroad programs. Specific guidelines are set forth by NAFSA: Association for International Educators, the world's largest organization for international education (Desruisseaux, 1998). As Scharman (2002) stated, these policies (written based on U.S. law and practice) are "reviewed by

knowledgeable individuals to determine how much can be realistically applied overseas” (p. 70).

Conclusion and discussion

This review has looked at parental involvement in higher education through an institutional lens. By first providing a theoretical framework based on parent-child relationships and adjustment to college the foundation for parental involvement can be better understood. However, as evidenced by this review, there are various mitigating variables that contribute to parental involvement in higher education. Most importantly, this chapter looked at how the background characteristics of parents and their relationships with their children have altered the campus climate and how institutions have adjusted as a result.

Throughout this chapter, many sections ended by extrapolating concepts from the general higher education literature to study abroad. This review’s final section summarizes the applicability of the parental involvement in higher education discourse to study abroad. Chapter Five will draw the parallels that emerged between the reviewed literature and the current research.

From a study abroad professional’s viewpoint, many similarities about parental involvement can be drawn between the overall higher education experience and study abroad. As suggested in Chapter One, studying abroad presents greater unfamiliarity and may be seen as the transitional point going to college once was. Due to greater distances and fewer conveniences, student adjustment overseas may be more challenging. The theoretical frameworks presented above provide a solid foundation for understanding the

potential impacts study abroad may have on parents' relationships with their children. Furthermore, study abroad can be viewed as a time when students are more able to demonstrate increased development and capabilities due to the abovementioned challenges.

There are many reasons why a parent might become involved in the study abroad process. These motivations are limitedly discussed in study abroad literature, and most likely known anecdotally among study abroad professionals. As indicated through generational theory, today's parents are hyperaware of safety issues and thus have many concerns with regard to their students' well-being. This is indeed true for a study abroad experience, particularly due to the increased unfamiliarity of the host culture in most circumstances. Finances are another motivation for parents to become involved, as study abroad is often viewed as a significant financial investment similar to an undergraduate education. Finally, parents may become involved in choosing a program, though the literature indicated this tendency to be more prevalent among ethnic groups due to cultural values. Again, when discussing parental involvement, parents' involvement does not necessarily mean directly intervening on the student's behalf. Rather, a parent's actions should be viewed on a continuum and thought of also in terms of engagement. This concept will be explored in more detail in Chapter Five.

Overview

The purpose of this study is to gather a more holistic understanding of parental involvement in study abroad from both the institution's and parent's perspective. To fully capture the depth of understanding necessary with an under-researched topic, this study took a highly qualitative approach through triangulation of the two perspectives. This reasoning is best explained through Merriam's (2009) discussion of the frequent inductive nature of qualitative studies, which often result from "a lack of theory or an existing theory fails to adequately explain a phenomenon. [As a result], researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than deductively testing hypotheses" (p. 16). The extrapolated research from higher education and the collected data was utilized to develop implications for the relationship between parents and the study abroad office (the Learning Abroad Center).

This study is an *embedded case study*, as there are two bounded units being analyzed (Yin, 2009): the parents of University of Minnesota students who have studied/are studying abroad, and the University of Minnesota (i.e., the Learning Abroad Center and Parent Program). The following chapter first presents the research questions. Second, the chapter explains the overall research design. Third, this chapter provides an explanation of the rationales for each chosen methods and sampling techniques. Fourth is a discussion of the limitations present in the study. Last is the data analysis protocol.

Research Questions

The following research questions shape this study:

1. How does the study abroad office establish and then convey the parent's role?
 - 1a. What are the study abroad office's expectations for parental involvement?
2. How do parents' engage with their students and the institution during the study abroad process?
 - 2a. How do parents shape their role in the study abroad process?
3. To what extent do parents' and the study abroad office's perceptions and expectations of the parent's role align?

These questions align with the objectives of an embedded case study. In other words, one question pertains to each of the bounded units with the third question capturing the holistic experience of parental involvement with both units.

Research Design

The research design has been emergent and flexible as required by the study's progress, which are ideal characteristics of a qualitative study (Merriam, 2009). Case studies are well suited for answering questions regarding how and why parents get involved in students' study abroad experience. Yin (2009) explained that 'how' and 'why' types of questions "are *explanatory* and likely to lead to the use of case studies" (p.9). By utilizing a "how" and "why" approach, the research is able to effectively develop understanding, as well as implications for parental involvement in study abroad. Furthermore, the use of multiple methods establishes triangulation of the collected data. These methods include: observations of parent orientation sessions, interviews with

Learning Abroad Center staff and the Parent Program Director (a unit outside of the Learning Abroad Center), a parent survey, and a parent focus group. The following section outlines the utilized methods of this research.

Interviews

The staff interviews had a structured format in addition to including some semi-structured elements, such as using open-ended questions and flexibility with question order. This approach still allowed for themes to emerge from the interviewees' responses and thoughts as they occurred (Merriam, 2009). The interview questions (see Appendix A) were provided to the interviewees prior to the arranged meeting due to the short timeframe of the interview, as well as the majority of the questions being open-ended format. Furthermore, structured interviews allowed staff members time to thoughtfully and constructively develop their responses. The researcher established this rationale primarily because, as discussed in previous chapters, negative experiences with parents are often more memorable than the positive, or neutral interactions. The purpose of these interviews, however, was to elicit comprehensive information regarding the Learning Abroad Center staff member's experiences with parents.

After informal discussions with colleagues at the Learning Abroad Center, it was determined that the three, non-student resource center (front desk) staff, associate program directors, parent liaison, and office director have the most contact, or experience, with parents during the study abroad process. Additionally, the Parent Program Director participated in an interview because she has made concerted efforts to address learning abroad topics with parents. Participants responded to a different set of

interview questions were administered based on their position and known structure of their interactions and experience with parents. For instance, associate program directors receive program-specific questions, while resource center staff answer more general inquiry or questions that are then directed to other staff members. The parent liaison and director tend to receive parent calls later in levels of urgency, in the case of a crisis, emergency, or upset parent. Additionally, the parent liaison receives referral calls from the Parent Program director.

As the resource center staff has the least amount of contact out of the three positions, these three, non-student staff members completed a short questionnaire in lieu of an interview (included in Appendix A). The office director, parent liaison and Parent Program director's interview contained questions pertaining to the development of parent materials, as well as how the desired relationship with parents is articulated to the rest of the Learning Abroad Center staff.

Observations

The Learning Abroad Center holds up to five parent orientation sessions which coincide with the students' own pre-departure orientation sessions. For this study, the researcher observed four parent orientation sessions in total—three general sessions and one which was specifically for Minnesota Studies in International Development and held separately from the other parent orientation sessions. Parents typically spend 45 minutes with a staff member who discusses the nature of study abroad in the present day and what parents might expect from their students' experiences. There is a general outline, or script, for the Learning Abroad Center staff to follow during these sessions, but each

session is not identical in format as the staff member improvises with his or her own techniques. Parents have the opportunity to ask questions throughout, and particularly at the end of the orientation session. Afterward, the parents may join their students for the second half of the program-specific orientation sessions.

The benefit of conducting observations is to “triangulate emergent findings; that is, they are used in conjunction with interviewing and document analysis to substantiate the findings” (Merriam, 2009, p. 119). The observations offer a unique opportunity to see how well parents receive the messages about the parents’ role the Learning Abroad Center tries to convey, as well as whether the Learning Abroad Center is meeting parents’ expectations (research question number three). As a non-participant observer, the researcher sat in the back of the room, taking notes, to not be a distraction to the parents. To minimize saturation of subjectivity in the notes, the notes were descriptive of the session’s content, in addition to the interpretive notes. In particular, the notes focused on what the Learning Abroad Center staff members explicitly told the parents. The observation notes also captured what parents asked, the number of times one parent asked a question, the number of mothers and fathers in attendance, and the layout of the room: where parents and the Learning Abroad Center staff member sat.

Parent survey

To reach a larger number of parents, this study included a self-administered survey. The survey design adhered to Dillman’s (2000, 2nd ed.) Total Design Method¹ in

¹ Dillman (2000) explains Tailored Design Method (TDM) as using social exchange theory (the perceived benefits outweigh the costs for participants to complete a survey) to achieve an optimal response rate on a survey. TDM includes four specific contact points during the survey process, personalized contact, and appropriate ordering of questions to make the survey appear short and easy to answer (p.5).

order to maximize response rate (see Appendix B for the full survey). Using a self-administered survey greatly reduces costs and time to collect data as opposed to administered surveys, (i.e., interviews) (Dillman, 2000). The survey contained three sections, including fourteen close-ended questions, three open-ended questions, and four demographic questions. The first section examined the parent-institution relationship, asking questions regarding the ways in which parents interacted with the Learning Abroad Center and the utility of resources and interactions with university staff during the study abroad experience. The second section pertained to the parent-child relationship. These questions looked at how parents and students kept in touch and how often during the study abroad experience, whether students asked for their parents' assistance, as well as parents' own perceptions of their role in the study abroad process. The third section contained questions on the parents' background information, asking whether they studied abroad, was their student a first-generation college student, as well as the parents' gender and ethnicity. The survey was used to analyze the alignment of parents' expectations and the Learning Abroad Center and the Parent Program Office's approaches to handling parents' questions and concerns.

Multiple steps were taken to ensure the quality and cohesiveness of the survey. Several revisions and expert, as well as peer, review of the survey took place. Additionally, two think-alouds and a pilot of ten people were conducted. A think-aloud, or cognitive interview, is a process where the investigator sits down with a participant to "take" the survey (Rodriguez, personal communications, October 2009). In this case, the participants were not from the sample population, but they were able to assume an

imaginary role to conduct the procedure. The participant then thought aloud as she attempted to answer the question in order for the researcher to understand the cognitive processes of reaching a response to the survey questions. Taking this step in the survey design allowed the researcher to understand if there were other unanticipated responses, and whether the question wording was clear (Rodriguez, personal communications, October 2009). The pilot responses also allowed the researcher to see whether the participants were able to understand correctly the questions, as well as determine if the question responses would be analyzable (Rodriguez, personal communications, October 2009).

Focus group

To enhance the findings from the survey, the focus group session took place after closing the survey to delve deeper into the meanings behind the collected and analyzed responses of the survey; in other words, “to elicit more affective information” (Merriam, 2009, p. 95). Conducting focus groups allows a researcher to take a less dominant role in the discussion, as the conversation is primarily directed by the participants (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Data from focus groups are “socially constructed within the interaction of the group” (Merriam, 2009, p. 94). This allows the researcher to witness firsthand how parents formulate perceptions and opinions of their role and the resources available to them in the study abroad process, while being subjected to other influences (i.e., the other participants).

The original intent was to hold two focus groups, one where parents had attended a Learning Abroad Center orientation session (5 participants) and the other group who

had not (6-8 participants) (see Appendix D). Having some aspect of homogeneity among participants in focus group was desirable to encourage relatedness among participants, as “subjects tended to disclose more about themselves to people who resembled them in various ways” (Jourard, 1964, p. 15 as cited in Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 9). Specifically, dividing the groups by attendance at the orientation sessions was determined because the Learning Abroad Center identifies these orientation sessions as an integral component of their parent relations. Due to inclement weather, the first focus group (parents who had not gone to a parent orientation session) had to be cancelled and could not be rescheduled. Parents who had not attended an orientation session filled out questionnaires instead.

The session lasted one and a half hours. Additionally the Minnesota Parents’ Association sponsored the focus group, providing refreshments and gift card incentives to the University of Minnesota Bookstore. Marjorie Savage, Director of the Parent Program, took notes during the session.

Sampling Methods

University of Minnesota

Choosing the University of Minnesota was purposeful. The U of M is recognized as one of the most active institutions in study abroad. According to the 2009 *Open Doors Report*, the U of M ranks third in doctorate institutions for total number of study abroad students (Institute of International Education, *Top 40 institutions by Carnegie Type*). Additionally, in 2009, NAFSA: Association for International Educators awarded the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities the Senator Paul Simon Award for achievements in

internationalization (NAFSA, *Internationalizing the Campus 2009*). Choosing the staff members from the Learning Abroad Center was also purposive in identifying those most frequently interacting with parents, as discussed above.

Survey sampling

After obtaining permission from the Learning Abroad Center, the researcher drew a stratified simple random sample from the study abroad student database using the general contacts on students' applications which listed a parent as the contact. Stratified simple random samples reduce sampling error by ensuring a greater representation from each strata, or category of parent in the sample size (Rodriguez, personal communications, 2009). The sample was drawn from the 2006-07 academic year to spring semester of 2010. These years were chosen because the survey asks a question with regards to the student's point in the study abroad process: confirmed to study abroad, currently abroad, or returned from studying abroad within the last three years. This criterion was established to ensure a greater likelihood of parents' recollection of their experiences. A Learning Abroad Center staff member emailed the survey invitation to the parents, as well as a reminder email two weeks after opening the survey. In total, the survey remained open for one month.

The finite sample population was 3146 (number of general contacts listed as parents for the years indicated above). The data were then cleaned to show only parental contacts (e.g. mother, father, mom, dad, or parent) and those which listed an email address. From this population, a sample size was computed. A confidence interval of 95% was used with error limits of 0.05. The question used for determining the population

variance is a key survey question: *Did your student directly request your involvement at some point in the study abroad process? Answer: Yes or No*

$$[1.96^2 \times (0.5 \times 0.5)] / 0.05^2 = 384$$

Of these 384 emails, 46 bounced back, or were undeliverable, and counted as un-administered surveys, resulting in a final sample size of 338. The final number of returned survey was 135, resulting in a 40% response rate.

Focus group sampling

This study utilized two different methods for finding focus group participants. At three general parent orientation sessions, an interest sheet was passed around to parents to collect their emails. An invitation was then sent to these parents for the focus group sessions for parents who had attended the orientation sessions. Also, the Parent Program Director, Marjorie Savage, placed announcements for both focus group sessions in her bi-weekly e-newsletter.

Limitations

There are criticisms of single-case studies, as they may be unique to that case and consequently, ungeneralizable to other populations (Yin, 2009). It is important to note that the University of Minnesota offers an abundance of resources and information pertaining to parental involvement in study abroad, which other universities may not offer. Undoubtedly, multiple case studies would have enhanced the depth of knowledge obtained from this study, but time restrictions influenced the decision to conduct a single-case study with the hope of analytical generalization still being possible.

Various sampling limitations needed to be considered with the use of an online delivery method of the parent survey. First, while all students participating in a study abroad program are in the Learning Abroad Center database, the sampling is likely to have experienced some coverage error as not all students list the parent as the general contact. Additionally, the researcher was unable to reach parents who do not use the internet. There was missing data in the survey, as parents did not always answer frequency of communication topics or indicate usefulness of resources, as is discussed further in Chapter Four.

As mentioned above, inclement weather caused one of the focus groups to be canceled. Due to scheduling constraints, a later date could not be determined for a make-up session. While parents from this group still completed the questions that would have been asked in the session, the responses were not collected in the same dynamic way as the second focus group. This undoubtedly raises some caution with comparability to the responses across groups.

Data Analysis

To analyze highly qualitative data, Creswell (2003) suggests using open coding to generate categories of information. As the final research question states, one of the goals of this study was to see if parents and the institution's expectations and perceptions align. After drawing themes and conclusions from each unit, the researcher made comparisons and collective conclusions to return to the holistic nature of parental involvement in study abroad at the University of Minnesota. Using these multiple methods from both perspectives allowed for triangulation of the data.

Survey Results

The survey was administered through Survey Gizmo, which offers summary reports of the survey responses. This report provided descriptive results of parents' responses, including percentages and graphs. Coding was utilized with open-ended questions to determine themes pertaining to four questions: 1) How did students directly ask parents for assistance? 2) What resources parents think would have been helpful (or did not know about)?; 3) How did parents describe their role in the study abroad process?; and 4) How did the study abroad experience impact the parents?

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the findings by each phase of the research. First, the findings pertain to research question one: *How do study abroad offices establish and then convey the parents' role?* And the sub-question: *What are study abroad offices' expectations for parental involvement?* These questions capture the institutional perspectives of the Learning Abroad Center and director of the Parent Program Office through the staff interviews and observations of Learning Abroad Center parent orientation sessions. The second phase focused on the parents' perspective, which was obtained through the parent survey and focus group session. Phase two examines research question two: *How do parents engage with the institution and their student during the study abroad process?* And: *How do parents shape their role in the study abroad process?* Lastly, the third question sought to capture the holistic picture of parental involvement in study abroad at the University of Minnesota: *To what extent do parents' and the study abroad office's perceptions and expectations of the parent's role align?*

Phase One-Institutional Perspective

This section outlines the first phase of research through the institutional perspective. The staff interviews with the Learning Abroad Center and the Parent Program director provide this viewpoint. Additionally, this portion presents the findings from the observations of the Learning Abroad Center parent orientation sessions. First, this section examines how the Learning Abroad Center establishes and conveys the

parent's role. Second, this section presents the Learning Abroad Center's expectations for parental involvement in the study abroad process.

Establishing and Conveying a Parent Role

Learning Abroad Center staff interviews

When establishing a parent role, it is important for the office staff to understand where parents are positioned in this experience. As noted earlier, Johnson asserts that study abroad might be the “new ‘going to college’ experience... making the [Learning Abroad Center] very important” in guiding parents through the process (personal communications, November 2009). By helping parents be informed and know how to talk to their students about issues pertaining to study abroad, the Learning Abroad Center can “empower parents as advocates,” consequently helping, rather than hindering, the students' experience (M. Johnson, personal communications, November 2009). Johnson acknowledges that there are many areas where parents can have a greater impact on students. For instance, parents should have the “alcohol conversation,” suggesting that students will be more likely to listen to their parents than the office about the cautions to take with alcohol while abroad. This is an important matter from the Learning Abroad Center staff's perspective, as alcohol abuse is the cause of most problems that students experience while studying abroad (M. Johnson, personal communications, November 2009).

Learning Abroad Center staff members are trained in FERPA policy, which shapes the interactions staff can have with parents. Resource center staff communicate with parents less frequently than associate program directors (APDs). It is typical for

people in the former position to receive a few calls or emails per week. It is even less common for resource center staff to interact with a parent who actually comes into the Center (C. Churma, personal communications, November 2009). Frequency of communication with parents varies among all APDs, ranging from receiving a handful of calls/emails per month to one call/email per day during a busy week. One APD referred to having at least one “serial” parent per semester, meaning one parent calls and/or emails many times throughout the semester (S. Tschida, personal communications, November 2009).

When parents call, they often ask direct questions about the student pertaining to billing matters or other logistical matters. APDs answer more program and country-specific questions regarding housing abroad, safety, arrival, and departure information. To avoid conflict with FERPA policy while still giving parents the information they seek, the staff member speaks in generalities regarding programs, particularly if the information can be found on the website (B. Titus; S. Daby; B. Cherny, personal communications, November 2009). If a parent wants more concrete information regarding his or her student, the student must have signed a FERPA waiver to give the parent permission to access information. When staff members explain the legal restrictions, parents do not usually push back (Z. Mohs, personal communications, November 2009). Whenever possible, however, staff members try to convey to parents the need for students to take initiative with logistics or problem solving by redirecting communication back to the student.

In addition to legal guidelines, staff members have established a role for parents through informal discussions around the office and talks coordinated with the Parent Program. These discussions included trends in parental behaviors and characteristics of Millennial students (Z. Mohs; S. Daby; S. Tschida; B. Titus, personal communications, November 2009). Through this informal and formal training, APDs have come to recognize the parent's role as encouraging and supportive, but they emphasize that this support should take place behind the scenes. From the staff's perspective, it is important for parents to understand boundaries and acknowledge the student's responsibility for preparing for the study abroad experience.

Working with the Parent Program

The collaboration between the Parent Program and the Learning Abroad Center began around 2001 to take a step towards being more proactive with parents. Moreover, this relationship has aided the Learning Abroad Center in effectively establishing and conveying a role for parents. One individual, Antonia Lortis, assumed the position of parent liaison, communicating directly with the Parent Program director, Marjorie Savage. As Savage states, "When the Learning Abroad Center began its curriculum integration project [around 2000] and one of the key barriers for students was identified as family, I saw I had a responsibility and a role" in this process (personal communications, November 2009). The parent efforts began with the website and later a brochure to show parents, "We're thinking about you" (A. Lortis, personal communications, November 2009). The information on the parent website seeks to convey the parent's role as a supporter, but asserts immediately on the parent welcome

page that “the Learning Abroad Center is student-centered” to emphasize that the office prefers to communicate primarily with students (*Parents*, September 3, 2009). The website information’s purpose is “to be informative before being defensive,” which reinforces the office’s desire to remain student-centered (A. Lortis, personal communications, November 2009).

Several years later, the current director of the Learning Abroad Center, Martha Johnson, and other staff, worked with the Parent Program to develop parent orientation sessions. The Parent Program also offers a learning abroad workshop during Parents’ Weekend (available online as well) and a few articles related to learning abroad that were placed in the Parent Program print newsletter (*Study abroad and graduation*, Winter 2008; *When students go abroad, should parents visit?*, Winter 2008; *Parents can help make study abroad more successful*, Winter 2008).

Parent orientation observations

Parent orientation sessions play an important role in conveying a role to parents. After parents started showing up at the students’ orientation several years ago, the Learning Abroad Center acknowledged that parents had their own questions and concerns (M. Johnson, personal communications, November 2009). Parents attended a 45-minute orientation session that coincides with the students’ own pre-departure orientation sessions. First, the staff member discussed how his or her own experience was drastically different compared to programs of today. By using their own experiences, the session leaders were able to emphasize how much more support today’s students receive in a study abroad program, particularly with the University of Minnesota programs (*Parent*

“Breakout” notes, March 2008). The staff then explained what parents can expect during their students’ experiences. After their own meeting, parents joined their students for the second half of the program-specific orientation sessions.

Expectations for Parental Involvement

Learning Abroad Center staff interviews

Parent-student communication is an issue that influences staff members’ expectations for parental involvement. Staff worry that it appears “parents are concerned that their students aren’t doing what they should be doing. [These parents] are more intent on making sure the student is doing things in the ‘correct’ manner” (B. Cherny, personal communications, November 2009). Moreover, it appears that many students are the ones asking their parents to call or complete tasks for them, and “have no shame in having their parents do the work for them” (S. Tschida, personal communications, November 2009). One expectation associate program directors (APDs) have of parents is that it never gets “to the point when the parent knows the information and the students do not” (E. Volden, personal communications, November 2009). Staff members see the parent’s role as being supportive, but they believe students should be taking responsibility for some of the tasks that parents are calling and asking about. Sometimes, APDs have to “make a conscious effort (in a polite way) to say the student needs to [take care] of this” (E. Volden, personal communications, November 2009).

However, Titus acknowledges that sometimes it becomes necessary for the parent to call a staff member directly because the “chains of communication can break down going back and forth with the student” (personal communications, November 2009). This

concern is not necessarily due to the student's lack of ability, but staff recognize that there is much information for both students and parents to process, particularly with the less traditional locations. Consequently, APDs expect that parents are not always familiar with the cultural complexities of living abroad. For instance, parents with students who are going to a country under travel warning, such as Kenya, frequently call inquiring about crime statistics (B. Titus, personal communications, 2009). However, Titus pointed out that students going to Kenya will be hyperaware of safety, as the student may perceive that more precaution is necessary. In a country such as Italy, on the other hand, a student might be less aware and less cautious, possibly having a greater chance of being pick-pocketed. Titus utilizes these occasions as an opportunity to inform and educate parents not only about the precautions the Learning Abroad Center takes to ensure students safety, but also to point out the less obvious realities of study abroad.

It is important to recognize circumstances that contribute to parental involvement when creating expectations. When asked if there is an expected "type" of parent that might utilize parent resources, Lortis suggested the concept of a "highly involved consumer," those parents who plan, talk to someone about the purchase, and then buy it (personal communications, November 2009). This term does not generalize to all parents, as some simply want to be informed of a process they know little about. Both Lortis and Savage point out that the K-12 experience is very different from higher education, as parents are expected to be involved in their child's early school experiences. During college, the expectations shift and parents do not know what to do (personal communications, November 2009). Giving parents information and resources on what

they can do (i.e., a defined role) to support their student in the study abroad process can thus alleviate some of parents' concerns and most likely, the volume of parent inquiry at the Learning Abroad Center.

Johnson emphasized the importance of the office managing expectations about the student's (and parent's) background, especially to "understand the cultural issues behind these students" (personal communications, November 2009). For example, despite expressed interest, Somali female students were not allowed to participate in a Morocco program because their parents would not let them live alone while overseas. Once this information was known to the staff, the Learning Abroad Center was able to identify housing options which would allow two participants to live together, effectively addressing the parents' concerns (M. Johnson, personal communications, November 2009). Students can indicate on an advising checklist form if they have concerns regarding family and parents, or do not know how to talk to them about study abroad due to cultural values. While Johnson acknowledged that she would ideally like "more tools on the front end for underrepresented students," time and money currently prevent the office from doing so. The office is, however, in the process of developing an online parent orientation to try to reach a broader audience.

Parent orientation observations

During the parent orientation sessions, Learning Abroad Center staff members outline the expectations the office has for parents through a brief discussion of today's generation of students and parents, followed by suggestions on areas where parents' involvement and support is important, as well as where their involvement can hinder the

student's experience. For example, Johnson mentioned to parents how students might undergo "form fatigue" with all of the paperwork students must fill out, but that it is important for students to complete this, not the parents (personal communications, November 2009). As part of the orientation program, parents heard about the benefits of visiting students abroad, and they were given suggestions for the appropriate time to visit students (i.e., a midterm break or at the end). The staff members also explained why students might call within the first few days of arriving overseas in crisis, and parents were encouraged to give the student 24 hours to adapt and adjust to their new culture. In most cases, the staff member assured, the student will be fine (C. Huber; M. Johnson, B. Blahnik personal communications, November 2009). Session leaders conclude sessions by acknowledging the help parents give students overall.

Concluding remarks

Overall, it appears that the Learning Abroad Center has a well-established approach to conveying a role to parents, as well as setting expectations. There are obvious challenges to getting parents to follow through with these expectations, as well as with the ways in which the Learning Abroad Center does this. These issues will be discussed further in Chapter Five. An additional challenge the Learning Abroad Center faces deals with outreach to parents of underrepresented student populations. Although it would be desirable to work more with underrepresented parent groups, such as from low income, different ethnic groups and first-generation students', a lack of time and money hinders further development of materials or programs that target these populations (A. Lortis, personal communications, November 2009). Additionally, Savage noted that

working with these populations can be a slightly sensitive matter with other offices on campus when determining what outreach channels are most appropriate to connect with these parent populations (personal communications, November 2009).

Phase Two-Parent Perspective

The second phase of the research captured the parent's viewpoint. To obtain this perspective, the researcher administered a survey to parents of study abroad students and held a focus group, which Chapter Two outlined. This section presents the survey findings, followed by the findings from the focus group and the parent interviews from the cancelled focus group.

Parent Survey

This portion of phase two first presents an overview of the survey, followed by a brief profile of the parents who completed the survey based on the few demographic questions the survey asked. Second, to understand how parents engaged with the institution during the study abroad experience, the findings examine parents' responses to resource-focused questions. Last, findings are presented based on parents' engagement with their student during the study abroad process.

Overview and purpose

Of the 338 surveys that were sent out, 135 parents responded, resulting in a response rate of 40%. Through this survey, the researcher sought to understand better parents' relationship with the institution, as well as with their student to then examine how parents perceive their role in the study abroad process (research question 2). All questions are reported in the findings with the exception of question 11 (see appendix C)

First, the survey questioned parents' awareness and usefulness of resources provided by the Learning Abroad Center and Parent Program. In part, this portion sought to learn to what extent parents are in direct contact with the institution. The second part of the survey pertained to parents' contact with their student at all stages of the study abroad experience (i.e., before, during, and after). The open-ended questions were the core questions of this survey:

1. Survey Question 8: *Did your student directly request your involvement during the study abroad process? If yes, please explain.*
2. Survey Question 13: *If there was a particular resource that would better assist you in being informed about your student's study abroad experience, what would that be?*
3. Survey Question 14: *In a few sentences, please describe your role in your student's study abroad experience.*
4. Survey Question 15: *How, if at all, has your student's study abroad experience impacted you?*

The following section examines in more detail the parents who indicated that their students are first-generation college students and those parents who marked a racial/ethnic group other than Caucasian.

Parent and student profile

To provide a better profile of the parents' experiences, Tables 1 and 2 describe the location and structure of the students' study abroad experience. Question 1 asked parents the current status of their students in the study abroad process.

Table 1. Students' Study Abroad Status

Status	Count	Percent %
Confirmed to study abroad in the near future	12	8.9%
Currently abroad	58	42.9%
Returned from studying abroad within the last three years	65	48.2%

While the survey was originally sent to equal strata of parents in the above classifications, due to undeliverable email addresses the strata became unequal with final

counts resulting in 121 parents for confirmed to study abroad, 103 parents for currently abroad, and 109 parents for returned from abroad. As Table 1 illustrates, however, those parents with students confirmed to study abroad had the lowest number of respondents.

To identify the types of programs students participated in, question 2 asked parents to choose between the first five responses in Table 2, which are based on the most common structures of the Learning Abroad Center's programs. As indicated in Table 2, the majority of students participated/are participating in study center programs with other U.S. students (40.3%). Some programs that parents listed in the 'other' category are likely to represent this format as well, but parents were either unsure or viewed the programs as hybrids of more than one type of program. While the information from this table was not used in the analysis of this study, there is potential for future research with this type of information, as mentioned in Chapter Five.

Table 2. Structure of Students' Study Abroad Program

Type	Count	Percent %
In a study center with other U.S. students	53	40.3%
A mix between local university and study center, taking classes with U.S. students and domestic students	33	24.6%
Directly enrolled at a local university, taking classes with local students	24	17.9%
An internship, work, or volunteer program with locals	4	3%
An internship, work, or volunteer program with other U.S. participants	2	1.5%
Other/unknown	16	11.9%

According to the *Open Doors Report*, the top three destinations for U.S. study abroad students are 1) the United Kingdom (12.7% of students studying abroad); 2) Italy (11.7%); and 3) Spain (9.6%) (*Top destinations of U.S. Study Abroad Students 2007/08*). The findings from this study mirror these top three study abroad destinations of the students whose parents completed the survey, which Table 3 shows. However, it is

interesting to note that parents listed a wide range of countries in which their students were studying or had studied. In total, parents listed 35 countries from all parts of the globe.

Table 3. Top Four Countries of Students' Study Abroad Destination

Country	Count	Percent %
United Kingdom	20	15.2%
Italy	19	14.3%
Spain	17	12.8%
Mexico	7	5.3%
Other	69	52.3%

In addition to students' program structure and destination, question 17 also asked parents if their study abroad student was the first in the family to attend college. Table 4 lists parents' responses to this question.

Table 4. Is the Student a First-generation College Student?

First-generation?	Count	Percent %
Yes	43	32.1%
No	91	67.9%

About twice as many parents (67.9% vs. 32.1%) responded that their students are not first-generation college students. A brief description of the parents who marked their students as being first-generation is presented here, as it is a category discussed in Chapter Two that can influence parents' level of involvement.

Similar to the results found for the survey overall, as is discussed in more detail below, these parents of first-generation students were less likely to participate in events that involved direct contact with the university and more likely to go to web or print

resources. Of the resources parents used most, 72.1% looked at the Learning Abroad Center parent brochure, 58.1% looked at the program-specific information on the Learning Abroad Center website, and 53.5% looked at the parent-specific web information. Only 18.6% of parents with first-generation students attended a Learning Abroad Center parent orientation and 11.6% attended the Parent Program workshop during Parents' Weekend. 41.9% of parents knew what FERPA is, but only 4.7% encountered difficulties communicating with the University due to FERPA. The majority of parents, 90.7%, indicated going to their study abroad student for information, while 37.2% went to a friend and only 20.1% went to another family member for information.

One of the factors that may influence parental involvement regarding parents without previous education is whether these parents have working knowledge (or mental models) of the higher education system, as discussed in Chapter Two. When looking at the range of responses of these parents with regard to resources and events listed in the previous paragraph, there does not appear to be any particular pattern to indicate an inability to assist the student due to inexperience. Additionally, percentages of used resources are similar to the overall results of the survey. Most importantly, however, only one parent indicated that she did feel that she had the information to be able to respond to her student's questions and concerns.

To learn whether parents have had personal experience with study abroad, question 16 asked parents if they had studied abroad if they attended college. The survey found that 86.7% of parents who attended college did not study abroad (see Table 5). This is likely to further support the notion that parents rely on students to work together

to navigate the study abroad process as discussed farther below in the open-ended and resource questions.

Table 5. Parents' Own Study Abroad Experience

Did parent study abroad?	Count	Percent %
Yes	11	8.2%
No	117	86.7%
N/A	7	5.2%

Questions 18 and 19 in the survey asked parents two additional demographic questions, gender and ethnicity/race, which indicated a majority in the type of parent who answered this survey. As Table 6 and 7 demonstrate, roughly twice as many mothers than fathers (68.2% vs. 31.9%) responded to the survey, and 93.3% of the respondents consider themselves Caucasian.

Table 6. Parents' Gender

Gender	Count	Percent %
Female	92	68.2%
Male	43	31.9%

Table 7. Parents' Ethnicity and Race

Item	Count	Percent %
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0.7%
Asian or Asian American	2	1.8%
Caucasian	126	93.3%
Hispanic, Latino, or Chicano	1	0.7%
Other, please specify.	3	2.2%
American	1	0.7%
French	1	0.7%

The lower percentages of the ethnic groups listed above are representative of national percentages of racial/ethnic groups of study abroad students. According to the 2009 *Open Doors Report*, in 2007-08, Caucasians made up 81.8% of students studying

abroad, 6.6% were Asian or Pacific Islander, 5.9% were Hispanic or Latino(a), 4% were Black or African American, and 0.5% were American Indian/Alaska Native (*Profile of U.S. Study Abroad Students, 1998/99-2007/08*).

Chapter Two discussed ethnicity—in terms of cultural values—as an element that may influence parental involvement. This section presents a brief description of the responses of those who did not mark Caucasian. It must be noted that the researcher cannot draw conclusions about these responses from non-Caucasian ethnic groups because there were so few respondents. Of the resources and activities listed, the majority (4 out of 6) did not contact or go to the Learning Abroad Center. Half (3 out of 6) of the parents did not read the program brochure, go to a parent orientation session, nor look at the Parent Program online workshop. Five out of six parents did not go to the Parents' Weekend workshop. Two parents knew about FERPA, but none indicated that they had problems with FERPA. All of these parents indicated that they went to their study abroad student for information and all students came to their parents for assistance. Three out of the six parents stated that they spoke with their children 4-6 times per week while the student was abroad, while the rest marked 1-3 times per week. Additionally, three out of six parents noted that their students were first-generation college students.

Responses to resource-focused questions

This section will go into more details about parents' responses to how they engaged with the institution based on their resource usage. Question 4 in the survey asked parents what resources they used and how useful these resources/events were, or if parents even knew about them. Table 8, 9, and 10 below identify the most used resources

and their usefulness based on the resources with the fewest number of parents marking ‘did not do’ or ‘did not know this existed’ to determine which resources parents used the most. Table 9 identifies the non-university sources parents went to for information.

Table 8. Usefulness of most used resources

Item	Very useful	Useful	Minimally useful	Not useful	Did not do	Did not know this existed (count)
Parent Brochure	21.6% 22	48% 49	10.8% 11	2% 2	17.7% 18	35
Learning Abroad Center Website: Program Information	22.5% 25	40.5% 45	9% 10	0.9% 1	27% 30	31
Learning Abroad Center Website: Parent Information	10.6% 11	42.3% 44	11.5% 12	1.9% 2	33.7% 35	41

Table 9. Parents seeking information from non-university sources

Item	Yes	No	Total
A friend	42.7% 53	57.3% 71	124
Your student who is studying abroad	83.5% 111	16.5% 22	133
Another family member	25.8% 31	74.2% 89	120

69.6% of parents who indicated using the parent brochure found it to be very useful or useful, while 63.1% found the program specific information on the website useful or very useful, and 52.9% found the parent-specific information on the Learning Abroad Center website useful or very useful. Table 9 displays parents’ responses to a question asking if parents sought information from certain people outside of the university. The student studying abroad was the clear top source of information and advice at 83.5%.

Of those resources listed on the survey that parents did not know existed, the most frequently marked were the Parent Program online workshop (44.4%) and the Parents’

Weekend Learning Abroad Workshop held by the Parent Program (34.8%). 32.6% of parents marked not knowing that the Learning Abroad Center parent pre-departure orientations existed.

A smaller percentage of parents contacted or went to the Learning Abroad Center (28.6% and 14.4%, respectively). Table 10 below shows the number of parents who contacted or went to the Learning Abroad Center and how useful parents thought these actions were.

Table 10. Usefulness of Contacting and Going to the Learning Abroad Center

Contacted the Learning Abroad Center	Count	Percent %
Very useful	10	8.9%
Useful	16	14.3%
Minimally useful	5	4.5%
Not useful	1	0.9%
Did not do	80	71.4%
Went to the Learning Abroad Center	Count	Percent %
Very useful	4	3.6%
Useful	6	5.4%
Minimally useful	6	5.4%
Not useful	0	0%
Did not do	95	85.6%

As discussed throughout this study, FERPA restrictions often control parent-institution contact. When asked if parents knew what FERPA meant, 59.7% marked that they did not (question 5). Nonetheless, 96.2% indicated that they did not encounter difficulties with FERPA during the study abroad process (question 6). Overall, parents indicated that they felt they were able to assist their students' appropriately, as 85.2% of parents marked that they were able to respond to their students' questions and concerns during the study abroad process.

In question 13, parents identified possible resources they would have liked to have had. Many parents did not appear to fully understand this question, as they did not actually indicate a resource they would have liked to have known about or have access to. Rather, some parents took this space to indicate a problem they had with something during the study abroad process, or explain the students' experience. Many parents stated that they thought the student was the primary resource they needed. Others would have liked to have known about the parent resources that already existed. Parents also cited country-specific travel information, as well as hearing from past participants or parents as desirable resources. With regard to the study abroad office directly, some parents did not feel there was someone they could contact directly or they wished information could be sent directly to parents. Table 11 below lists key quotes that aligned with these themes.

Table 11. Themes and Key Quotes for desired resources

1. Students were key informants	<p>“My daughter did the work and shared the information with me.”</p> <p>“I don’t know that answer. Maybe my own child telling and keeping us informed?”</p> <p>“I think the student is the best source of information. At this point they should be mature enough to figure it all out with the assistance from the university, not mom and dad.”</p> <p>“I had to rely on my son getting me information. I was not aware that there was another source.”</p>
2. Would like to be aware/informed of the current parent resources	<p>“I wasn’t aware of any parent informational meetings. That would have been helpful.”</p> <p>“I think there are enough resources, I just wasn’t made aware of them.”</p> <p>“Let the parents know about all meetings beforehand.”</p> <p>“I wish I had found out more about parent meetings. I would have really liked a parent teleconference or something that many parents could ‘attend’ via phone...”</p>

Table 11. Themes and Key Quotes for desired resources (continued)

3. Logistical in-country info	<p>(grouped parent thoughts) Broad travel and logistical tips for those unfamiliar with study abroad/travel</p> <p>“Maybe some cooking tips and/or basic healthcare tips: how to care for yourself with a cold, etc.”</p> <p>Visa assistance</p> <p>Money managing tips, currency info</p> <p>“I could have used assistance in what my student would need to stay connected- power adaptors, convertors, etc. I found I bought a lot of things my student did not really need.”</p>
4. Hearing from past participants or parents	<p>“It would be nice to compile students’ actual experience in a handbook with suggestions for future study abroad students. Also getting information from parents whose children have studied abroad with their suggestions and helpful tips.”</p> <p>“It would be good to have a parents’ group specific to the country your child is going to for reasons of giving information about the country and I could have asked questions about the reality of the experience.”</p> <p>“Guidance from someone who has experienced the expectation of the country that she will be studying in.”</p>
5. A contact person in the study abroad office	<p>“A regular communication source, other than the student to report basic benchmarks, i.e., confirmation of arrival, academic progress at program midpoint, etc.”</p> <p>“Someone who is willing to answer any questions about a particular program without having to ask through the students.”</p> <p>“A face to face meeting, parent-student-Learning Abroad Center with specific knowledge/experience of the particular program in the country where the student is actually going.”</p>
6. Info sent directly to parents	<p>“Receiving a parents’ guide in the mail or by email that linked me to the above-mentioned resources would have been great.”</p> <p>“More proactive communication on what to expect.”</p> <p>“Perhaps direct mailing to parents. Our daughter didn’t share any parent connections or information with us.</p>

Below are the additional results of the open-ended questions, which were coded into themes.

Parents' engagement with their students

It appears that parents shape their role and their involvement based on their relationship with their student, as well as their knowledge, or familiarity, with traveling abroad. Question 8 asked: *Did your student directly request your assistance at any point during the study abroad process?* 58.2% of parents stated that, yes, their students directly requested their parents' involvement at some point during the study abroad process. One caveat of this question is that involvement was not defined for parents, leaving it up to the parents' discretion to determine whether they were involved or not. Parents listed a range of reasons as to why their students asked for their advice and/or assistance. Some parents saw their involvement as extending little beyond paying for the experience. Others indicated that their students wanted them to be kept in the loop and students sought their parents' insight to work through the process together. The following categories emerged from parents' responses as the primary areas in which students sought their parents' assistance.

Table 12. Areas in which Students Sought their Parents' Involvement/Assistance

1. Financial assistance	<p>"[We provided] financial assistance to move funds to different accounts"</p> <p>"Financially - to wire transfer tuition to the school."</p> <p>"To pay for it and attend the parent orientation program."</p>
2. Advice/Input/Discussion	<p>"She wanted my input directly. She referred to the Learning Abroad Center and I did see the website but I was unaware of resources for parents."</p> <p>"We worked together to decide the program that fit him best. He made the choice based on what fit him."</p> <p>"She kept me in the loop. The biggest problem is that she does not have the time, taking 19 hours and working to keep on top of all of the things that were available to her/me."</p> <p>"Minimal parental guidance as to choice options. She is quite self-directed."</p>

Table 12. Areas in which Students Sought their Parents' Involvement/Assistance (continued)

2. Advice/Input/Discussion (continued)	<p>“She wanted me to be familiar with everything in case she needed help. She also knew that if I was involved somewhat then I would feel more at ease with her going.”</p> <p>“We were on Skype with him constantly trying to figure out what was normal and what was not. In general, he handled the situation, but we provided a sounding board and support.”</p> <p>“She discussed the housing and class possibilities and financial matters. Went through the application with her.”</p> <p>“My daughter had already been through a exchange student process herself and with students we had stay with us. We worked together.”</p>
3. Paperwork and forms	<p>“I helped with any forms I could and attended her orientation meeting (which was very informative).”</p> <p>“Just helped with getting appropriate documents together, copied, and submitted in timely manner.”</p> <p>“Help get required paperwork, pay for it.”</p> <p>“Gathering required forms, information prior to leaving for Italy.”</p>
4. Actively came to campus	<p>“Attended orientation meeting; met with U legal staff for power of attorney; traveled to Chicago for student Visa”</p> <p>“Both my students needed to discuss all this with me; have me sign documents-etc. in my daughter's case we met with people in the S/A office.”</p> <p>“Only by bringing me to the parent session for studying abroad.”</p>

The survey asked parents how often they kept in touch with their students while abroad. Table 13 provides the frequency of parent-student communication. The majority of parents indicated keeping in touch 1-3 times per week (70.69%).

Table 13. Frequency of Parent-Student Communication While Abroad

Item	Count	Percent
Less than weekly	15	12.93%
1-3 times per week	82	70.69%
4-6 times per week	19	16.38%

The researcher asked this question because many study abroad administrators are concerned that parents and students communicate too frequently while abroad. The accessibility of internet and communication technologies, such as Skype, make it easier for parents and students to keep in touch. However, staff interviewed for this study did not indicate an “appropriate” amount for parents and students to communicate while abroad. Moreover, it is difficult to determine what is considered an appropriate frequency of communication as each student is different when considering the student adjustment theories discussed in Chapter Two.

In question 9, the survey asked parents: *How often did/do you and your student communicate about the following issues regarding study abroad?* Table 14 provides a breakdown of the frequencies parents cited with regard to various aspects of the study abroad experience and process. Parents marked frequently or occasionally for the following top five areas of discussion (and likely assistance/involvement): 1) Financial matters (96.3%); 2) General travel concerns (87.4%); 3) Health matters (83.7%); 4) The application process (80.6%); and 5) The visa/passport process (80%). Parents marked homesickness (58.9%) and adjustment issues overseas (48.2%) as the topics they discussed least (hardly ever or never) with their students.

Table 14. Topics Parents Discuss with Their Student

Item	Frequently	Occasionally	Hardly Ever	Never
Application process	37.3% 50	43.3% 58	14.2% 19	5.2% 7
Financial matters	61.5% 83	34.8% 47	3.0% 4	0.7% 1
Visa/passport process	36.3% 49	43.7% 59	14.1% 19	5.9% 8
Social advice	22.2% 30	41.5% 56	29.6% 40	6.7% 9

Table 14. Topics parents discuss with their student (continued)

Item	Frequently	Occasionally	Hardly Ever	Never
Academic advice	14.9% 20	44.0% 59	32.1% 43	9.0% 12
Health matters	30.4% 41	53.3% 72	14.1% 19	2.2% 3
General travel concerns	48.1% 65	39.3% 53	8.9% 12	3.7% 5
Homesickness	8.2% 11	32.8% 44	35.8% 48	23.1% 31
Adjustment issues overseas	11.9% 16	40.0% 54	28.9% 39	19.3% 26

Parents often associated the topics listed in Table 14 with their role in the study abroad process, as is evident by many of their open-ended responses. In question 14, parents were asked to describe their role in the study abroad experience. Parents shape their roles based on their relationship with their student—how independent parents perceive the student to be, how involved the student wants them to be (i.e., how often the student comes to them for advice or help). Primarily, parents serve as a source of emotional and financial support. As indicated above, the majority of parents did not study abroad when they were in college. Nonetheless, parents frequently stated that they guide, consult, and advise as much as the students requested from them. A large percentage of parents indicated financial support (~40%). Table 15 illustrates the themes that describe parents' roles and a few key quotes attributed to them.

Table 15. Parents' Descriptions of their Role

1. A hands-off approach	<p>“My daughter is very independent. My role was to provide some financial and emotional support.”</p> <p>“Basically, my son told me he wanted to study abroad and he took it from there, occasionally telling me about progress.”</p> <p>“Limited role. Our student was proactive in taking care of nearly everything and only occasionally asked for parental input.”</p> <p>“I try to keep a pretty hands-off approach, as my daughter needs to assume the responsibilities. My role is just to make sure that she is staying on track. Remind her of deadlines. I would have liked to help her with (and would suggest that you consider) a timetable for things that need to be done.”</p>
2. Provide support/advice as needed; act as a sounding board	<p>“She worked through most everything herself, but I saw our role as more ‘supportive’. Tried to be the voice of reason when she was frustrated, etc.”</p> <p>“We are here to support our daughter in any and every way she needs. She is comfortable to ask when she needs something.”</p> <p>“We provide coaching and advice and give him ideas on how to navigate the systems there. At first, we served as ‘cheerleaders’ to encourage him to problem solve and get adjusted.”</p> <p>“My role has been to listen to the information my student has gotten and give my input on situations that have more to do with non-academic questions. Also, to help make a financial plan to pay for the trip.”</p> <p>“They each consulted me by bouncing their ideas off me and asked for opinions/suggestions. My daughter got discouraged a couple times to the point where I met up with her at least three times and helped her complete bits and pieces of the process. Having me there seemed to fortify her belief in my commitment in supporting her (esp. financially) and convince her that this could all really happen.”</p> <p>“As parents, our role has been to act as sounding boards, to help in understanding financial issues and providing some of the funding and to help a little with stress management.”</p> <p>“I was the ‘rock’ he relied on and a sounding board for roommate, academic and governmental issues that arose.”</p> <p>“I am someone she vents frustrations to and discusses things with to enable her to find solutions.”</p>
3. Financial support	<p>“I am providing financial assistance and advice on financial matters and safety concerns.”</p> <p>“We are the source of his loans to finance his study abroad.”</p>

Lastly, question 15 asked: *How, if any, has your student's study abroad experience had an impact on you?* Parents (118 out of the 135) described how their students' study abroad experiences have impacted them. In the previous question—regarding the parent's role—parents frequently indicated financial support as a component of their role, but fewer parents indicated financial burden as an impact. Indeed, the majority of parents focused on the positive outcomes of a study abroad experience. Some lamented at the need to “let go,” or a struggle with distance, but few indicated a negative impact. The one parent that did indicate a negative experience, stated:

I would NEVER allow one of my children to be put in that situation again. It wasn't fair to him. I was too sanguine about travel abroad programs. This experience had a profound effect on me. College students are adults yet can be very vulnerable when isolated and confused.

This parent indicated that the student's program was brand new and lacked organization and, as a result, “we were on Skype with him constantly trying to figure out what was normal and what was not.” This parent acknowledged that their experience was unique (though does not fully explain how, aside from the newness of the program) and after the student transferred to a different program, her son had a wonderful experience, “really what we expected from the study abroad experience.” It is difficult to draw deeper conclusions from this parent's experience, however, because the student's and institution's perspectives are not represented. Below are additional key quotes that pertain to each theme from the impact parents experienced listed in Question 15.

Table 16. Impact of Study Abroad on Parents

<p>1. Saw students' growth/independence</p>	<p>"We realized the extent of her maturity and independence. I had to accept that she was somewhere strange where there could be potential dangers if she wasn't careful and be comfortable with that."</p> <p>"It was nice to watch him become independent. At the end of the term, when I went to visit for a week, it was fun to let him be my tour guide."</p> <p>"We saw a much changed/mature 22 yr old after seven months abroad. It also gave him a different view of our country and how he can become a better world citizen."</p> <p>"When my student was abroad, it helped to build stronger adult to adult relationships rather than mother to child. Being able to join her after her studies was one of the best experiences I've had."</p>
<p>2. Engaged in the experience (e.g., visiting)</p>	<p>"At first I was concerned for his safety. Now I get that he is safe and secure. His experience and love for South America prompted us to take a 17 day vacation with him in South America...I felt so proud of the progress he has made in easily communicating in Spanish with the locals. I have more understanding of South America and a deeper connection."</p> <p>"It gave me the chance to experience another country and their culture with someone, my daughter, as a tour guide and translator."</p> <p>"It also increased my curiosity to travel more. I've done more reading lately on current events in Spain."</p> <p>"Neither of us did a study abroad while we were in college (wished we had), but we are planning on visiting him at the end of his semester. So his taking this step helped propel us to decide to go to Europe too."</p> <p>"I am planning on visiting her which would NEVER have happened if I wouldn't have had a child studying abroad."</p>
<p>3. Saw it as an educational opportunity</p>	<p>"I really learned a lot through her sharing her experiences."</p> <p>"Gave us educational opportunities as well. Able us to encourage our children's independence."</p> <p>"I wish I could go back to college and do it all over again and include a study abroad experience for myself."</p> <p>"It was a very positive, life-changing experience for my daughter that changed my view of the world."</p> <p>"We as parents are learning and growing with our son as he relates his experiences with other cultures. We were unable to study abroad during our college years."</p>

Table 16. Impact of Study Abroad on Parents (continued)

4. Letting go process/transitional period	<p>“A great letting go experience for all involved and forcing the “independence” that college on its own no longer offers.”</p> <p>“I have let go as I know she will be making her own decisions entirely while she is away.”</p> <p>“I feel like this is the big launching of her into the adult world...I miss her and part of me regrets the transition, but I am also proud of her and pleased that she can handle these things independently.”</p>
5. Little impact due to ease of staying in touch	<p>“We will be in constant contact via Skype and other electronic communications.”</p> <p>“Email, IM, and Skype make the distance easier.”</p> <p>“Learned how to use Skype. Otherwise not a big deal.”</p> <p>“I talk to him on Skype about as often as we do when he was at U of M.”</p>

Parents mentioned the growth and capabilities they witnessed in their students as a result of the study abroad experience (~17%). A subtheme of student independence is study abroad as a pivotal transition into adulthood where parents felt the relationship with their child shifted to more of an adult to adult context. Parents also discussed engaging in the experience themselves, particularly by visiting and having their child share their life abroad with the parents (~15%). In addition to visiting, several parents mentioned learning more about the country in which their child was studying, or in general, learning through their student. As a result, parents saw the study abroad as an educational opportunity for themselves, not only for the student.

Survey conclusion

It should be noted that, at this time, the majority of the survey findings were qualitatively descriptive and somewhat limited in terms of analysis about the factors that contribute to parental involvement. It can be assumed that parents' relationship with their students is a strong determinant of how much the parent gets involved or engaged in the

study abroad experience. Many students ask for their parents' assistance, whether it is for advice or help completing paperwork. Because most parents did not study abroad themselves in college, it appears that parents and students work together to navigate the study abroad process and students use parents as a source of guidance and support. Additionally, it appears that it is less likely for parents to engage directly with the university (i.e., the Learning Abroad Center), but rather to get information through their student.

Parent Focus Group

Overview

This section presents the results of the focus group, which included five parents who attended a Learning Abroad Center parent orientation. The responses from the group that was cancelled due to weather are included at the end of this section as supplementary information to the parents' opinions. After two last minute cancellations, two sets of parents from families and one individual mother attended the focus group. Table 17 provides parents' pseudonyms with a profile of the student's study abroad status and the family's previous international experience, which strongly appeared to influence the discussion of the group.

Table 17. Focus Group Parents' Profile

Pseudonym	Student's status	Previous international experience
Harry & Sarah Dune	Two study abroad students, One currently abroad, one returned	Hosted 4 high-school age exchange students, previous international travel Sarah studied abroad in college.
Patricia Carmichael	One student currently abroad	Limited to no previous international experience
Carla & Josh Peterson	Two study abroad students, both returned (older did a study abroad and then worked abroad)	Hosted 1 exchange student, previous international travel

The intent of the focus group was to expand on the results of the survey. Indeed, the focus group provided more in-depth information on questions in the survey, particularly regarding how frequent and in what ways parents and students kept in touch. Additionally, parents were able to better explain what led them to be directly involved in their student's experience, i.e., why they wanted to come to parent-specific events or the circumstances leading them to contact the Learning Abroad Center. These instances are discussed below in more detail.

After coding the group's transcript, two major themes emerged which appear to influence parents' level of involvement and engagement through the university and the student with the study abroad experience for this particular group of parents. These themes include: 1) previous international experience and 2) parents' knowledge (or lack thereof) of the host culture. These themes contribute to a better understanding of how these parents shaped, or perceived, their role during their student's study abroad experience. In addition to these two major themes are the following categories which relate to how parents shaped their roles:

1. Perceived levels of students' independence;
2. Available or desired resources;
3. Uncertainty about the parent's role; and
4. Managing expectations

In particular, themes three and four (uncertainty about the parent's role and managing expectations) were particularly enlightening, though these themes were not the most frequently discussed topics.

Previous international experience

Two families had fairly extensive travel experience. The Dunes had hosted four international exchange students (from high school). Both the Dunes and the Petersons had older children who studied abroad before the current students, and Sarah Dune studied abroad as an undergraduate student. Throughout the session, these parents made frequent references to their past experiences and how certain situations influenced the current study abroad experience of their students. For instance, because of her own study abroad experience, the level of contact between parent and child as a result of new technologies, such as Skype concerned Sarah.

I have mixed feelings about [Skype]. When I studied abroad, I had one phone call on Christmas Eve. That was the only contact besides letters. It makes me wonder, you know, about the kind of attachment issues... what differences there are.

Conversely, Patricia did not discuss any previous traveling experience, stating:

This is new to us... we were always excited for it. She did the preparation herself, but I wanted to know what was going on. I was curious about so many aspects.

It appeared that the parents with previous international experience were knowledgeable and understanding of cultural differences, as well as adjustment issues and culture shock. Such experience did not deter these parents from being involved or engaged in their students' experiences. In fact, it seemed that these parents utilized their international knowledge as a platform to be even more interested in connecting and being informed of their students' study abroad programs. All parents seemed to recognize that, through their students' experiences, they too would have/had a learning experience.

Knowledge of the host culture

Concerns and knowledge, or lack thereof, of the host cultures also contributed to parents' involvement. Harry mentioned using non-university resources to reassure the parents about the conditions of the country to which the daughter was traveling, stating:

If you go to the State Department website, you don't feel good after you read it... If we hadn't met with our travel agent...that got me over the hurdle... We also found out that families look out for their students.

Although, Sarah did point out that while the majority of concerns they had been having pertained safety issues in-country, the particular crisis they experienced had nothing to do with safety, but with cultural differences. The Dune's daughter had been experiencing difficulties with her host family, at times having to share a bed with other family members and sharing the apartment with upwards of 50 relatives, according to Sarah. And while it was an extreme situation, she and her husband often wondered:

I struggle with how much we're supposed to be having control over our kids. Should we be intervening at all?

Other parents' concerns also pertained to student's adaptation to the host culture and how much they should be communicating with their students. The parents were concerned that talking too much with family could result in the students not immersing themselves. As Carla stated, "You want them to be used to where they are and adapt."

One component of student adaptation was coping with the housing arrangements; specifically, living with a host family, such as the Dunes' experience. All parents in the group thought there was value in staying with a host family. The Dunes recognized their situation as being unique and had done research on cultural norms of the country in which they were staying so as to better understand the circumstances their daughter might

be encountering, but they still grappled with determining at what point to intervene. Often, the Dunes would say “In that culture” or “In Kenya.” Other less frequently mentioned concerns included homesickness, the destination of the student’s study abroad program, and alcohol consumption.

Perceived levels of student independence

Frequently, parents made direct references toward their students’ level of independence, citing their students’ desire to handle, or manage, the experience on their own. For instance, Harry commented that “Lydia was very independent, she just handled it. She wanted to do it all herself.” Overall, these parents expected their students to grow and mature from a study abroad program. Consequently, the parents viewed their role in a supportive function, allowing the students to take charge of the experience, but being available for advice and encouragement.

Additionally, parents brought up their students’ age as a factor in their level of maturity, stating that they expected students at ages 19-21 (the representative ages of the parents’ students in this group) to act as adults capable of making their own decisions. Parents felt that at college age, these students controlled how often they were in contact with their parents.

At that age, they’re able to control how much they want to talk to you. I mean she’s talking to you often because she needs to, but if she didn’t need to, she wouldn’t. The younger ones, they don’t want to be too connected. They call when they want to.

Nonetheless, while these parents expected their students to handle their experiences, the parents did express concern for students’ choices while abroad, such as with regard to alcohol or independent traveling.

Resources

These parents seemed eager to be engaged in their students' study abroad experiences, attending the parent orientation sessions and wanting to know about anything offered to parents in general, both University-wide and related to study abroad.

Carla stated:

Thank goodness he told us about [the parent orientation session]. He told us, 'next week, there's a meeting you can go to...' ok, well where is it? He didn't realize we really wanted to go.

When asked, all families indicated that they were familiar with FERPA policy, but were still confused about what kind of information they could and should receive regarding the study abroad experience. Sarah suggested, and others agreed, that it would be helpful for parents to directly receive a checklist stating the information students receive from the Learning Abroad Center.

To keep themselves informed and perhaps, in a sense, to discourage pestering their student directly for information, these parents sought out their own information, including non-university sources as mentioned above, such as a travel agent or friends. Parents preferred personal contact, indicating that the most helpful part of the student orientation sessions were the testimonials from past participants. Additionally, Sarah and Carla indicated that they had been able to get contact information from other parents who were sending students to either the same program or at least country. While these mothers agreed that it would be useful for parents to be able to contact one another, they were uncertain as to how to orchestrate such a task—how to include everyone that was not able to go to the parent orientations and whether it really was necessary. Both the Dunes and

the Petersons said they had gotten their students to give them the phone numbers of the students' closest friends. Parents did this to have peace of mind and in case of an emergency. As Josh stated, "You don't need it, but it's nice to have it."

In addition to resources with personal contact, Patricia noted that the "study abroad folder"—a list of documents to keep at home while the student is away—was another useful resource provided in the parent orientation. Parents cited that it would be helpful to provide cultural overviews, or sources to find descriptions of cultural norms before the students go abroad. Patricia also indicated that she read twice a "Know Before You Go" guide twice that was given to parents at the orientation sessions.

Prior to the focus group, parents received a link to Cavallero's (2002) parents' guide to re-entry. None of the parents knew about this guide before receiving the link for focus group participation. All parents agreed that the information and issues to consider included in this guide were highly useful, indicating that they had not considered many of the issues presented to them. Patricia indicated that she was thankful to have the guide before her daughter returns from abroad, stating:

I'm glad to have it ahead of time. I wondered if she is going to come back a different person. Is home going to be mundane?

The Petersons stated that they wished they had read the guide before their students came back. One of their students, in particular, had a difficult time readjusting to life in the United States. Although they recognized these difficulties at the time, parents noted the importance of having expectations about the re-entry process and culture shock, which parents who had not had experience with study abroad before might not know about.

Uncertainty about parents' roles

The abovementioned topics appeared to shape the parents' involvement in their students' study abroad experience. Based on the conversations parents had with their students, parents' shifted their roles as the students needed them to, e.g., financier, supporter, motivator, and confidant. In a sense, the parents were/are their students' "rock," as all families appeared to have close relationships with their students. All had visited (or were planning on visiting) their students at some point. Visiting provided a strong sense of engagement in the experience. The Petersons explained how they rented an apartment and invited all of their student's friends over for a party to get to know who the student had been living with overseas.

These parents noted obstacles to knowing what to do in certain situations, i.e., how involved should they become. Understanding cultural norms and student adjustment processes contributed to these uncertainties with how much is too much. Sarah noted,

What made it hard was we didn't know what to do, if we should call because maybe this is the norm and they're expected to live in this kind of situation. We didn't have the information we couldn't make the good judgments do we need to do something.

Patricia stated:

It's a trade-off because am I being too motherly, or not doing enough? What if it's really important? I wanted to be sure. What if they didn't know... She's really quite capable.

Although this particular group of parents appeared to feel comfortable with the idea of study abroad, as well as seeing the value of international experiences—especially the parents with students who had previously studied abroad—how to handle the current student abroad (or recently returned) still seemed to present certain challenges due to

both the nature of the relationship with the student and the university. An understanding of FERPA did seem to help overall, but parents indicated that they would have like more clarification about their role.

Managing expectations

Due to the nuances of a study abroad experience and the uncertainties mentioned above, a large component of study abroad for parents is managing expectations. This might involve expectations about the students' capabilities, the host family experience—both on the part of the student and the host family—and what changes for the student upon return. This final theme is, in a sense, the umbrella to all of the above themes, as they all connect at this point. For example, parents in the focus group felt that their students were independent and capable in handling themselves overseas. Nonetheless, these parents overwhelmingly had concerns about students' safety and their choices, particularly with independent traveling during their program. Patricia struggled between accepting her student as capable of making her own decisions, while acknowledging that taking a trip to Morocco was not something the mother was comfortable with, suggesting that “maybe I'm just too much of a worrier.”

Re-entry difficulties were one area where expectations needed to be managed for both student and parent. Josh specifically stated that both parents and students need to expect challenges when returning from such a long time away from home, but that the struggle will pass for everyone. Carla elaborated on their daughter's issues with re-entry:

When she came back, she felt a little alienated from her friends who hadn't experienced the same thing... She's pretty critical of her friend from high school. I told her to take it easy.

Josh expanded further, stating

She felt she grew a lot and was a more experienced traveler [after studying abroad]. Her friends had never done that and they didn't know what to ask her.

Conclusion

Based on the group's discussion, these parents seemed to manage with obtaining information on their own to guide themselves through the study abroad process. However, four out of the five parents had significant international experience, which seemed to help them navigate challenges better, such as dealing with culture shock and general travel concerns. Nonetheless, it appears that these parents would have liked more resources and tips upfront, particularly on how to handle re-entry, what to expect with living with a host family, and advice on appropriate levels of contact while the student is abroad. Similar to the survey results, these parents shaped their role based on their relationship with their student and how much the student requested them to be involved. Parents indicated concern with "how much is too much," with regard to parental involvement. On the one hand, these parents wanted to let their students be independent and immerse themselves in the experience, but on the other hand, they still wanted to know what was going on and stay in touch. Specifically with re-entry, parents would like to know what to expect, as they understand study abroad can be a life-altering experience for students, but they want to be able to help the students cope, as well as prepare themselves for changes in their student.

Parent interview comments

Similar themes emerged from the parents who had planned on participating in a focus group before it was cancelled. However, the information obtained from these

interviews was not as in-depth as it had been in the focus group. This limitation was due to the dynamic environment a focus group provides through discussion and sharing. Nine parents returned the questionnaires, three fathers and six mothers. All parents stated that they did not come to the parent orientation either because they could not due to schedule conflicts or because their student had not told them about it.

Based on these responses, it appears that many students were directly asking their parents to help or advise them during the study abroad process. Several times, parents mentioned helping their students fill out paperwork or assist with visa documentation, stating that the amount seemed overwhelming for the student. One mother stated that she was “actively involved in counseling the student.” These parents had similar concerns to the focus group, including safety, adjustment, housing and academics. Additionally, re-entry adjustment appeared to cause difficulties for some parents. As one mother explained, after her son came back from a semester abroad, “he felt he had moved on from the partying atmosphere of the house and didn’t have a lot in common with them anymore.” This particular student ended up moving back home, suggesting that the relationship between parent and child is more steadfast through such a possibly life-altering experience.

There was little other comment to infer what other factors may have influenced parents to get involved aside from the students’ requests, though several of these parents contacted offices at the University, such as One Stop, someone for power of attorney, or the Learning Abroad Center. Some parents felt they had difficulties getting information, indicating that there is perhaps unfamiliarity with navigating the channels of

communication in the study abroad office. Likely, this was due to the Learning Abroad Center's emphasis on maintaining contact with the student only. One mother commented that she would like a guide on communication with the student—"How to be involved but not over-involved." Similar to the focus group, these parents indicated that they could have benefited from more front-end contact to have a better understanding of what their role is in the process, as well as feel more prepared for issues, such as re-entry.

Alignment of the Learning Abroad Center's and Parents' Expectations

Phase one and two—and correspondingly, research questions one and two—of this study captured the Learning Abroad Center's and the parent's perspective. Research question three seeks to understand whether these two stakeholders' expectations align with one another. On the one hand, findings show that there are many areas in which the Learning Abroad Center staff and parents do have a mutual understanding regarding the importance, principles, and objectives of a study abroad experience. For instance, both in the survey and in the focus group, many parents indicated that they felt their students were capable of taking care of preparations for studying abroad and needed to take ownership of the experience. Often, parents stated that they were proud of their students and that they were happy their students had the opportunity to study abroad. Overall, parents seemed cognizant of the learning value in study abroad as an independent experience for the student, which is a clear objective of a study abroad office.

It appears that misalignment may occur between the Learning Abroad Center and parents because parents struggle with knowing how much involvement is too much. However, it is difficult to say whether parents get *overly* involved with direct assistance

to the student, such as filling out paperwork, helping the student complete a task, or directly contacting the study abroad office. This is because parents indicated that their students actively seek their help with such tasks. From an institutional perspective, it might be viewed as over involvement. Nonetheless, fewer parents in the survey or focus group indicated actually going to, or contacting the Learning Abroad Center than those who indicated more indirect involvement, such as looking at websites or relying on their student for information. Furthermore, the Learning Abroad Center staff (who were interviewed) indicated that, overall, they do not struggle with parent interactions and acknowledge that it is only a few parents each semester they perceive as calling or emailing too frequently.

From the parent's perspective, it seems that the line is blurry between when parents can call the study abroad office and when they should not. On the one hand, parents want to be informed and knowledgeable about all aspects of their students' experience and the Learning Abroad Center recognizes parents' desire for information. This is why the office created the number of resources they have in addition to those offered by the Parent Program. Further, some Learning Abroad Center staff actually have directly told parents they can call the office if they need something. However, many parents are not aware of these resources and staff do not often refer parents to parent resources because their questions are so program-specific. Answering parents' questions appears to be more reactionary since no communications are sent directly to parents.

Staff state they are willing to talk through parents' concerns. Moreover, the amount of events and resources clearly indicate that the Learning Abroad Center takes

parents' concerns into consideration. The parent orientation session, especially, serves as a critical time in which parents can get answers to questions, learn about their role, and gain key information related to their student's experience. Observing these sessions confirmed what the staff discussed in the interviews with regard to the office's philosophy of being student centered, yet still conceding that parents are still stakeholders in the study abroad experience. Although the differences are not great, parents indicated knowing less about the parent-specific resources and activities than the general program information.

Table 18 provides a breakdown of the resources/events parents marked as 'did not know this existed.' Parents indicated that they would like information more proactively sent to them, though the Learning Abroad Center appears hesitant to offer direct parent communication due to their student-centered policy, time and money constraints, as well as due to legal restrictions with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

Table 18. What Parents Did Not Know Existed

Item	Number of parents
Online parents' Learning Abroad Workshop	60
Parents' Weekend workshop	47
Learning Abroad Center Parent Orientation	44
Parent-specific Learning Abroad Center website	41
Learning Abroad Center Parent Brochure	35
Program-specific Learning Abroad Center website	31
Going to the Learning Abroad Center	24
Contacting the Learning Abroad Center	23

While the numbers are not significantly larger, parents more frequently do not know about the parent-specific resources. Parents must either rely on their students to provide them with this information or discover these resources themselves. This is not to say that parents should not be self-sufficient in locating resources on their own, but their unfamiliarity with the system of studying abroad may hinder them from knowing where to look. Overall, It appears that parents' and the Learning Abroad Center's expectations are not aligned with regard to the level of communication parents directly receive from the office. Chapter Five provides a few suggestions for ways in which to address parents more directly, while not significantly increasing the contact Learning Abroad Center staff have with parents.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

Discussion and Conclusions

To review, Chapters One and Two discussed how parental involvement has impacted colleges and universities, and how these institutions have adapted as a result. Specifically, institutions have developed programs and materials to meet parents' needs and demands; many have even created administrative positions to directly deal with parent relations. On the one hand, part of the research discussed in Chapter Two identified the ways in which parental involvement can be beneficial for students' adjustment and success in college. Additionally, the review offered a theoretical framework in which to better understand different types of parent-child relationships. On the other hand, the literature review identified negative perceptions of parental involvement on college campuses. Many college (and study abroad) administrators have experienced helicopter parents hovering above their students, leading administrators to generalize how parents might be interfering with students' development.

Specifically with the study abroad experience, research in this study discussed the areas parents might get involved, where parents might face difficulties with their students studying abroad, and what parents' greatest concerns are about a study abroad experience. There is an important observation to make regarding parental involvement in the study abroad experience. Earlier, this study made a distinction between direct and indirect involvement, but a further distinction should be emphasized between involvement and engagement. The latter concept should be seen as parents taking an

active interest in their student's journey abroad and helping students prepare to have a successful experience, which may indeed include some aspects of involvement. Of the most important among preparation tasks a parent can assist with, it is critical that parents ensure students are mentally prepared for their journey abroad.

Indeed, confirming what was gathered from the literature, parents indicate that they have close relationships with their students and students rely on parents for advice regarding a range of issues. Even if parents are not familiar with study abroad, students look to parents as their "sounding board" or their "rock" of stability when a challenge arises. The Learning Abroad Center is aware of the relationships parents and students have, but must continue to enable parents to utilize this trust students have with them during a study abroad experience in ways that will *further* the student's development, rather than hinder it. The office recognizes that communication breaks down between student and parent, as sometimes the parent tries to bypass the student to get information from the Learning Abroad Center. Though, this is most likely due to the emotional investment and concern parents have. As a result, staff members react to parents calling them for information. Although the office has made efforts to be proactive, this has only been to a certain extent and parents indicate they would benefit from more proactive contact.

One of the core issues with parental involvement in study abroad can be attributed to the amount of consideration, preparation, and details that go into a study abroad experience. Because of the relationships many students have with their parents, students seek their parents' advice and/or assistance on practically anything. Considering the

generational traits that Howe and Strauss (2003) posited, in addition to Arnett's (2000) *emerging adulthood* concept, administrators can have a better understanding of the framework in which college students operate. Today's college student-parent relationships do not appear to be on an adult to adult basis yet. As some Learning Abroad Center staff suggested, as well as the Marj Savage, Parent Program Director, study abroad could be considered the new pivotal transition in a college student's life. Some parents in the survey also recognized relationships with their students moving to a more adult to adult basis after a study abroad experience.

The Learning Abroad Center staff members expect to interact with parents, which is a noticeable shift from the staff members' own generation's interactions with parents (Z. Mohs, personal communications, November 2009). Overall, it does not appear that the Learning Abroad Center experiences a great deal of difficulty with handling parental interactions. The office establishes and conveys the parent's role by following legal guidelines established by FERPA in addition to their student-centered office philosophy. However, even with these policies the Learning Abroad Center is able to include the parents to a certain extent by speaking in general terms when parents have student-specific questions. Additionally, the availability of various print and online resources for parents allows the office to further convey their expectations for parents, particularly through the parent orientation.

It is evident from the feedback provided in the survey, as well as from the focus group, that an overwhelming majority of parents are happy for their children to have a study abroad experience, embracing the growth and learning such an opportunity gave

the student. In fact, several parents stated that they wished they would have studied abroad. The study abroad experience is not only a learning opportunity for the student, but it is also a chance for the parent to expand their knowledge and open their eyes to new worlds. As one mother admitted in the findings above, she never would have considered traveling abroad had her daughter not studied abroad. Studying abroad was not as heavily emphasized when these parents were in college themselves. Also, the options for study abroad were not as diverse as they are now. As discussed in Chapter One, study abroad used to be viewed more as a “junior year abroad” to Europe.

Although parents are not study abroad offices’ target audience, the experience can still be viewed as an opportunity to educate the parents in an effort to extend the benefits of international, cross-cultural, and intercultural learning. This is especially important considering that a low percentage of U.S. Americans do not own a passport. In 2006, this number was around 23% according to a spokeswoman for the Washington Department of Licensing (G.Zenk, quoted by Ammons, 2006). At the same time, it is important that the study abroad office draws boundaries and establishes a role for parents in order for students to maintain ownership of the experience.

As has been discussed, there are added layers of complexity that a study abroad experience presents to both students and parents. Increased unfamiliarity introduces greater challenges, likely causing study abroad to be the new dramatic transition going to college once was as Learning Abroad Center staff and the Parent Program director suggested. Several parents agreed, suggesting that study abroad impacts the entire family, not just the student. However, it is dangerous to generalize study abroad as the new adult

transition to the entire college student population. Not every student is going to study abroad, and there are many other factors to take into consideration with regard to parental involvement, such as those discussed in Chapter Two. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of survey respondents identified themselves as Caucasian and the entire focus group was Caucasian. Consequently, these results may identify more with the majority student population than can be extended to underrepresented student populations.

Recommendations for the Learning Abroad Center

In the parent orientation sessions, Learning Abroad Center staff provide parents with a few materials to take home, including information on power of attorney, the Parent Program newsletter articles, and a checklist of materials to keep while the student is abroad. However, staff did not mention the NAFSA: Association for International Educators' guide, "What Parents Need to Know!" (Hulstrand, 2007), Hoffa's (1998) "Parent's guide to study abroad," or Cavallero's (2002) "Surviving Re-entry: A Readjustment Manual for Parents." These guides, to the researcher's current knowledge, are the only published guides available to parents. Providing parents with these in-depth, informative sources might inform parents in a broader context outside of the University of Minnesota. Particularly, parents from the focus group and interviews indicated they would like more information on re-entry and found the re-entry guide helpful.

Furthermore, it would be valuable for the Learning Abroad Center to evaluate parent orientation sessions, monitoring the number of parents who attend and requesting feedback from parents. For the most part, parents remain fairly quiet during the sessions, and while parents do ask questions at the end, it would be worthwhile to have some

documented feedback from the parents to know whether improvements would be warranted.² Parents from both the survey and the focus group indicated that hearing from past participants was one of the most helpful components of the orientation sessions. Parents rely on those with experience to help navigate them through the study abroad process, particularly with all of the cultural nuances of traveling abroad. The majority of parents in this study did not study abroad when they were in college (86.67% in the survey), indicating the high degree of unfamiliarity parents encounter with study abroad.

The office has a glaring challenge with how to handle the apparent disconnect with communication between parents and students. This challenge stems, in part, from generational trends and current expectations of both students and parents with regard to the amount of effort it takes to accomplish tasks on a college campus today as discussed in Chapter Two. Cultural environments, however, are difficult, if not impossible to change, which staff recognize. Thus, it is necessary to adapt to the circumstances instead of forcing a change.

To address this challenge, it may be beneficial to provide parents with more direct information after a student is confirmed to study abroad, especially information on the parent orientation sessions where they can get first-hand guidance on their role. It is important for parents to understand the office philosophy and recognize that all communication is directed to the student, but perhaps at least one initial, direct communication to the parents would satisfy their desire for more contact. For example, in the survey and focus group, many parents indicated that a checklist of information the

² The researcher did observe three additional sessions in a previous semester, but could not include these findings due to IRB protocol. Thus, these sessions were not included in this study, but the same conclusions could be drawn.

students receive (and possibly a timeline) would be helpful. If there was a breakdown in communication between parents and students, the parents could reference this information without having to know if the student already received it. A list of available resources might also be useful.

There is one caveat to consider with this suggestion, however. Providing parents with this information up-front might encourage the continuance of parents' and students' expectation of having information handed to them instead of taking the initiative to search for it on their own. Nonetheless, it might also further enable parents' communication with their students if parents are more aware of what their students have received and where parents can go directly for information.

FERPA restrictions must be considered, as the office is not allowed to send parents direct communications when their student confirms their acceptance in a study abroad program. However, a waiver could be placed onto the confirmation to remove these restrictions, so that students choose themselves whether information is sent to their parents. Because many students already list their parents as a general contact on their applications, it could be assumed there would not be much hesitation to allow parents to receive the above suggested checklist, or something similar.

Collaborating with the Parent Program is an important characteristic of the Learning Abroad Center's parent relations. Marjorie Savage, the Parent Program director is able to provide up-to-date information regarding parent trends, which aids Learning Abroad Center staff in better understanding their stakeholders' needs. This relationship has the possibility of being utilized even further. For instance, perhaps a system could be

developed to streamline more parent communications through Savage. Presently, the Parent Program offers a bi-weekly e-newsletter to parents who self-select to receive it. A similar opportunity could be offered to parents, strictly pertaining to study abroad, with information coming through the Learning Abroad Center program directors and associate directions to the parent liaison and lastly, to Savage. This may not be feasible at this time for the Learning Abroad Center, as time constraints and workload are an issue for the office. Additionally, in the focus group, Savage asked parents whether it would be useful to collect parents' tips and thoughts about their learning abroad experiences. This information could be provided through her e-newsletter, but could also be made available through the Learning Abroad Center. As noted above, however, parents seem to have a more difficult time knowing where parent-specific information is located, thus some proactive delivery options may need to be considered.

Recommendations for Future Research

The discourse on parental involvement in study abroad deserves further attention, as parents' interactions with study abroad offices is likely to continue to increase. As a result, the need for best practices will be even more prevalent. There are various areas of future research that could be conducted with regard to parental involvement in study abroad. These are a few areas in which this type of study could be expanded.

While qualitative research is necessary to capture the rich, in-depth information of parent-institution interactions, the relationships behind factors which cause parental involvement needs to be examined with a quantitative analysis. For instance, Chi-square tests and T-tests could shed light on the relationships between demographic

characteristics of parents and their relationships with instances of direct involvement (e.g., going to the Learning Abroad Center).

Additionally, this study gathered both the parent's and the institution's perspective, but it is also important to obtain the student's viewpoint. As discussed in this chapter and Chapter Four, parents shape their roles based on their relationships with their student and the students' requests. It would be worthwhile to conduct an even more in-depth triangulation of all three perspectives. Using the information on students' program structures and study abroad destination, administrators could look at the amounts of support students receive and levels of student independence that may influence parental involvement. For example, a study could look at whether students directly enrolled at a university abroad will be more likely to handle preparations on their own.

More focus groups with parents, as well as with students, in addition to a student survey would increase the qualitative depth of research. Furthermore, it would be worthwhile to take a deeper look into the demographic variables that the literature review examined, such as socio-economic status, parents' education, and ethnicity, especially because there is a foundation of research with which to work.

Specifically, interactions with parents of underrepresented student groups warrant more investigation. Through its initiatives with curriculum integration of study abroad and the Multicultural Study Abroad Group, a system-wide group of University of Minnesota professionals aiming to increase participation of students of color, the Learning Abroad Center recognizes cultural differences with regard to family involvement. Some steps have been made to address these specific concerns in advising

sessions with students of color, as discussed in the staff interview findings, but more research is needed to understand how target efforts can reach these parents, which may, in turn, increase participation of students of color.

Lastly, as mentioned in the limitations, this study did not examine other institutions. The University of Minnesota is a large, Research, land-grant institution, but it would be interesting to compare with other sizes of colleges and universities, as well as examine public versus private institutions. Conducting such comparisons would broaden the range of parents' perspectives, as well as institutional practices captured.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Other institutions can still benefit from this study's findings with regard to the approach the Learning Abroad Center takes with parents, as well as to consider their own current practices. This applicability can be suggested because, as discussed, there are often negative perceptions among professionals about the level to which parents get involved during the study abroad process. Based on this study's findings, however, not all parents are helicopter parents and not all involvement is bad. It should be noted that the Learning Abroad Center does interpret FERPA conservatively, meaning they disclose little information to parents unless the student has signed a waiver. However, staff members still take an open approach to communicating with parents, viewing the majority of the interactions with parents as a time to educate parents if, in the long run, it means the students and parents will have a smoother understanding of the study abroad experience.

It is a challenge for today's higher education administrators to comply with students' (and their parents') expectations for details and ease of completing tasks, even with the case of the Learning Abroad Center which offers parents many resources. As mentioned in Chapter Two, this is a characteristic of many of today's Millennial students who are accustomed to "hand holding," meaning that some students expect most, if not all, details laid out for them and are not as self-efficacious as some administrators would like them to be. Consequently, parents perhaps have come to hold the same expectations.

The parent orientation sessions and collaboration with the Parent Program are key components of the Learning Abroad Center's success with parent interactions. These elements offer parents a wealth of information and resources to further assist them in getting through, as well as appreciate the study abroad experience. If they are not already doing so, institutions can learn from the Learning Abroad Center's example by utilizing connections with parent offices or coordinators, as they are now present on most campuses. These offices can help study abroad offices develop communications and activities to establish effective parent roles and coordinate parent relations with the rest of institution. Working with parents to enlist them as advocates for study abroad could work to study abroad offices' advantage, but it is important to understand how to handle these interactions and appropriately assign the parent's role. A parent coordinator or office might have more directed experience, knowledge and resources to work with parents. If the study abroad office has established a plan in how to communicate the role and boundaries determined they believe is necessary for the student's success, the next step is to proactively communicate this to parents.

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Appendix A: Interview questions

Interview questions for Associate Program Directors

1. How often would you estimate that you speak with parents, both on the phone and in person?
2. What tends to be the topic of your discussion (i.e., what are their most common concerns and questions)?
3. Are there times when you would rather not (or cannot) answer their questions, whether because of FERPA or not? Please explain how parents react to these instances.
4. What do you see as the parent's role in the study abroad process?
5. Do you ever try to explain a role the Learning Abroad Center would like parents to have? (Whether explaining directly or indirectly to the parent)
6. Have you read the information for parents on the website?
7. Have you ever led or been to a parent orientation session?
8. If yes to 7 and/or 8, how do you think these resources help parents?
9. Was part of your training instruction on how to communicate with parents?
10. Do you see any changes in the parent-child relationship that have affected your work?
11. Is there additional information you think parents need to know at any point in the study abroad process?

Interview questions for Antonia Lortis, Parent Liaison

1. When did you start recognizing the need for parent materials (website, brochure, etc.)?
2. Could you explain a timeline of how these resources developed?
3. Do you think there is a particular "type" of parent that utilize the resources the Learning Abroad Center and the Parent Program offers to which you target your materials? Please explain.
4. What are your impressions of parents interacting with the student and Learning Abroad Center during the study abroad process?
5. A lot of the parent information is geared towards assigning a role (the website states that the role of parents is to be a supporter for the students. At the CIEE Nashville conference you talked about an appropriate role). Do you think the expectations of this role align with how staff members interact with parents?
 - a. Is this communicated to the staff in some way? (training discussion, etc)
6. What is the office approach with FERPA? Is the policy in line with U-wide policy?
7. What is the office's biggest challenge with interacting with parents? The greatest successes?
8. Do you think current level of parental involvement needs to be altered/improved at the UMN? If so, do you have any insights on to how this could be done?
9. When international educators get together at conferences/events, one tends to hear the horror stories of parental involvement—the helicopter parents. What message do you think is important for professionals to understand, or an approach to take when handling parents?

Interview questions for Front Office/Resource Center (full-time) staff

1. How often would you estimate that you speak with parents, both on the phone and in person?
2. What tends to be the topic of their questions?
3. Did you receive any training or instruction on how to interact with parents?
4. What do you understand the parent's role to be in the study abroad process?

Questions for Martha Johnson, Director, Learning Abroad Center

1. What are your impressions of parents interacting with the student and Learning Abroad Center during the study abroad process?
2. Could you elaborate on your experiences with parent orientations? (how many years, changes, observations, etc)
3. A lot of the parent information/materials are geared towards assigning a role to parents. Do you think the expectations of this role align with how staff members interact with parents?
 - a. Is this communicated to the staff in some way? (training discussion, etc)
4. What is the office approach with FERPA? Is the policy in line with U-wide policy?
5. What is the office's biggest challenge with interacting with parents? The greatest successes?
6. Do you think current level of parental involvement needs to be altered/improved at the UMN? If so, do you have any insights on to how this could be done?
7. When international educators get together at conferences/events, one tends to hear the horror stories of parental involvement—the helicopter parents. What message do you think is important for professionals to understand, or an approach to take when handling parents?

Interview questions for Marjorie Savage, Director, Parent Program Office

1. When did you start collaborating with the study abroad office?
2. Could you explain the time line/evolution of the resources and materials?
3. You recognize the diversity of the student population, and thus the parents, how do you think your materials address these populations?
4. How did you decide to organize the parent trip?
5. What are your learning goals/outcomes for parents on this trip?
6. How will you be marketing this trip?
7. What approach do you take when parents call with questions about study abroad? (do you answer regardless of the question, redirect them to another resource, encourage them to talk to their student, etc)
8. In your presentation at the CIEE Nashville conference, you talked about assigning an appropriate role (the “right” questions; encouraging their students; address difficult issues; letting their students do the work they are supposed to do)—How do you work with the Learning Abroad Center accomplish this?
9. Do you think the expectations of this role align with how staff members (from both the Learning Abroad Center and your office) interact with parents?
10. How do you think study abroad office staff's understanding of the changing parent-child relationship could be beneficial for interacting with parents?

Appendix B: Survey

Parental involvement in study abroad at the University of Minnesota

Interaction with the University and your student

There is no clear cut definition for what parental involvement means in study abroad, as it ranges from staying in touch with the student while overseas to intervening on the student's behalf at the university. The purpose of this study is to learn more about parents' relationships with their students and the university during the study abroad process. These questions look at how often, and in what ways, parents get involved. This survey will also be used to understand better how parents utilize study abroad resources provided by the University of Minnesota.

Please note that your responses will be kept anonymous. This survey should take 10-12 minutes to complete. Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey!

1. What is the current status of your student in the study abroad process?

- Confirmed to study abroad in the near future
- Currently abroad
- Returned from studying abroad within the last three years

2. In what type of program is your student participating?

- In a study center with other U.S. students
- Directly enrolled at a local university, taking classes with local students
- A mix between local university and study center, taking classes with U.S. students and domestic students
- An internship, work, or volunteer program with other U.S. participants
- An internship, work, or volunteer program with locals
- I don't know.
- Other, please specify.

3. In what country is your student's study abroad program located?

4. How useful were the following actions for gaining information about your student's study abroad experience? *If you did not know one of the following resources existed, please ALSO mark "Did not know existed."*

	Very Useful	Useful	Minimally Useful	Not Useful	Did not do	Did not know this existed
Looked at the Learning Abroad Center website for program information	<input type="radio"/>					
Looked at the Learning Abroad Center website for parent-specific information	<input type="radio"/>					
Read the parent brochure for study abroad	<input type="radio"/>					
Contacted the Learning Abroad Center	<input type="radio"/>					
Went to the Learning Abroad Center	<input type="radio"/>					
Came to a Learning Abroad Center parent orientation for study abroad	<input type="radio"/>					
Looked at the online learning abroad workshop on the Parent Program Office website	<input type="radio"/>					
Attended the learning abroad workshop during Parents' Weekend	<input type="radio"/>					

5. Are you aware of what the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is? (If no, please see the link at the end of the survey for more information.)

- Yes
 No

6. Did you ever encounter difficulties with the university during the study abroad process due to FERPA?

- Yes
 No

7. Did **you actively** seek information or advice regarding the study abroad process from any of the following non-university sources?

	Yes	No
A friend	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your student who is studying abroad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Another family member	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Did **your student** directly request your involvement during the study abroad process? If yes, please briefly explain.

No

Yes

9. In general, how often did/do you and your student communicate about the following issues regarding study abroad?

	Frequently	Occasionally	Hardly Ever	Never
Application process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial matters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Visa/passport process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social advice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academic advice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Health matters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
General travel concerns	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Homesickness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adjustment issues overseas	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Questions 10 and 11 pertain to parents whose students have returned from abroad or are currently abroad. If your student has not yet studied abroad, please skip to question 12.

10. If your student has already gone abroad or is currently abroad, how often did/do you keep in touch?

- Less than weekly
- 1-3 times per week
- 4-6 times per week
- 7+ times per week

11. How often did/do you use the following methods for keeping in touch with your student during the study abroad experience?

	Frequently	Occasionally	Hardly Ever	Never
Email	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cell phone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Landline phone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instant messenger (e.g., AIM, Windos Live Messenger, Skype)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Video calls (e.g., Skype, iChat, etc)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Letters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. Based on the questions or concerns your student has brought to you about his or her study abroad experience, do you feel you have had the information to respond appropriately?

- Yes
 No

13. If there was a particular resource that would better assist you in being informed about your student's study abroad experience, what would that be?

14. In a couple sentences, please describe your role in your student's study abroad experience.

15. How, if at all, has your student's study abroad experience had an impact on you?

Background Information

16. If you attended college, did you study abroad?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

17. Is your child the first student in your family to attend college?

- Yes
- No

18. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

19. What is your ethnicity/race?

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian or Asian American
- African or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Caucasian
- Hispanic, Latino, or Chicano
- Other, please specify.
- Non-U.S. citizen. Please specify.

Appendix C: Survey Question 11: Means of communication while abroad

Question 11: How often did/do you use the following methods for keeping in touch with your student during the study abroad experience?

Item	Frequently	Occasionally	Hardly Ever	Never	Total
Email	64.0% 73	30.7% 35	4.4% 5	0.9% 1	114
Cell phone	15.9% 17	33.6% 36	24.3% 26	26.2% 28	107
Landline phone	4.9% 5	13.7% 14	13.7% 14	67.6% 69	102
Instant messenger (e.g., AIM, Windos Live Messenger, Skype)	29.9% 32	24.3% 26	9.3% 10	36.4% 39	107
Video calls (e.g., Skype, iChat, etc)	41.7% 45	25.0% 27	7.4% 8	25.9% 28	108
Letters		12.4% 13	32.4% 34	55.2% 58	105

Appendix D: Focus group questions and protocol

As they come in, invite them to get food and drinks.

Introduction of myself and brief explanation of thesis and why we are here. Introduce Marj. Explain format of the evening. Emphasize that there is no right way for a parent to be involved during the study abroad experience, as everyone's relationship with their student is different.

1. Please tell us your name, where your student studied abroad, current status (abroad or returned) and for how long.
2. What did you do to prepare yourself for your student's study abroad experience?
 - a. Was there particular information you were looking for (e.g. program-specific, broad study abroad information)?
 - b. What were your main concerns?
3. Where did you find this information (if parents didn't get a chance to look, discuss briefly and show handouts)?
 - a. What is (not) helpful about the website/reentry article?
 - b. If they didn't find this, would they have liked someone to direct them to it?
 - c. What else would you have liked to see specifically for parents?
4. *(For those that went to the PO; for those that didn't go, ask why not and would it have made a difference-explain format briefly if necessary)* How would you rate the parent orientation session?
 - a. Is there a format that would have been more helpful?
 - b. Other information to include?
5. Did you contact the University before your student went abroad? During?
 - a. What were your reasons for doing so?
 - b. Ask parents who did to describe any interactions
6. *(Explain FERPA briefly)* Did you understand FERPA before your student signed up for a study abroad program? Or if you contacted the Learning Abroad Center, did they have to explain it to you?
 - a. Did FERPA create any difficulties? If so, what would have made it easier to understand/get through?
7. Overall, how would you rate your experience with the Learning Abroad Center (Great, good, so-so, poor)?
 - a. Is there something you wish they would have done differently?
8. How would you describe your role in the study abroad process?
9. Did your student directly ask you to do something for them (e.g. help with paperwork, contact the U, etc) during the study abroad process (application, while abroad, after)?
10. Did your student ask you for advice before, during or after?
 - a. Topics?
11. What about your student's experience had the greatest impact on you?
 - a. Most challenging? Rewarding?
 - b. Anything you would have done differently?