Promoting equity in study abroad: A focus on first-generation and students of color in the USA

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Abstract

Education abroad is considered a high-impact practice with short-term benefits such as intellectual development and higher retention and university graduation rates, along with more long-term benefits such as personal and professional development. Thus, it is important to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to study abroad; however, research shows that this is not the case. For example, in the United States, the majority of study abroad participants are white (68% according to Institute of International Education [IIE], 2022), and the racial and ethnic diversity of study abroad participants is well below the percentage of undergraduate students of color overall. First-generation college students also make up a small proportion of the students who study abroad, with some coming from racial and ethnic minoritized backgrounds as well. This lack of diversity

in study abroad should be a major concern for institutions of higher education. To address this issue at our own university, we surveyed 137 first-generation and students of color to gather data on their interests, opinions, and reservations about study abroad. Results demonstrate that they are overwhelmingly positive about study abroad but are concerned about cost, fitting it into their degree plan, and not knowing languages other than English. Additionally, 81% reported that they did not know where to start or how to get involved in study abroad. These results suggest that a more equity-minded approach with targeted interventions is needed to increase study abroad participation among first-generation and students of color.

Keywords: first-generation; students of color; study abroad; higher education; equity

1. Introduction

Research on the impact of study abroad (SA) has highlighted a number of long-term benefits including increased global engagement (Paige et al., 2009), local civic engagement (DeGraaf et al., 2013), professional development (Franklin, 2010), and personal development (Hadis, 2005), among others. Education abroad is considered a high-impact practice with short-term benefits as well, such as higher retention and graduation rates (Barclay-Hamir, 2011; Posey, 2003). A recent report by NAFSA (2021) also emphasizes the value of study abroad for developing a globally competitive workforce. Considering these demonstrated benefits, it is important to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to engage in study abroad. However, research shows that this is not the case.

Up until the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of students studying abroad from the United States (US) was steadily increasing (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2022). Recent years have also witnessed a gradual climb in the number of students of color (SOC) and linguistically diverse students going abroad to study compared to years prior (Parker, 2022; Pozzi et al., 2021). However, still less than 10% of university graduates have studied abroad (NAFSA, 2021), and the profile of a typical SA student has remained largely unchanged: a white undergraduate woman (Dietrich, 2018) whose dominant or only language is English (Pozzi et al., 2021). And although in the past the main motivation of study abroad for US students was to learn a language other than English (LOTE), today foreign language and international studies majors make up just about 9% of students who go abroad (IIE, 2022). This number has decreased in similar ways to enrollments in degree programs in LOTEs across the US (see Morgan & Thompson, 2023).

Over the past decade, scholars and practitioners have increased awareness and drawn attention to inequities in US students' SA participation (e.g., Goldstein & Lopez, 2021; Kang & Shively, 2023). First-generation college students (FGCS),

those whose parent(s) or guardian(s) did not complete at least a bachelor's degree (e.g., Conefrey, 2021), represent over a third of all university students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), yet only 8% of FG college graduates reported participating in SA compared to 17% of continuing-generation (CG) college graduates (RTI International, 2021). Similarly, while SOC make up 43.65% of undergraduates (Hanson, 2022), they only comprised 31.6% of the US students who studied abroad during the 2020-2021 academic year (NAFSA, 2021). Strategies are therefore needed to promote more equitable SA participation.

To address these concerns at our own university, a team of faculty and staff began working together to explore how to enhance equity in SA at a land-grant, research-intensive university in the Appalachian region of the United States. According to the Education Abroad Office on campus, the percentage of students who studied abroad and self-identified as a FGCS on their applications has been on average about 12% (since 2012), and of the students who reported their race and ethnicity, 3.6% identified as Black or African American, 3.6% as Hispanic, 3.5% as Asian, 0.2% as American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 0.06% as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

Our long-term goal is to increase SA participation among these underrepresented groups in order to contribute to their personal and professional development, as well as help boost achievement, retention, and degree completion rates. As a first step, we gathered data on their interests, opinions, and reservations about SA to understand how we could better design programs to support their participation. The study reported here summarizes this initial phase, which also included exploring how effectively our institution is making SA opportunities accessible to these students. Our findings indicate that targeted interventions are needed to increase SA participation among FGCS and SOC.

2. Literature review

2.1. First-generation college students (FGCS)

As mentioned previously, FGCS are those whose parent(s) or guardian(s) did not complete at least a bachelor's degree (e.g., Conefrey, 2021). Much research has focused on their experiences including unique challenges they face, ways in which they differ from CG, and their strengths for higher education. Their differences from CG students are particularly noteworthy when it comes to retention rates, with some research showing that, even after controlling for variables such as race, gender, and family income, "FGCS are 71% more likely to leave college in their first year than their non-FGCS counterparts" (Pratt et al., 2019, p. 106).

Similarly, Engle and Tinto (2008) found FGCS nearly four times more likely than their CG peers to drop out of college.

Studies indicate that FGCS' initial encounters with college may be similar to "entering an 'alien culture'" (Orbe, 2004, p. 133). According to Pascarella et al. (2004), FGCS are more likely to live off campus, leading to less involvement in extracurricular activities on campus and limited communication with fellow students outside class. Given that extracurricular engagement is shown to have a higher positive impact on FGCS than their CG counterparts, this difference may have enduring implications for FGCS. Residency is also an important factor given that it can promote engagement and association with the college community and peers, including "collaborative learning, discussions with diverse others, and student-faculty interaction" (Graham et al., 2018, p. 265). Additionally, Pascarella et al. (2004) found that FGCS carried lighter course loads than their CG peers, and yet they earned "lower grades through the third year of college" (p. 265). FGCS also worked far more hours each week, and this employment was shown to negatively impact FGCS' growth during college.

In addition to being the "first" in their families, FGCS share several other characteristics. As discussed in Evans et al. (2020), they often enter college with lower grade point averages (GPAs), experience less confidence in their potential for success and academic abilities, and are more likely to come from low-income families. As such, they tend to express concerns regarding how to finance their education and obtain financial aid, and they often study part-time. Furthermore, while FGCS experience their parents and families as sources of motivation to attend college, they often perceive them as having limited knowledge and experience of higher education to guide them through the process and therefore do not seek their guidance. FGCS also encounter a number of other emotional, academic, and financial challenges. Yet for some FGCS, this can be a source of motivation. For example, in comparing community college and university experiences of FGCS, Evans et al. (2020) found that FGCS are proud of having more independence and "defined themselves as achievers" (p. 18). They also demonstrated high levels of determination and assertiveness, following their goals, and a strong work ethic. Indeed, a crucial part of FGCS' success is their self-sufficiency and self-determination; they take pride in finding balance between school and other responsibilities.

2.2. Students of color

In addition to their common characteristics, surveys show that FGCS come from diverse backgrounds. According to the US Department of Education (McFarland,

J. et al., 2018), they are composed of 46% white, 25% Hispanic/Latine,[1] 18% Black/African American, 6% Asian, 1% Native American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 0.5% Pacific Islander students (RTI International, 2019). These numbers reflect college enrollment trends, wherein most undergraduates identify as white (51.6%) (Hanson, 2022). Black/African American (12.5%), Hispanic/Latine (19.4%), Asian (7.1%), Native American Indian/Alaskan Native (0.64%), Pacific Islander students (0.26%), and those who identify as two or more races (or multiracial, 4.01%) remain in the minority among US undergraduates. In fact, enrollment among non-Asian SOC has decreased since 2010. Therefore, while demographic diversity is on the rise in higher education, gaps in college enrollment by race and ethnicity persist, in addition to disparities in terms of graduation rates.

While persistence is highest among Asian descent students, rates differ significantly between whites and SOC (Gardner, 2022). Moreover, these disparities exist at both four-year and two-year institutions. Banks and Dohy (2019) surveyed the literature regarding barriers to persistence among SOC enrolled at institutions of higher education and explored how some universities are successfully mitigating them. They noticed a tendency for conversations around inequities to consider achievement gaps (i.e., a deficit approach) rather than disparities in access or opportunity, which holds SOC responsible without factoring in the responsibility of universities or offering comprehensive solutions. Racism was a major barrier identified in their survey, contributing to feelings of non-belonging, isolation, underperformance, disengagement, and ultimately affecting student retention and completion. They also noted how overrepresentation of white faculty often impacted diversity in the curricula, decreased student feelings of rapport with faculty, and limited culturally competent mentorship. Additionally, SOC reported feeling underprepared for college work, which, while valid, may also derive from imposter feelings reported among SOC, especially those at the intersections of other marginalized identities such as women, FGCS, and/or working-class students (Jackson, et al., 2022; Peteet et al., 2015).

It may be of little surprise, then, that SOC tend to enroll in minority-serving institutions (MSIs) rather than predominantly white universities (PWIs), with degree completion rates higher at the former (Espinosa et al., 2019). Additionally, Black/African American students and Hispanic/Latine students attend community colleges in larger numbers than their peers (Hanson, 2022). Unfortunately, White and Dache (2020) report that graduation rates are lowest at community colleges.

Dulabaum (2016) utilized focus groups with African American and Latine men to understand the obstacles they experience and their suggestions. Students reported facing several common issues: lack of financial resources to fund college and

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[1] We use *Latine* as a more gender-inclusive alternative to *Latina* and *Latino.*

challenges navigating financial aid, under-preparation for college, difficulties balancing work and family responsibilities and overcoming challenges such as family resistance and peer pressure, struggles with self-motivation and remaining academically focused, and teaching ineffectiveness and lack of faculty/staff support as well as managing their own expectations. Notable are the challenges shared with FGCS, such as feeling under-supported by family, lacking role models as "firsts" in their families, or, specific to African American men participants, cultural clashes where the campus climate is not accepting of student diversity and expects conformity.

In an exploration of contributors to low retention rates among SOC, McClain and Perry (2017) noted that campus racial climates can impact rates of student attrition (cf. Dulabaum, 2016). They also discussed how campus cultures, including their racial climates, could be positively leveraged to foster enrollment, retention, and degree completion. As solutions, they encouraged inclusion or representation of diverse faculty/staff and SOC to promote student centering and smooth the transition of SOC to PWIs; culturally relevant, inclusive, and sustaining curricula that reflect the experiences of SOC; programming such as mentoring initiatives and summer bridge programs that help students acclimate to college, establish peer groups and networks, and offer personal and professional development opportunities; and finally, cultural spaces or "safe spaces" that promote belonging and peer engagement for SOC.

2.3. Issues of equity in study abroad

High impact practices (HIP) are evidence-based educational strategies for active learning that foster student engagement, retention, and persistence. Kuh (2008) identified eight HIPs, one of which is "diversity/global learning" including SA programs. Other research has similarly identified education abroad as a HIP with short-term benefits such as intellectual development, and higher retention and graduation rates (Barclay-Hamir, 2011; Posey, 2003), along with more long-term advantages such as personal and professional development (Franklin, 2010; Hadis, 2005). Evans et al. (2020) summarize the main benefits of SA programs, including greater emotional resilience; intercultural competence, global understanding, and world mindedness; increased foreign language interest and competence; and greater environmental citizenship.

According to Demetriou et al. (2017), FGCS are often less informed about HIPs compared to CG students. As a result, FGCS are highly underrepresented in SA, as are SOC (Engel, 2017; Hanson, 2022). Overcoming these disparities will require understanding issues specific to international education exchanges as well as challenges that FGCS and SOC face in post-secondary education more generally.

One issue is advertising or accessibility of information. Goldstein and Lopez (2021) found that FGCS received less exposure to the notion of SA than did CG students, whether through formal or informal channels, which may be explained by the unwillingness of their academic advisors to inform them of these opportunities under the assumption it is not feasible for them. Further, the authors suggest that since FGCS spend less time on campus, they can be less likely to hear about such opportunities from their classmates and college friends.

Cost is also a factor. Tuckman et al. (1990, as cited in Haisley et al., 2021) explain that students, in general, factor in the "costs and expenses, both monetary and nonmonetary, that will be incurred during the travel experience" (p. 187) when deciding whether to study abroad. Misconceptions or misunderstandings about international education exchanges may also limit participation. FGCS often view SA as a touristic trip, not an educational or career opportunity (Ungar, 2016); however, underrepresented students, in fact, tend to be more adaptable to new environments that SA programs introduce (e.g., having to share a bathroom) compared to their peers. Thus, studying abroad may strengthen relationships between different socioeconomic and ethnic groups returning to campus.

There are also a multitude of reasons why SOC are underrepresented in SA programs, some of which overlap with barriers to persistence in college. A review by Kasravi (2009) found finances or SA expenses and a lack of information about SA to be principal deterrents identified in past research on SOC, most of which has focused on African American and Asian students. Additionally, reservations included concerns about the academic fit of programs, experiencing racism while abroad, not knowing other languages, and absence of support systems (both familial and institutional). In their own broader study, financial barriers and academic concerns were main challenges.

Concerns surrounding racialization and alienation are validated in multiple studies about SOC in SA. Serafini (2020) describes the experiences of one student who felt disappointment with being positioned as an outsider and as someone who would not know the local language (Spanish) in the Ecuadorian host country because she presented as Black. The author also highlights the experiences of other students who felt welcome and validated in the local context, including a heritage learner who was able to negotiate belonging due to her advanced Spanish proficiency and accepted Latine identity. The study highlights the importance of positive interactions with and treatment by host community members in the SA context, which can inspire or threaten students' feelings of belonging and sense of self and may inform their decisions to study or live abroad in the future. The study is also significant for its consideration of heritage learners and first language (L1) speakers of LOTEs, who are underrepresented in SA scholarship. In fact, SA and reflexive research have largely considered the experiences

of white, monolingual English users to the oversight of students of color and linguistic minorities (Kang & Shively, 2023; Leeman & Driver, 2021; Pozzi et al., 2021). Leeman and Driver (2021) acknowledge that the numerical predominance of white students in SA can be isolating for SOC participants. Their study highlights the diverse experiences as well as linguistic and identity outcomes that Latine heritage learners of Spanish meet when they study abroad, which may promote awareness of linguistic variation and help (re)affirm, negotiate or, contrarily, subordinate and reject students' identities and linguistic practices depending on the cultural and linguistic ideologies at play in the host countries. The authors caution that when students' "identities are challenged and/or their language is critiqued [it] can lead to missed opportunities for cultural exploration, language learning, and positive identity development" (p. 151).

Quan (2018) explores the opportunities and challenges that two students of color, an Iranian American and African/Mexican American, experience during a study program in Spain and how these experiences interact with their identity and language development. The author details how racial positionings and local interactions, which challenged students' identities, led them to withdraw from members of the host culture. Such negative experiences were shown to prompt linguistic and other insecurities as well as negative impressions of the host culture, which can cause students to miss opportunities for linguistic and cultural learning. Negative experiences can also adversely impact students' willingness to study abroad in the future as well as efforts to diversify SA at their home universities. As a positive gain, however, Quan finds that such adversities helped foster one student's sense of herself as a global citizen as she came to empathize with immigrants and other minoritized populations who similarly face xenophobia and racism.

The literature identifies a need for more SA programs and research with ethnoracially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students (Kang & Shively, 2023; Leeman & Driver, 2021; Pozzi et al., 2021), and for more work that explores identities and positionings across different national contexts (Quan, 2018). Scholarship also offers an insight into how to design more equitable programming. Leeman and Driver (2021) provide specific recommendations for programming based on critical approaches. In particular, they suggest trainings for students and leaders "to develop [their] critical awareness of language ideologies and attitudes in the home and host countries so that they are better able to interpret their experiences, resist the disparaging and racializing discourses they may encounter, and support each other during their time abroad" (p. 153). Quan (2018) also provides guidance for creating more inclusive and supportive experiences for underrepresented students, including orientations and advising to inform students of the social dynamics they may encounter during their sojourns and help them select study geographic locations that will serve and validate them.

Anya (2017) highlights an example of an equitable and culturally affirming program. Her work follows African American learners of Portuguese as they negotiate intersecting subjectivities and communicative identities during a sojourn in Brazil. Focusing on one Afro-Dominican American study participant, Leti, Anya (2021) highlights how Blackness contributed to belonging and security in the host context. In tandem with the Leti's culture and inherited Spanish language, it furnished her with the confidence needed to fully engage in opportunities for expanding her linguistic, cultural, and identity repertoires both in and outside the classroom. Anya highlights that these experiences are contextually conditioned by the SA location and thus diverged from Leti's previous encounters with racialization and non-belonging in her white college town and travel study to Italy. As such, this scholarship provides support for program designs that directly consider how race informs SA (and languaging) experiences and which are not only culturally relevant but also representative of students' backgrounds and experiences.

Perkins (2020) recommends that universities shift their focus away from barriers to SOC studying abroad to concentrate on the factors positively influencing participation. Recommendations for strengths-based approaches are increasingly being echoed by scholars studying how to make SA programs more inclusive (see also Harris-Weedman, 2022). In her research, Perkins identified motivational factors as "enabling networks," which included family, peers and friends, and faculty and staff, and "anticipated gains," such as students developing skills and expanding their social networks, enriching their cultural knowledge, and gaining new experiences. Notably, some participants looked forward to learning about other cultures, particularly ones related to their own backgrounds.

Baldwin et al. (2021) also noticed a shift to strengths-based approaches to understand the experiences of FGCS and SOC, with much previous research highlighting what marginalized students lack compared to their peers in terms of their readiness for higher education experiences rather than the strengths they already possess and can mobilize for academic success. For example, Wick et al. (2019) studied Latine FGCS engaged in SA, focusing on asset-based approaches to international education. They found that Latine FGCS in their study made use of an array of oft-overlooked resources (or community cultural capital), including linguistic and familial resources that SA coordinators and international educators should be harnessing in their pedagogies. The authors underscore the importance of focusing on pre-existing strengths that FGCS bring to the table when applying, advising, and preparing them for international education experiences and nurturing these strengths. Similarly, Goldstein and Lopez (2021) posit that cultural navigational skills among FGCS, such as their ability to move between the requirements of home and school environments, are valuable in SA experiences, which require students to interact with individuals who

may differ from them on multiple dimensions (e.g., language and communication practices and social norms).

Sweeney (2013) advocates the concept of inclusive excellence to address underrepresentation of SOC in SA. She explains:

> Dialogue regarding the participation of students of color in study abroad must move beyond a focus solely on numbers, access, and deficits of students of color. The inclusive excellence scorecard ... can be used as a tool for institutions to examine the participation and success of students of color in study abroad through the interconnected areas of access and equity, climate, diversity in the curriculum, and learning and development. (p. 13)

Solving underrepresentation will therefore require consideration of not only obstacles facing FGCS and SOC but also what about SA interests them and how institutions can better support them by drawing on their experiences and enacting systematic changes to create and sustain equitable access to SA.

2.5. The current study

Considering the review of the literature just presented, our exploratory study summarizes the first step in our local process of enhancing equity in SA. The following research questions guided our study:

1. What are the opinions of SOC and FGCS at a US public, land-grant university toward SA?
2. What are barriers to SA participation among SOC and/or FGCS at a public, land-grant university?
3. What kinds of SA programs are SOC and/or FGCS at a public, land-grant university most interested in?
4. How well is our university making SA opportunities accessible to SOC and/or FGCS specifically?

3. Methodology

3.1. Context and participants

The research was conducted at a large US public four-year, land-grant university and research institution located in Appalachia. In the Fall 2022 semester, 24,741 students were enrolled in the school at the main campus, with approximately

29% identifying as FGCS. The racial-ethnic demographics of undergraduate students are the following: 83% white, 4.4% Bi/Multiracial, 4.3% Hispanic, 4.0% Black or African American, 3% Asian, 1.2% unknown, 0.16% Native American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 0.07% Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

A total of 154 undergraduate students began the questionnaire. Eight sets of results were discarded for incomplete data, and nine were discarded because participants did not identify as FGCS or SOC, leaving 137 participants in total. Participants were recruited from various programs or courses on campus that work with the populations under investigation. An email was distributed inviting them to participate via a Qualtrics Survey, which also collected the background information presented next.

A high percentage, 95%, of the participants identified as a FGCS (130); 3.6% (5) responded no, and 1.5% (2) were "not sure." All of the seven participants who did not identify as a FGCS were included in the study because they identified as a SOC. Race and ethnicity information about the participants who completed the survey is provided in Table 1.

Table 1 Race and ethnicity of participants

Ethnicity		Number	%
	Hispanic	14	10.3%
	Non-Hispanic	122	89.0%
	No answer	1	0.7%
Race			
	Asian	2	1.5%
	Black or African American	17	12.4%
	Bi/Multiracial	17	12.4%
	White	97	70.8%
	Prefer not to say	1	0.7%
	Self-described	3	2.2%

Most participants, that is, 69%, identified as women (95), 26% as men (36), and 5% as non-binary (7). Participants also varied in their academic level at the university: 31% were in their first year (42), 31% in their second year (43), 24% in their third year (33), and 14% in their final year (19). Sixty-two different degree programs/majors were reported, with the most popular being "undecided" (typical of first-year students), psychology, biology, exercise physiology, criminology, and health and well-being. Only one participant reported a language as their major, which was a double major in acting and Spanish.

Regarding languages, 85% (116) reported only speaking English while growing up, whereas 11% (15) reported speaking English plus an additional language (e.g., Spanish, Korean, Tagalog), and 4% (6) reported only using one or more LOTEs (Chinese, Macedonian, Russian, Spanish/Korean/Polish, Spanish/Portuguese, Twi).

When asked about studying a LOTE, 83.2% (114) answered "yes." Spanish was reported by 61% of participants, followed by French (15%), and German (4.5%). Other languages reported by five or fewer participants include Arabic, American Sign Language, Bulgarian, Chinese, Filipino, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latin, Polish, and Russian.

Most participants reported having flown on an airplane, 80% (110); however, only 45% (61) reported having traveled outside the USA. When asked if they had a passport, 48.2% (66) responded "no," 42.3% (58) responded "yes," and 9.5% (13) responded that their passport had expired.

3.2. Materials and procedures

Data collection began in December 2021 and lasted for two months. The survey was designed based on the literature focusing on FGCS and SOC in SA and was primarily quantitative with few open-ended questions. It included four sections: 1) background information, 2) opinions about SA, 3) reservations about SA, and 4) preferred SA program characteristics. Participants completed the approximately 10-minute survey on Qualtrics. Piloting of the survey was carried out with a few FGCS, and only slight changes were made.

Part 1 of the survey (13 questions) included information about FGCS status, race and ethnicity, gender, degree progress, travel experience, and experience with LOTEs. Part 2 included 13 seven-point Likert-scale items (strongly agree, agree, slightly agree, unsure, slightly disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree) used to measure participants' views toward SA. Example items include the following: "A study abroad trip would benefit my college experience," "I am afraid of racism/discrimination in a foreign country," "I don't know where to start or how to get involved in studying abroad." Part 3 (1 question) focused on reservations toward SA. Participants were asked to select all the choices that applied (e.g., cost, family obligations, work obligations, food, allergies, time commitment, course schedule, fear of discrimination, safety fears, not knowing other languages). They could also add others if needed. The final section (6 questions) was designed to gather information about the kinds of trips participants would be interested in taking. Questions focused on preferences toward program lengths and times of the year (e.g., spring break, summer, full semester), locations (mostly by regions, e.g., Africa, Asia, Central and South America, Europe, and Oceania; participants could also write in specific locations), trip activities, and the number of credits they would like to receive for the trip. Additionally, a question was also added to gather data as to whether they would need to utilize financial aid to pay for SA.

3.3. Analysis

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, the survey data were analyzed descriptively by comparing the overall percentages of responses selected by FGCS and SOC. University web pages with information for FGCS and SOC were also analyzed qualitatively to explore whether and in what ways they discuss SA.

4. Results

Our first research question examines the opinions of FGCS and SOC toward SA. As mentioned in the methods section, results of this research question are based on the 13 Likert-scale questions from part 2 of the survey. Table 2 displays the percentage of participants from the two groups who selected each response. Results were sorted by the highest percentage of FGCS who selected the "strongly agree" category. As a reminder, the FGCS group includes all students who identified as a FGCS, including 82.5% of participants in the SOC group.

As demonstrated in Table 2, the first four statements show that participants have extremely positive opinions about the value of SA. For example, 85% of FGCS and 92% of SOC, either strongly agreed or agreed that a SA trip would benefit their college experience, and 90% of FGCS and 87% of SOC strongly agreed or agreed that they have heard positive things about studying abroad. The large majority of the participants also agreed to some extent that studying abroad looks good on a graduate school application (86% of FGCS, 93% of SOC) and looks good to potential employers (87% of FGCS, 93% of SOC). Only two participants selected some form of "disagree" for those statements. In general, results also show that participants agreed to some extent that family would encourage them to study abroad (65% of FGCS and 80% of SOC).

Despite overwhelmingly positive views toward the benefits of SA, 81% of FGCS and 70% of SOC selected some form of "agree" to the statement, "I don't know where to start or how to get involved in studying abroad." This finding is surprising given that there is a dedicated Education Abroad Office on campus that does several outreach activities per semester, including an Education Abroad Fair and visits to classes.

A majority of the participants (67% of FGCS, 75% of SOC) agreed to some extent that they would like to take a SA trip that includes a preparation course. Such courses are typically included as part of the pre-departure preparation that happens with faculty-led trips. Regarding the timing of SA, only 40% of FGCS and 32% of SOC agreed that they would like to wait until later in their degree program to go abroad, while 35% of FGCS and 38% of SOC were unsure.

Table 2 Participants' opinions related to study abroad

	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Unsure	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
A study abroad trip would benefit my college experience	FGCS: 63% SOC: 75%	FGCS: 22% SOC: 17%	FGCS: 4% SOC: 5%	FGCS: 9% SOC: 2%	FGCS: 1% SOC: 0%	FGCS: 1% SOC: 0%	FGCS: 0% SOC: 0%
I have heard positive things about studying abroad.	FGCS: 60% SOC: 62%	FGCS: 30% SOC: 25%	FGCS: 4% SOC: 0%	FGCS: 6% SOC: 13%	FGCS: 0% SOC: 0%	FGCS: 0% SOC: 0%	FGCS: 0% SOC: 0%
Studying abroad looks good on a graduate school application.	FGCS: 49% SOC: 65%	FGCS: 34% SOC: 28%	FGCS: 6% SOC: 0%	FGCS: 11% SOC: 7%	FGCS: 0% SOC: 0%	FGCS: 0% SOC: 0%	FGCS: 0% SOC: 0%
Studying abroad looks good to potential employers.	FGCS: 44% SOC: 63%	FGCS: 35% SOC: 25%	FGCS: 7% SOC: 5%	FGCS: 14% SOC: 7%	FGCS: 0% SOC: 0%	FGCS: 0% SOC: 0%	FGCS: 0% SOC: 0%
I don't know where to start or how to get involved in studying abroad.	FGCS: 35% SOC: 25%	FGCS: 31% SOC: 28%	FGCS: 15% SOC: 17%	FGCS: 8% SOC: 10%	FGCS: 2% SOC: 2%	FGCS: 5% SOC: 13%	FGCS: 4% SOC: 5%
My family would encourage me to study abroad.	FGCS: 33% SOC: 47%	FGCS: 24% SOC: 28%	FGCS: 8% SOC: 5%	FGCS: 21% SOC: 7%	FGCS: 6% SOC: 7%	FGCS: 3% SOC: 3%	FGCS: 5% SOC: 3%
I would like to take a study abroad trip that includes a course to prepare me for the trip.	FGCS: 25% SOC: 25%	FGCS: 27% SOC: 30%	FGCS: 15% SOC: 20%	FGCS: 26% SOC: 15%	FGCS: 3% SOC: 5%	FGCS: 4% SOC: 5%	FGCS: 0% SOC: 0%
I want to study abroad, but not until my junior or senior year.	FGCS: 11% SOC: 7%	FGCS: 15% SOC: 20%	FGCS: 11% SOC: 5%	FGCS: 35% SOC: 38%	FGCS: 8% SOC: 7%	FGCS: 12% SOC: 20%	FGCS: 8% SOC: 3%
I worry my grades are not good enough for studying abroad.	FGCS: 9% SOC: 12%	FGCS: 8% SOC: 5%	FGCS: 11% SOC: 23%	FGCS: 10% SOC: 10%	FGCS: 7% SOC: 5%	FGCS: 27% SOC: 20%	FGCS: 28% SOC: 25%
I am uncomfortable travelling abroad.	FGCS: 5% SOC: 2%	FGCS: 2% SOC: 0%	FGCS: 9% SOC: 13%	FGCS: 15% SOC: 15%	FGCS: 12% SOC: 10%	FGCS: 25% SOC: 30%	FGCS: 32% SOC: 30%
I would only study abroad with a group of people from my university.	FGCS: 4% SOC: 10%	FGCS: 7% SOC: 7%	FGCS: 13% SOC: 13%	FGCS: 22% SOC: 18%	FGCS: 16% SOC: 20%	FGCS: 25% SOC: 17%	FGCS: 13% SOC: 15%
I would not qualify for a scholarship to study abroad due to my grades.	FGCS: 4% SOC: 5%	FGCS: 8% SOC: 10%	FGCS: 4% SOC: 5%	FGCS: 21% SOC: 27%	FGCS: 7% SOC: 10%	FGCS: 29% SOC: 15%	FGCS: 28% SOC: 28%
I am afraid of racism/discrimination in a foreign country.	FGCS: 3% SOC: 10%	FGCS: 2% SOC: 5%	FGCS: 15% SOC: 23%	FGCS: 11% SOC: 17%	FGCS: 5% SOC: 7%	FGCS: 35% SOC: 20%	FGCS: 28% SOC: 18%

Two of the statements focused on whether participants were concerned that grades would impact their ability to study abroad or get scholarships. They disagreed more than agreed with those statements; yet 28% of FGCS and 40% of SOC still agreed to some extent that they were worried their grades were not good enough for SA. Related to scholarships, 21% of FGCS and 27% of SOC were unsure whether they would qualify for a SA scholarship due to grades.

In general, participants also reported that they disagreed with the statement, "I am uncomfortable traveling abroad," with 69% of FGCS and 70% of SOC disagreeing to some extent. Another statement focused on how much they would only want to go on a SA trip organized by our university. Approximately half the participants disagreed (54% of FGCS, 52% of SOC), but 22% of FGCS and 18% of SOC also reported that they were unsure.

The final statement relates to whether they were afraid of racism/discrimination in a foreign country. 38% of SOC reported agreeing to some extent compared to 20% of FGCS. Additional 17% of SOC were unsure. Nearly all participants who identified as non-binary selected some form of "agree" to this statement.

Research question two focused on barriers to SA participation among FGCS and SOC at our university and was included in part 3 of the survey. Table 3 displays these results. The most frequently selected item was cost, with nearly 77% of

FGCS and 75% of SOC selecting it. A separate but related question on the survey asked if they would need to use financial aid to pay for SA. Only one participant responded "no," whereas 18% of FGCS and 10% of SOC reported that it would depend on the cost. There were two possible "yes" choices. The first was "yes, all of it," which 44% of FGCS and 50% of SOC selected, and the other was "yes, at least some," which 33% of FGCS and 38% of SOC selected. Therefore, 77% of FGCS and 88% of SOC reported needing to use financial aid to help fund a SA trip.

Table 3 Reservations about study abroad

Concern	FGCS (*N* = 130)	% of FGCS	SOC (*N* = 40)	% of SOC
Cost	100	77%	30	75%
Course schedule	50	38%	16	40%
Not knowing other languages	49	38%	15	37%
Work obligations	36	28%	14	35%
Time commitment	28	22%	7	17%
Safety fears	24	18%	11	27.5%
Food	19	15%	3	7.5%
None	12	9%	2	5%
Fear of discrimination	7	5%	6	15%
Parents' opinions	7	5%	1	2.5%
Family obligations	5	4%	2	5%
Sports obligations	3	2%	2	5%
Allergies	2	1.5%	0	0%
COVID	2	1.5%	1	2.5%
Financial aid	1	0.8%	0	0%
Single parent	1	0.8%	1	2.5%
Pets	1	0.8%	1	2.5%
Delaying graduation	1	0.8%	0	0%
Disabilities/medical problems	1	0.8%	0	0%

Note. The FGCS group includes all students who identified as a FGCS, including 82.5% of participants in the SOC group

'Not knowing other languages' was another frequently chosen barrier, selected by 38% of FGCS and 37.5% of SOC, as was 'course schedule' with 38% of FGCS and 40% of SOC choosing it. 'Work obligations' and 'safety fears' were selected slightly more by SOC, 35% compared to 28% for FGCS, and 27.5% compared to 18% for FGCS, respectively. Other concerns participants wrote in included COVID, financial aid, being a single parent, pets, delaying graduation, and other issues of inclusion and accessibility. Only 9% of FGCS and 5% of SOC selected that they had no reservations about studying abroad.

Research question three examined aspects of SA programming that FGCS and SOC were most interested in. Part 3 of the survey included several questions to gather this information. First, participants were asked if they would be interested in taking a university-led trip. Only 3% of FGCS responded "no," whereas 78% responded "yes," and 19% responded "maybe." No SOC responded "no;" 78% responded "yes," and 22% responded "maybe." When asked about different program lengths and time of the year, participants were given five options

(full year, semester, summer, Maymester, and spring break) and could select multiple options. The most popular choice was summer, which 65% of all participants selected. After summer, spring break was chosen by 60% of the participants. A semester was chosen by 57%, followed by Maymester with 49%, and a full year with 20% of the participants. Additionally, 91% of the participants selected that they would want to earn course credit for studying abroad.

Regarding locations, Europe was the most popular location, ranked first by 47% of FGCS and 28% of SOC. Oceania was the next most popular location among both groups, with 54% of FGCS and 37.5% of SOC ranking it in their top three, followed closely by The Caribbean (34% of FGCS, 35% of SOC), and Asia (32% for both groups). There was, however, much variation among participants' answers.

The survey also included questions about the kinds of activities the participants would like to do on a SA trip, and they could select multiple activities. Table 4 displays these results. Most participants were interested in cultural and outdoor activities (including beach time), volunteering, visiting another university, seeing live music, and taking cooking and/or language classes. Participants could also write in response to this question, and several did. These additional responses included activities related to their own personal interests (e.g., learning about flora, taking a historical tour, shopping, skiing, and exploring on their own).

Table 4 Types of study abroad activities participants were interested in

Type of Activity	FGCS (N = 130)	% of FGCS	SOC (N = 40)	% of SOC
Cultural activities	109	84%	36	90%
Outdoor activities	99	76%	29	73%
Beach time	94	72%	31	78%
Volunteer somewhere	86	66%	25	63%
Visit another university	85	65%	29	73%
Live music	84	64.5%	22	55%
Cooking classes	76	58%	28	70%
Language classes	73	56%	30	75%
Dancing/demonstration	52	40%	20	50%
Learning about flora	1	0.8%	0	0%
Historical tours	1	0.8%	1	2.5%
Shopping	1	0.8%	1	2.5%
Skiing	1	0.8%	0	0%
Tasting wine, fruits, cheeses	1	0.8%	1	2.5%
Farming	1	0.8%	0	0%
Major related study	1	0.8%	0	0%
Travel to surrounding countries	1	0.8%	0	0%
Lots of sightseeing	1	0.8%	0	0%
Exploring on their own	1	0.8%	0	0%
Restaurants	1	0.8%	0	0%

Note. The FGCS group includes all students who identified as a FGCS, including 82.5% of participants in the SOC group.

Our final research question focused on how well our university was promoting equitable access to SA. To examine this question, we explored institutional web pages. The university provides support for FGCS and SOC in various forms. For example, the Office of Student Success provides academic support for students and has programs specifically for FGCS and SOC. The counseling center provides psychological support services and also has information on the website specifically for FGCS and SOC. Additionally, there are several organizations and clubs for SOC, but we were unable to find information about SA programs on any of these web pages.

The website for our university's Education Abroad Office states that the university is committed to providing unique, educational, and rewarding international opportunities to its students. The website is very well-organized and clearly states the reasons to participate in such programs, and what programs are offered, as well as provides step-by-step guidance explaining how to apply and participate. On the 'Frequently Asked Questions' page there is a link to another page centering on 'Identities Abroad' that talks about FG status and race and ethnicity, among others (e.g., LGBTQ+, gender, ability). These pages include questions for students to consider related to their different identities as well as resources. Nonetheless, there is no specific reference to the low participation rates of FGCS and SOC generally, and only brief information about possible financial aid is provided.

5. Discussion

The Institute of International Education (https://www.iie.org/) has concluded that "study abroad is basic training for the 21st century." Yet only one in 10 US undergraduates studied abroad before completing their degrees, with the majority being white (68.3% – IIE, 2022). FGCS also make up a small proportion of the students who study abroad, with some also coming from racial and ethnic minoritized backgrounds (Engle & Tinto, 2008). International education has benefits that can specifically support FGCS and SOC, but increased effort is needed to enhance equity in SA. It is with this motivation that we began exploring how to increase SA participation among underrepresented groups at our own institution. What is reported on in this article is the first step in the process, that is, surveying FGCS and SOC to better understand their views toward SA, their interest in different types of SA programming (including studying a LOTE), and potential barriers to SA.

We first investigated SOC's and FGCS' opinions toward SA and found that they overwhelmingly held positive views about SA and its benefits; yet, 80% agreed to some extent with the statement that they did not "know where to start or how to get involved in studying abroad." This result is concerning considering

how much they agreed with the benefits of SA and suggests we need to ensure information about SA opportunities reaches all students. Previous research has also mentioned lack of information as a deterrent for SOC (Kasravi, 2009) and FGCS (Goldstein & Lopez, 2021). In future surveys or interviews with students, which we plan to do next, it would be helpful to ask participants if they have noticed information about SA fairs, have attended any, or had a member of the Education Abroad Office visit their classes. These are all activities that are currently being done at our university. It would also be beneficial to ask participants what activities they think would help them learn more about SA opportunities, such as talking with SA returnees or with their advisors about SA options as a regular part of advising meetings.

Additional results showed that participants were mostly not concerned about their grades affecting their ability to study abroad or receive scholarships, yet many were unsure. The number of "unsure" responses may be related to what seems to be a lack of a general understanding about SA and how it works. While grades have come up in previous research (e.g., Doyle et al., 2010; Kasravi, 2009), in the current study, academic concerns, beyond not having time to fit SA into their degree plan, were not a major factor. In contrast, part 3 of the survey, which focused specifically on reservations toward SA, highlighted cost as the most important concern among FGCS and SOC, similar to Kasravi (2009). Furthermore, a large majority of the participants in the current study (77% of FGCS, 88% of SOC) reported needing to use financial aid to pay for all or part of a SA trip. This finding suggests the need to better educate students about options for paying for SA, including financial aid and scholarships/grants. In our context, students cannot automatically utilize financial aid for SA, as specific requirements must be met. Therefore, it is important for students to meet with the Education Abroad and Financial Aid offices to begin to navigate this process. At many universities, different SA scholarships are available, and in the US, there are also scholarship opportunities through external/governmental organizations (e.g., Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship). FGCS and SOC need more support in finding and applying for these scholarships. Too many students automatically assume that they cannot afford SA, which stops them from seeking information. Furthermore, as some FGCS view SA more as a tourist trip and not an educational or career opportunity (Ungar, 2016), they might be hesitant to consider SA a good use of their financial aid.

Another reservation about SA that was selected by more than a third of participants was not knowing languages other than English (see also Kasravi, 2009). This is an interesting result, given that, in the same survey, some participants (16%) indicated growing up using multiple languages, and 56% of FGCS and 75% of SOC reported that they would be interested in taking a language

class during SA. Most participants had studied a LOTE, with Spanish as the most popular language. It is possible that participants have misconceptions about SA being all about language learning and are unaware of the variety of programs and locations available. In future research, it would be useful to explore students' ideas of a typical SA program or what types of programs they have heard about. It is important to also keep in mind that research suggests that students have prior competencies and skills that they can leverage and apply to learning in new cultural and linguistic contexts (Anya, 2021; Goldstein & Lopez, 2021; Wick et al., 2019), even if they do not know the local language. Many US American students have intersectional identities and diverse cultural and linguistic repertoires that could facilitate their experiences navigating new terrains (Anya, 2021), and SA programs should take that into account in designing trips (for more information about the challenges of language learning in Anglophone contexts see Lanvers et al., 2021).

We found that 38% of SOC agreed to some extent that they were afraid of racism/discrimination in a foreign country, and 17% said they were unsure. Additionally, six of the seven students who identified as non-binary also agreed to some extent. Previous research has validated these concerns regarding some of the challenges SOC have faced on international exchanges (e.g., Kasravi, 2009, Quan, 2018, Serafini, 2020), and several articles provide suggestions of ways to design more equitable SA programming (Anya, 2017; Leeman & Driver, 2021), including the development and selection of culturally relevant programs and study locations as well as the addition of specific orientations and advising to help SOC, other underrepresented groups, and SA leaders prepare for safe and affirming experiences abroad.

Our third research question focused on SA programming. The purpose of this question was to help us consider whether different types of programming were needed to attract FGCS and SOC. One issue we felt important to explore was timing and trip length. Most participants were interested in summer and spring break programs, typically shorter in length. Spring break trips may be ideal for working students since requesting a week off may be easier than the whole summer. Informal conversations with some FGCS also highlighted their need to work over the summer to save money to pay for university expenses throughout the academic year.

Participants were interested in many of the locations already offered through our Education Abroad programming (e.g., Europe, Australia/New Zealand, the Caribbean, Asia – see also Hanson, 2022), and the activities that they selected as the most interesting are ones built into typical SA programs. Therefore, it appears the main question is how to encourage them to participate. As argued by Perkins (2020), research that focuses on the factors that positively influenced students' participation may be the most informative. Future studies

interviewing FGCS and SOC who chose to study abroad are needed. Based on our own observations, individual faculty and staff, mentors, and/or friends, or what Perkins calls "enabling networks," have been very important motivators.

6. Conclusion

Results of this exploratory study have taught us a great deal about ways to encourage SA participation among FGCS and SOC at our university. In addition to the need for interviews with students who have studied abroad and those who responded to our survey, we believe the results suggest that targeted interventions are needed to improve equitable access to SA. For example, a simple change would be better promotion of SA (and how to pay for it) across university web pages and specifically pages intended for FGCS and SOC. It is necessary to market directly to these students and explicitly highlight the benefits of SA (see also recommendations by Demetriou et al., 2017). It is also imperative to design theoretically grounded, relevant SA opportunities with equity-minded leaders and advisors that build on students' prior competencies and reaffirm their identities and experiences. Another idea would be to design more spring break programs. In our specific context, many students have not traveled abroad. A first trip, even one lasting 7-10 days and led by a university faculty or staff member, could help build students' confidence to go abroad again on a longer trip. Additionally, it is important for us to do a better job of helping students see how they could afford SA and to lobby for SA scholarships specifically for FGCS and SOC.

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