

Evaluating the International Experience: Best Practices and Findings

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- As international educators, we believe in the value of study abroad. But how do we really know what students are getting out of the experience? This session will
 - Review what current research tells us about best practices in evaluating study abroad programs
 - Present the online assessment tool developed at the University of Oklahoma
 - Discuss selected results and address opportunities and challenges encountered the process
 - Invite audience members to share their experiences with student assessments of study abroad and other international programs.
- Thanks to Cindy Woods and Dr. Alisa Hicklin in the political science department at the University of Oklahoma for assistance with all statistical analyses



Challenges:

- Mandate to double numbers of study abroad participants (currently 700/year) – request for thorough information about current programs
- Previous efforts at program evaluation ad hoc, fuzzy memory of results
- Few staff, many programs, diversity of length, location and type



Opportunities:

- Chance to gather data about students & programs
- Lots of good work on study abroad assessment being done in the field
- University has license for web based evaluation software (“StudentVoice”)



Assessment of Study Abroad: Best Practices

- Hot topic in the field – 2004 *Frontiers* “Special Assessment Issue”
- Common challenges:
 - Moving beyond the customer service model
 - Constrained resources
 - Getting a good response rate
 - Reporting: Data rich, analysis poor



2003, Engle & Engle *Frontiers*

- How move beyond “student client” expectations?
- Cannot meaningfully assess educational outcomes without distinguishing among program types
- Proposes hierarchical classification of program levels, each with specific learning goals
- Matching student readiness with program type
- Expectations management



2004 *Frontiers*: Special Assessment Issue

- Wide range of methods of information gathering
 - Student self-assessment
 - Faculty observation
 - Archival data analysis (e.g. databases)
- Some more scientific than others (e.g. pre and post-test, use of control group)



- What is being measured?
 - Most include some mix of:
 - language learning
 - academic performance
 - personal growth
 - intercultural sensitivity (Milton Bennett)
 - professional development
 - And how these vary across program type and student demographics



Findings?

- Study abroad is good
- Impact of study abroad corresponds to length of program in number of studies
- Lots of further research needs to be done
- Quality of research reflects growing professionalization of the field
- More interesting work has been published since summer of 2008



- Joshua McKeown's The First Time Effect: The Impact of Study Abroad on College Student Intellectual Development (SUNY, 2009)
- Mark McLeod and Philip Wainwright's "Researching the Study Abroad Experience," *Journal of Studies in International Education*. Volume 13, No 1, Spring 2009: 66-71



Applying the Research

2007 Durrant and Dorius “Study Abroad Survey Instruments: A Comparison of Survey Types and Experiences” *Journal of Studies in International Education*

Consider:

- Available resources and personnel required
- What will you do with the results?
- Danger of qualitative data overload



Purpose of OU Assessment:

- Create an instrument that generates data helpful to variety of audiences on campus
 - Advisers/Staff, Faculty and Students
- Design survey to allow for comparison of outcomes by program design and demographic variables



Survey Design: the OU experience

- Borrowed from existing surveys
- Online evaluation - vendor assistance, supplied software
- Final product: 62 questions
- 10-15 minutes to complete survey
- Mix of question types, including multiple choice, open ended, Likert scale



Survey Administration

- Online link to web survey sent via email to students approximately 1-4 weeks after end of program
- Launched survey late June of 2008
- Results immediately available
- Between 40% and 60% response rate
- October 2009: 459 total respondents



Scope of Survey

- Participant demographics
- Program type
- Satisfaction with services
- Learning outcomes
- Advice for future students



OU Study Abroad Profile

- 60% summer/short-term programs
- 40% to Spain, France, Italy
- 30% to UK, Germany, China, Mexico, Chile
- 70% fulfill a graduation requirement through study abroad
- 70% Oklahoma residents



OU Study Abroad Profile

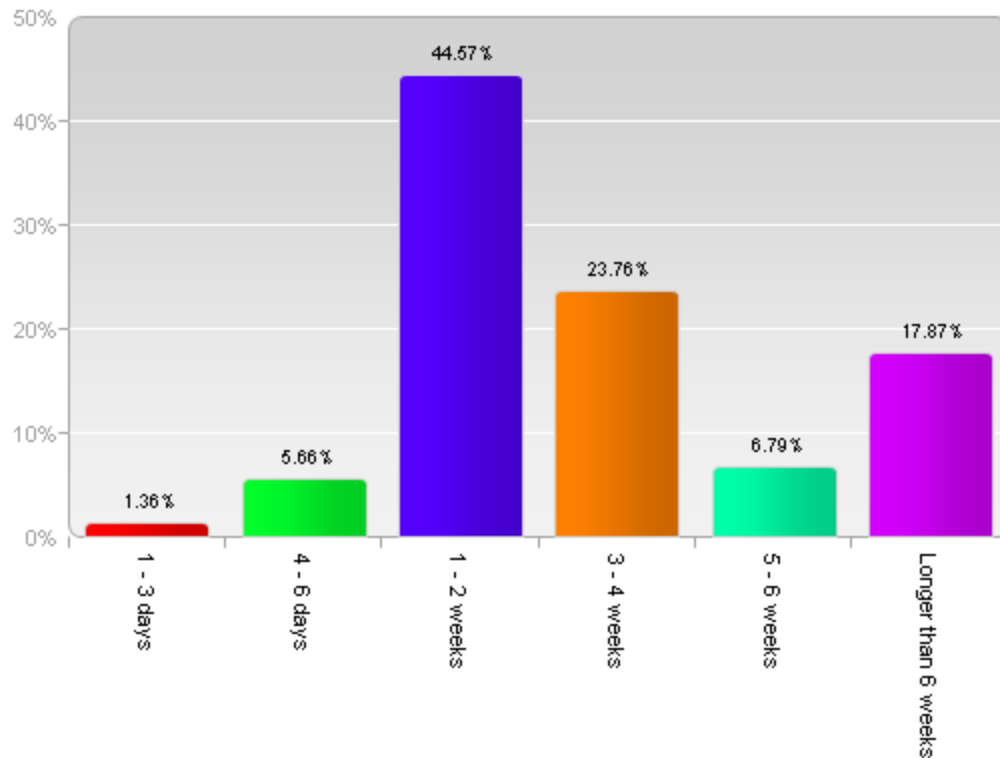
Please rate your level of language preparation for the study abroad program:

| | |
|--------|---------------------------|
| 31.35% | None |
| 37.22% | One semester to two years |
| 29.36% | More than two years |
| 1.99% | Native speaker |



OU Study Abroad Profile

Q9. What is the longest continuous duration you traveled prior to your study abroad experience?



What is the longest continuous duration you traveled prior to your study abroad experience?

52% Two weeks or less

48% More than two weeks



OU Study Abroad Participants

- 65% Female
- 50% College of Arts & Sciences
- 12% College of Business
- 11% School of Int'l & Area Studies
- 7% College of Journalism
- 5% College of Fine Arts
- 5% College of Engineering

OU Students (Norman Campus)

- 49% Female
- 35% College of Arts & Sciences
- 12% College of Business
- 2.7% School of Int'l & Area Studies
- 6% College of Journalism
- 5% College of Fine Arts
- 11% College of Engineering



OU Study Abroad Participants

Response %

| | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| Amer Indian/Nat Amer | 6.88% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 5.87% |
| Black/African American | 2.43% |
| Hispanic/Latino/a | 4.86% |
| White/European Amer | 73./8% |
| Other | 2.02% |
| Prefer not to respond | 4.86% |

OU Students (Norman Campus)

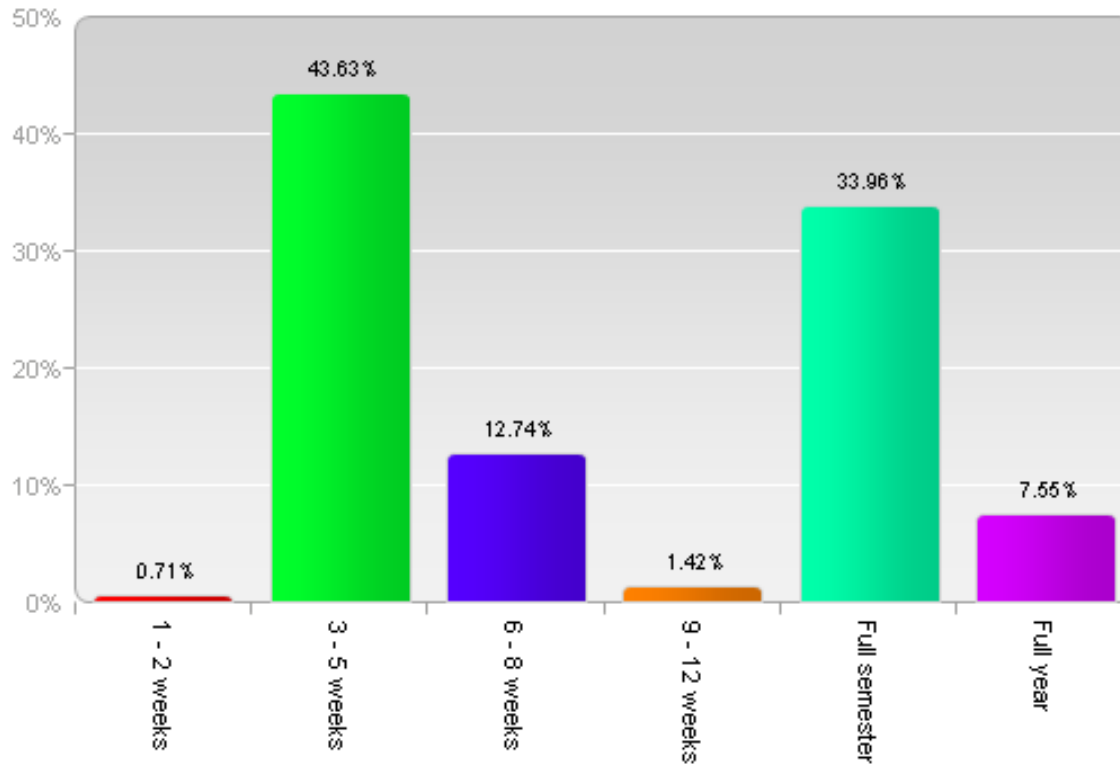
Institutional Research

| | |
|-----------------|-------------|
| American Indian | 6.7% |
| Asian | 5.4% |
| Black | 5.4% |
| Hispanic | 4.4% |
| White | 71.7% |
| International | 6.5% |



Program Type: Length

Q25. How long was your program?

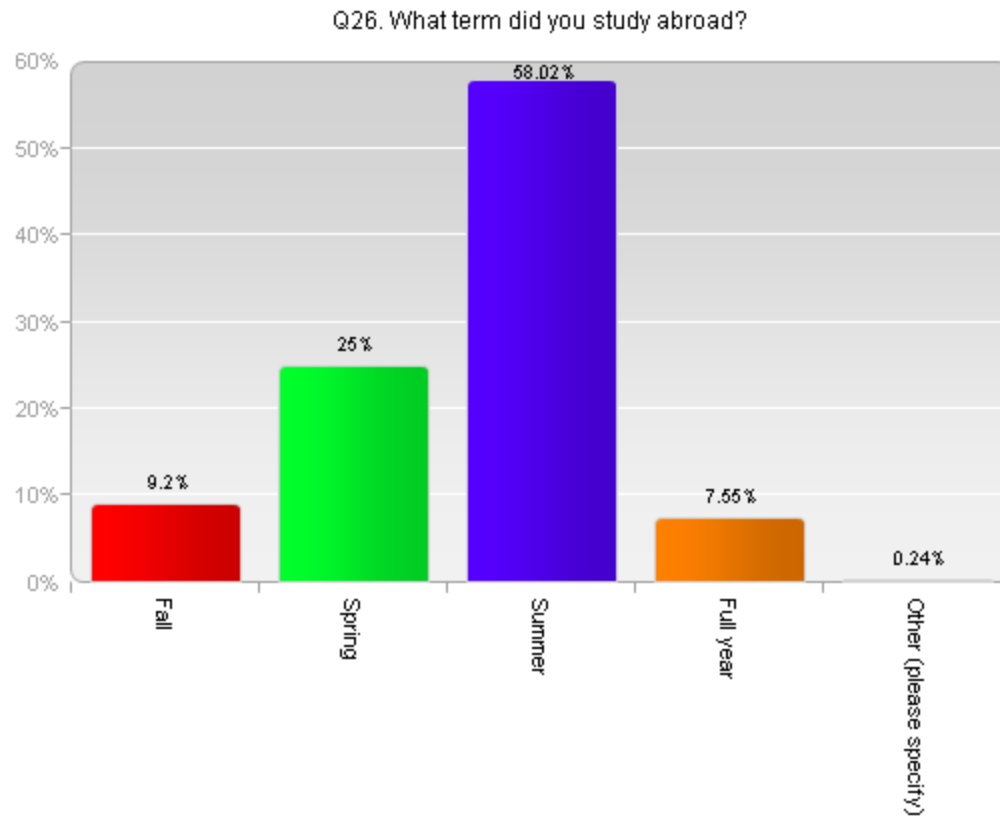


3-5 weeks:
44%

Full
semester:
34%



Program Type: **Term**



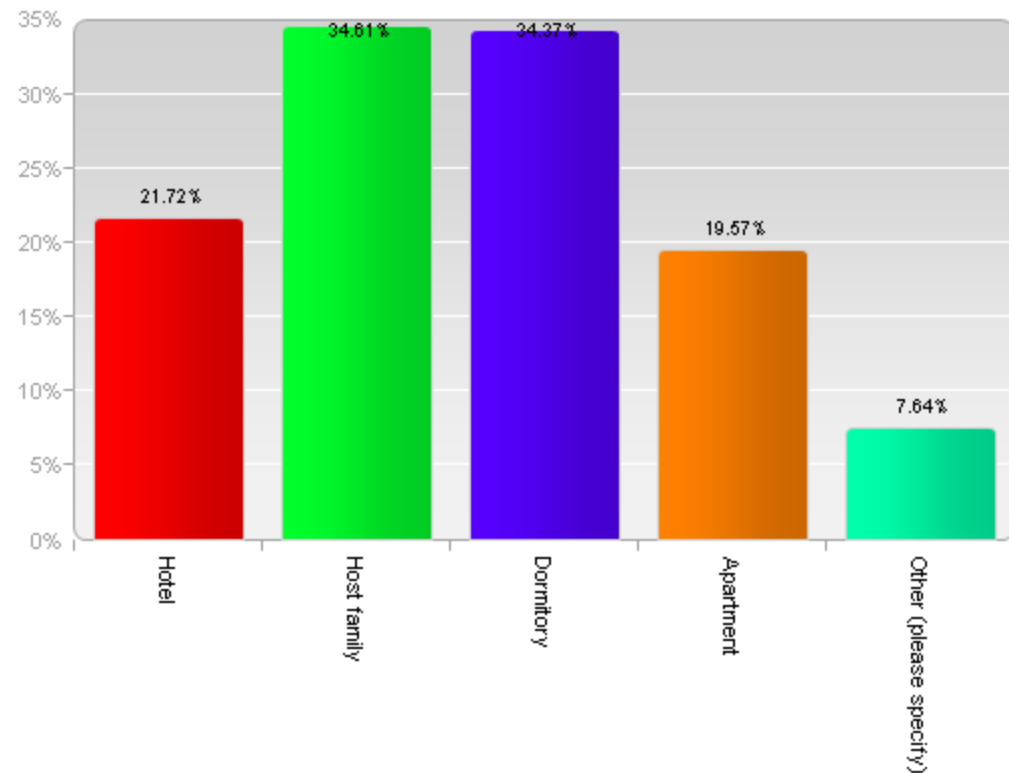
Majority is
summer
(and
growing)



Program Type: **Housing**

Host family &
Dormitory each
at 34% of
respondents

Q30. What was the nature of your accommodations during your study abroad program? (Check all that apply)

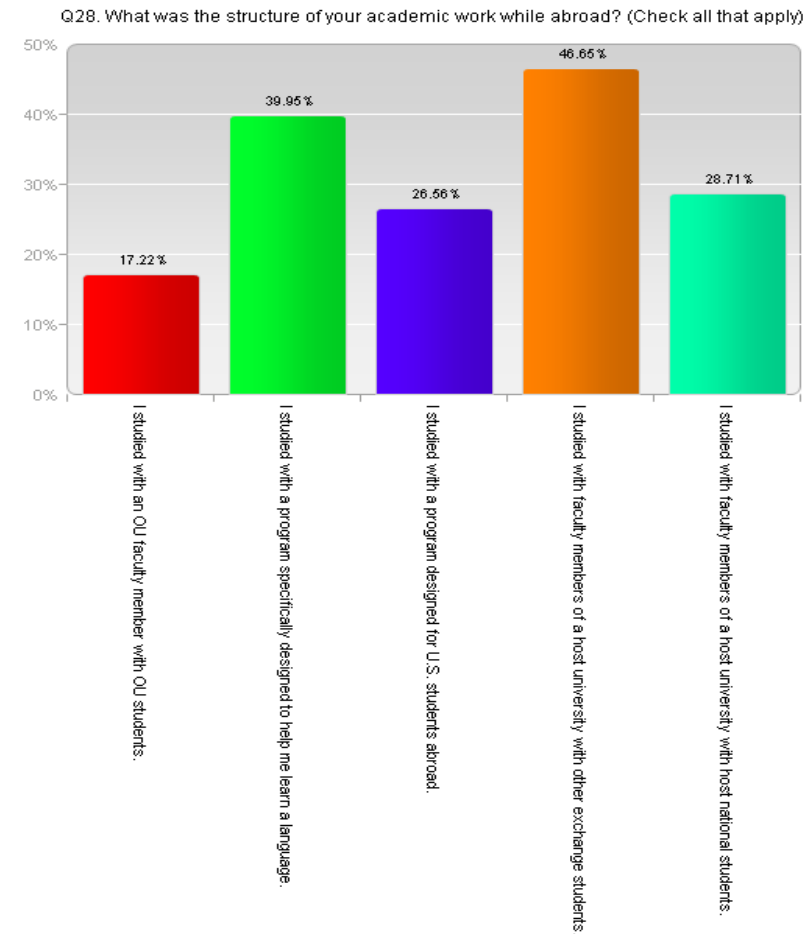




Program Type:

Structure of Academic Work Abroad

- This is an example of a poorly administered question: allowed students to check all that apply





Program Type: **language of instruction**

Worded almost as poorly: “In what language or languages did you take coursework during your program abroad? (Check all that apply)”

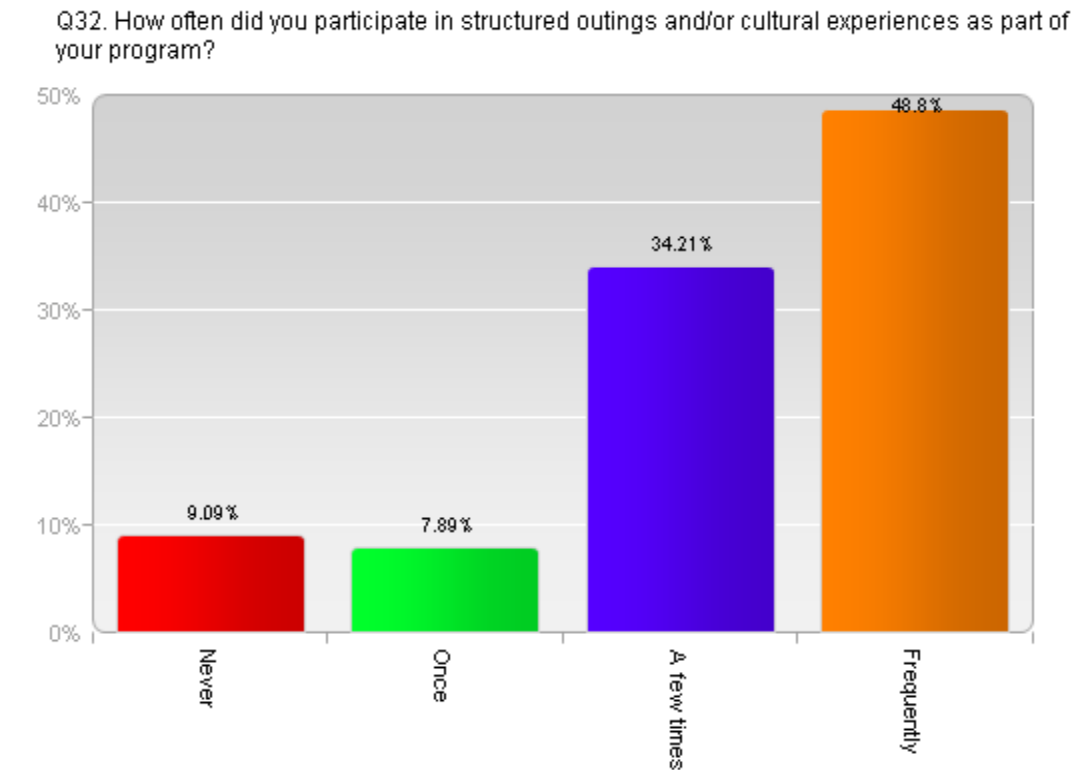
49%/42% English

68%/58% Language(s) spoken in host country



Program Type: Experiential Learning or structured cultural interactions

49% of Students “frequently” participated in structured outings and/or cultural experiences as part of their program

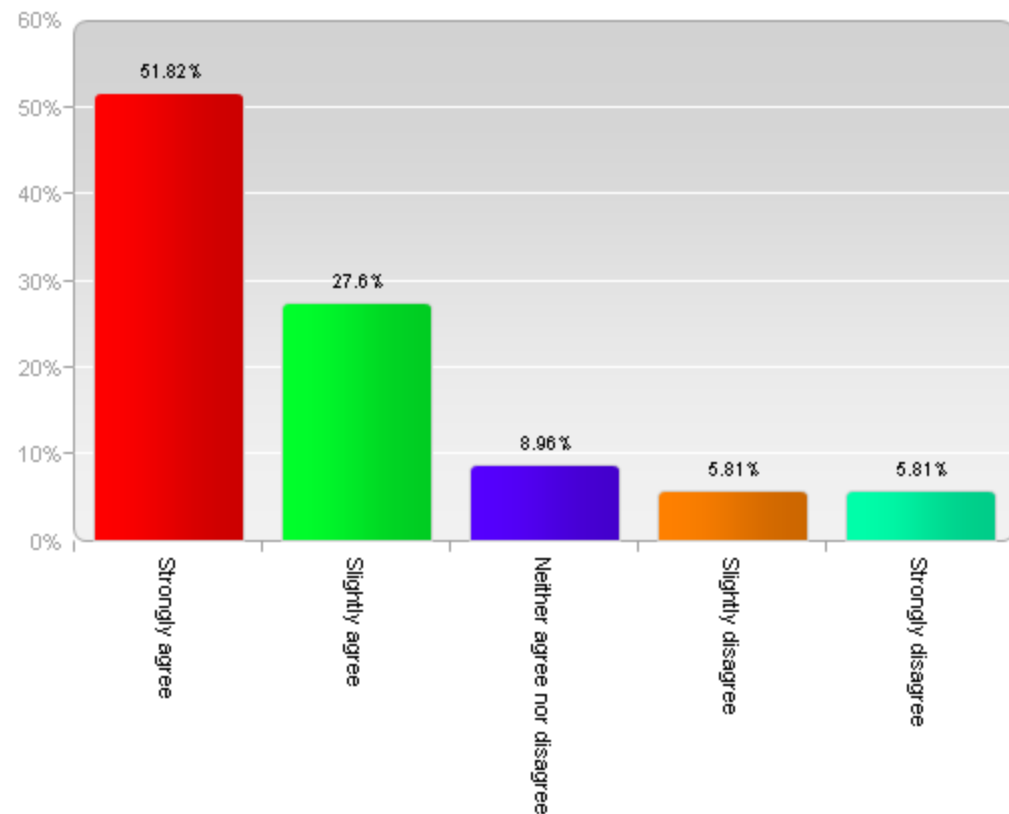




Moving from Program Type to Evaluation of Experience:

52% strongly agree that they made meaningful connections with host nationals while living abroad

Q35. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements: - I made meaningful connections with host nationals while living abroad.

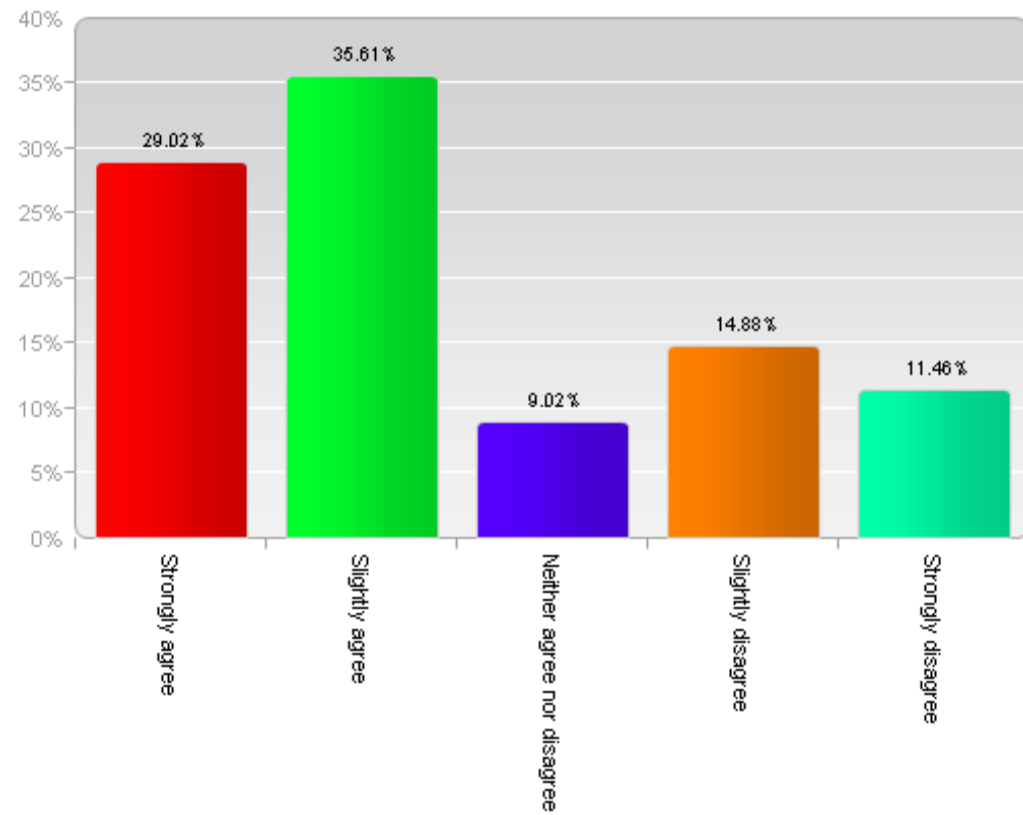




Was your program well-organized?

65% agree strongly or slightly

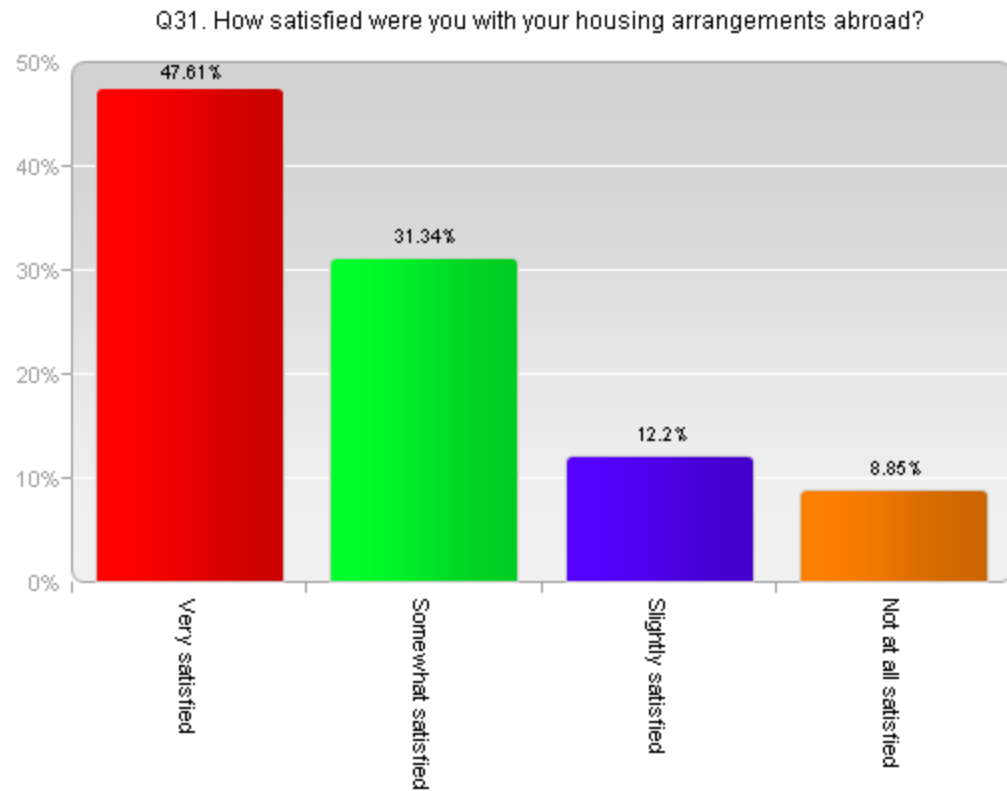
Q36. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements: - My program was well-organized





How satisfied were you with your housing arrangements abroad?

79% slightly or very satisfied

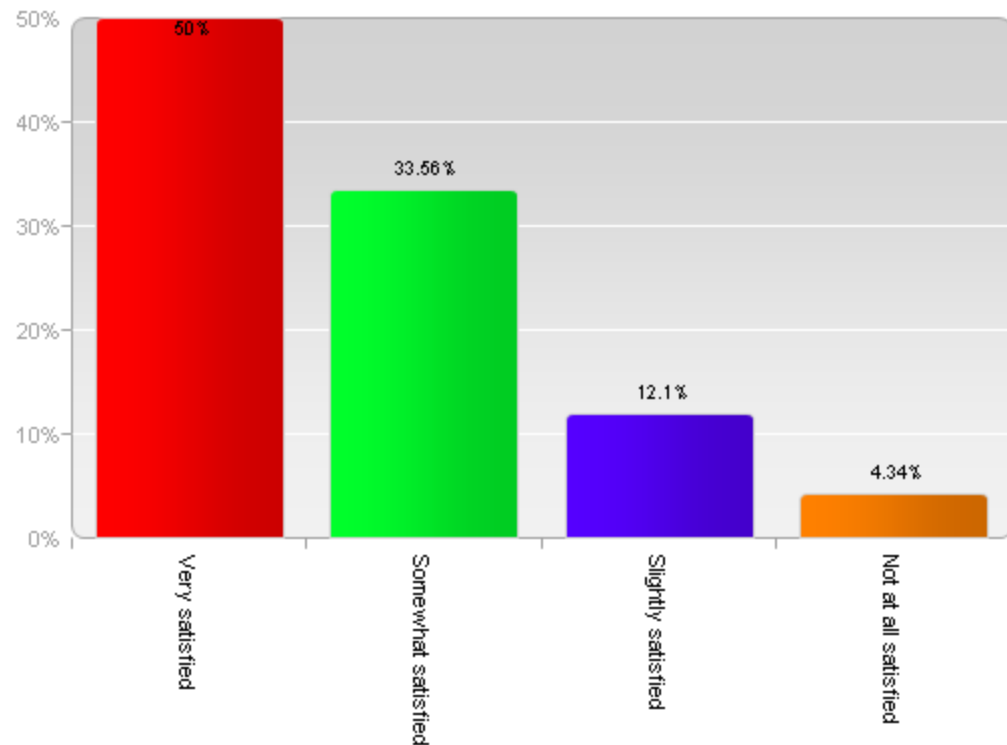




How satisfied were you with your **overall advising experience** in Education Abroad?

Students were asked to comment on their answer. Limited utility of results. Word Cloud content analysis not very interesting.

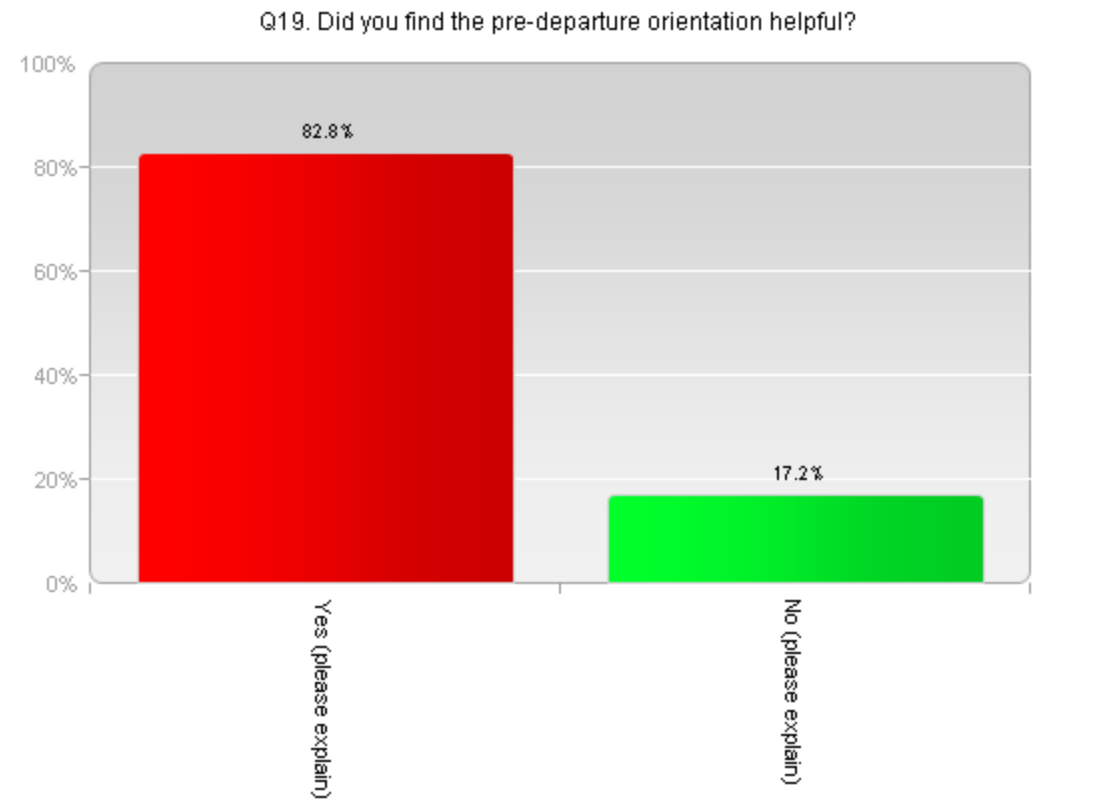
Q12. How satisfied are you with your overall advising experience in Education Abroad?





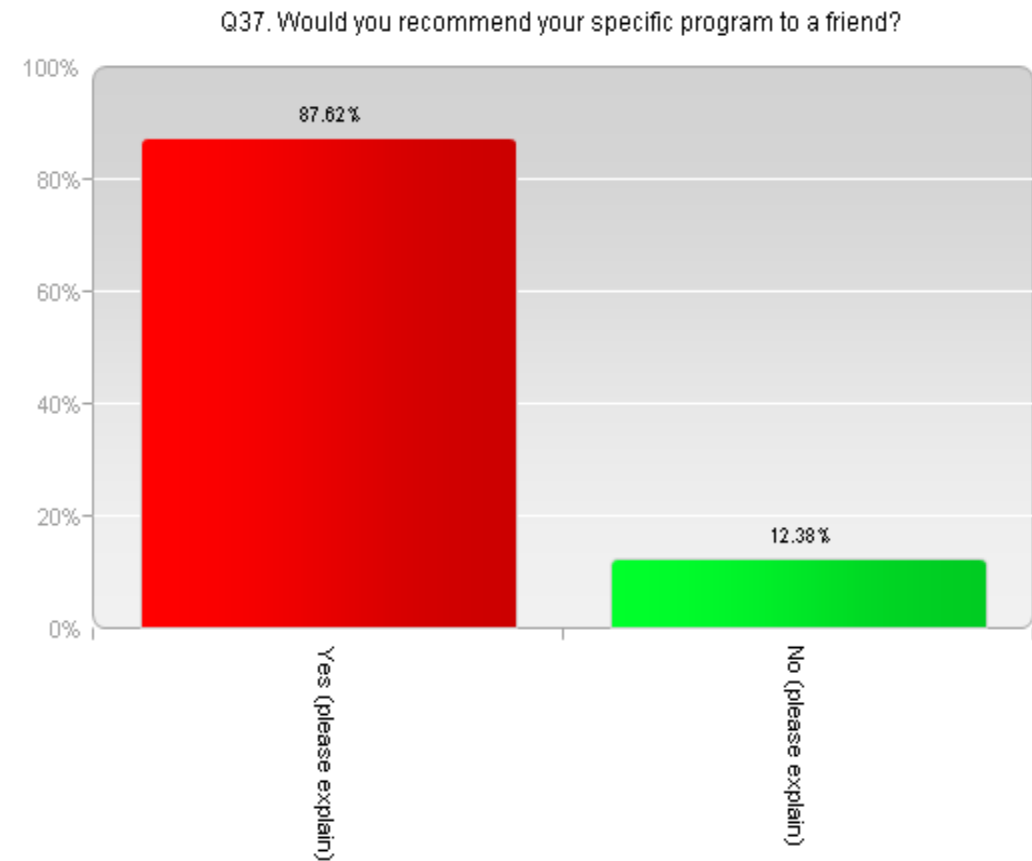
83% of students found the pre-departure orientation helpful

Comments on yes/no answers much more helpful in this instance



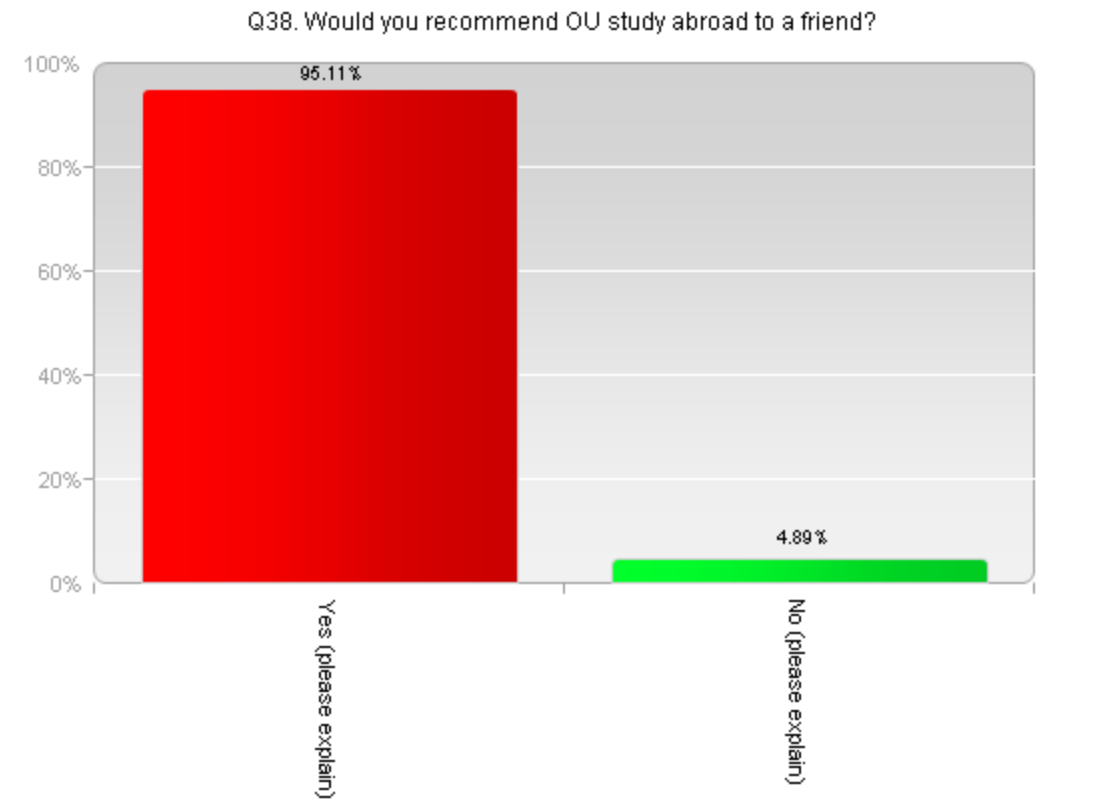


88% of OU students would recommend their specific program to a friend





95% would recommend OU study abroad to a friend





Frontiers 2004 Assessment article by Ingraham and Peterson: “Assessing the Impact of Study Abroad on Student Learning at Michigan State University”

- Student self-assessment component of study took place 1999-2002 with analysis of 2,500 questionnaires
- Length of sojourn positively correlated with all five factors, strongest in intercultural awareness



Learning Outcomes: Student self-assessment

- Language Learning (2)
- Academic Performance (2)
- Personal Growth (9)
- Intercultural Awareness (7)
- Professional Development (2)



- Positive Correlations:
 - language learning
 - intercultural awareness
 - personal growth
- “Non-findings”
 - academic performance
 - professional development



DV: Language Learning

- 1) As a result of my study abroad experience, my ability to speak a foreign language has improved (mean = 4.13)
- 2) Studying abroad has contributed to my desire to begin learning a foreign language (mean = 4.46)



DV: Intercultural Awareness

- Collapsed all questions into one variable
- Mean score = 4.62
- Understanding international issues, human difference, other cultures, own culture, host country, United States



DV: Personal Growth

Independence Variable = 4.42 mean

Included enhanced independence, self-reliance, problem-solving skills, leadership skills, feelings of personal effectiveness

Difference Variable = 4.65 mean

Included ability to cope with unfamiliar situations, comfort level with people different from myself, ability to effectively interact with those of different backgrounds



DV: Academic Performance

- 1) My study abroad experience has led to an improvement of my academic performance (mean = 3.47, 44% neither agree nor disagree)
- 2) Studying Abroad has enhanced my critical thinking skills (mean = 3.93, 26% neither agree nor disagree)



DV: Professional Development

1) Studying abroad has made me reconsider my career plans

mean = 3.31

2) Studying abroad has helped me find professional direction

mean = 3.29



Independent Variables

- Demographic data
- Program type (where possible)
- Satisfaction levels



Independent Variables

- Demographic data
 - Gender
 - Race/Ethnicity
 - Prior Travel Experience (+/- two weeks continuous duration)



Independent Variables

- Program type (where possible)
 - Length
 - Term
 - Language (English/not English)
 - Frequency of structured cultural outings



Independent Variables

- Satisfaction levels
 - With advising experience at OU
 - With pre-departure orientation at OU
 - With housing abroad
 - Was the program well organized?
 - Did you make meaningful connections with host nationals? (could also be program type)



Language Learning: As a result of my study abroad experience, my ability to speak a foreign language has improved.

Stronger agreement among students

- Who had a more satisfying overall advising experience
- Who reported greater satisfaction with housing abroad



Language Learning: As a result of my study abroad experience, my ability to speak a foreign language has improved.

Stronger agreement among students

- Participating in programs taking place in language other than English
- Who feel most strongly that they made meaningful connections with host nationals



Language Learning: Studying abroad has contributed to my desire to begin learning a foreign language or continue my existing study of a foreign language

Stronger agreement among students

- Participating in programs taking place in language other than English
- Who feel most strongly that they made meaningful connections with host nationals



Personal Growth: Independence variable

Stronger agreement among

- Women and People of Color
- Programs with greater numbers of structured outings and/or cultural experiences
- Those who feel they made more meaningful connections with host nationals
- Those most satisfied with advising experience
- Those who found the PDO helpful



Personal Growth: Difference Variable

Stronger agreement among

- Women and People of Color
- Those who feel they made more meaningful connections with host nationals
- Those who found the PDO helpful



Intercultural Awareness

Stronger agreement among

- Women
- Programs with greater numbers of structured outings and/or cultural experiences
- Those who feel they made more meaningful connections with host nationals
- Those who found the PDO helpful
- Those who expressed greater satisfaction with housing abroad



Is more better?

- OU results inconclusive, often counterintuitive
- Problem of sample bias and self-assessment rather than objective measurement

So what do we know?

- Intervention matters, program type matters



Interventions:

- Study abroad advising experience
- Pre-departure orientation

Program Type:

- Satisfaction with housing
- Structured cultural outings/experiences
- **Connection with host nationals**



Moving Forward

- New software (Studio Abroad) will allow for pre-test and post-test answer comparison
- Can reduce number of questions asked by half
- Place greater emphasis on program classification (Engle & Engle), facilitation of better program matches and **expectations management**



Michael Vande Berg's "Intervening in the Learning of U.S. Students Abroad," *Journal of Studies in International Education*. Vol 11, No 3/4, Fall/Winter 2007: 392-399

- Importance of asking students to articulate their personal learning goals
- Need to continue to intervene actively in student learning *throughout the program*



- What tools are you using to evaluate international experiences?
- What challenges have you encountered in this process?
- How are you sharing the results?