

Building Cultural Competence Through an Interdisciplinary Short-Term Study Abroad Program

Scott E. Lawrence, Cassandra A. Ledman

Department of Health and Kinesiology, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN

Abstract

Hypothesis/Issue: Building cultural competency and moving from theory to application can be challenging in an undergraduate student population.

Methods: An interdisciplinary group (n=19) of students consisting of athletic training, applied exercise physiology, and pre-professional allied health majors participated in a short-term study abroad trip to China. Students participated in educational programming and cultural immersion activities during the program with guided reflection periods. Each student completed pre- and post-experience surveys, including the Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge Short Scale (A.S.K.S²), The Curiosity and Exploration Inventory (CEI), and the Intensity Factor Index (IFI).

Observations/Outcomes: Significant improvements were observed for both the A.S.K.S² (p=0.003) and CEI (p=0.015) surveys following the program. Student gains were statistically significant for the A.S.K.S² sub-scales of Cultural Self-Awareness (p=0.001), Communication (p=0.029), Empathy (p=0.001), and Worldview (p=0.015) and for the CEI sub-scales of Stretching (p=0.02) and Embracing (p=0.031). No differences in the experience were observed among student major, ethnicity, or gender. Female students had significantly higher improvements in the A.S.K.S² (p=0.016) and CEI (p=0.033) surveys when compared to male students.

Conclusion: The short-term study abroad program focusing on cultural education and immersive experiences appears to improve student cultural competency.

Hypothesis/Issue

Cultural competency is a core component in health care education. Accredited professional programs must meet educational competencies to ensure their students have adequate preparation and ability to provide care to individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds and beliefs. However, it is often a challenge for students to experience and provide care with culturally diverse patients bridging their educational and clinical experiences.

Cultural immersion through study abroad programs has long been thought to benefit students in multiple ways. Through immersion, students learn and experience different cultural values. These students may also experience improvements in components of cultural competence.

Students who study for a semester abroad have previously demonstrated improvements in components of cultural competence. We hypothesized that a short-term study abroad program (3-weeks) would improve components of cultural competence through cultural immersion and study.

References

Reference list posted below.

Methods

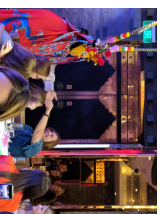
A group of undergraduate students (n = 19) in various Health & Human Science undergraduate programs enrolled in a short-term study abroad program, Global Perspectives in Sports Medicine. After completion of a typical study abroad orientation, students traveled to China for 17 days. The first 11 days were spent at Beijing Sport University where students completed an educational program in Traditional Chinese Medicine and Chinese Culture. The remainder of the trip was spent in Hangzhou and Shanghai for further cultural exploration.

Educational Activities:

- Tai Chi
- Chinese Massage
- Cupping
- Acupuncture
- Gua Sha
- Badminton
- Chinese Chess
- Table Tennis
- Dragon Dancing
- Roulit Ball

Cultural Activities:

- Great Wall of China
- Tianamen Square
- Forbidden City
- Beijing Zoo
- Silk Market
- Wangfujing Street
- Bailing Hutong
- Tea Village and Farm
- Silk Factory
- Yu Garden
- West Lake



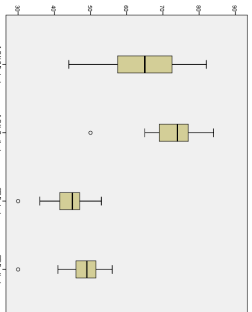
Educational content was completed by Chinese faculty in a formal classroom setting for six to eight hours/day during the week. Other educational opportunities included weekend off-campus cultural activities and free-time activities where students toured local shopping, experienced local cuisine, and connected with Chinese students.

All students completed pre-/post- surveys, the Intercultural Attitudes, Skills & Knowledge Short Scale (A.S.K.S², the Curiosity & Exploration Inventory (CEI), and the Intensity Factor Index (IFI). Students also completed daily reflective journaling throughout the study abroad experience. Students were given prompts for their journals based on the days activities to reflect upon growth opportunities throughout the day. Journals were scored upon program conclusion according to the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Value Rubric from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC & U).

Outcomes

Significant increases were observed for both the A.S.K.S² (p=0.003) and CEI (p=0.015) when comparing pre- and post-trip scores.

Differences were most evident on the A.S.K.S² subscales of Cultural Self-Awareness, Communication, Empathy, and Worldview and CEI subscales of Stretching and Embracing. No differences were observed for the A.S.K.S² subscales of Openness or Curiosity.



Differences Observed in Pre-/Post-Survey Subscales

A.S.K ² Openness	p = 0.150	A.S.K ² Worldview	p = 0.015*
A.S.K ² Curiosity	p = 0.084	A.S.K ² Cultural Self-Awareness	p = 0.001*
A.S.K ² Communication	p = 0.029*	CEI Stretching	p = 0.020
A.S.K ² Empathy	p = 0.001*	CEI Embracing	p = 0.031

Kruskal-Wallis tests found no difference observed in the experience, as measured by the IFI, among gender, ethnicity, or student major.

Kruskal-Wallis testing found female students to have greater gains in the A.S.K.S² (p=0.016) and CEI (p=0.033) surveys when compared to male students.

Additional gauges of cultural competence were taken from student journal entries. A total of 18/19 (95%) students reached the AAC & U milestone 2 for cultural self-awareness, with 32% reaching milestone 3 or higher. Scores were higher for openness with 16/19 (84%) achieving milestone 3 or higher and for curiosity with 18/19 (95%) achieving level 3 or higher.

Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Value Rubric Score

Knowledge, Skill or Attitude	Proficiency
Cultural Self-Awareness:	95% (18/19) of students reached Level 2 or higher
Openness:	84% (16/19) of students reached Level 3 or higher
Curiosity:	95% (18/19) of students reached Level 3 or higher

Conclusions

The short-term study abroad experience significantly improved several components of cultural competency. Improvements were demonstrated in cultural self-awareness, communication, empathy, and worldviews.

Female students appeared to have higher amounts of improvement than male students.

No change was observed in the sub-scales of Openness and Curiosity, but a significant number of students demonstrated proficiency in these areas suggesting the students seeking this type of experience likely already possess high levels of openness and curiosity.