



Apr 12th, 2:15 PM - 3:15 PM

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John Wesley Powell Student Research Conference. 1.

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Oral Presentation O4.1

INSIGHT INTO ILLINOIS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY STUDY ABROAD

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This project focuses on the reasons students do and do not study abroad during their years at Illinois Wesleyan. Currently, most IWU students do not study abroad for at least a semester, and I wish to analyze the factors behind this. My study abroad experience was one of the highlights of my IWU education, vastly increasing my self-reliance and knowledge of the world. I wish this experience could be realized by a majority of IWU students; therefore, I hope, as a long-term goal, that my research will provide insights that may lead to an increase in the number of IWU students who study abroad.

Following a review of the research literature about study abroad, and drawing on my skills as a Computer Science major, in March 2003 I conducted an internet-based survey at IWU. It was open to all students, including those who had and had not studied abroad. Questions attempted to attain students' perceptions of study abroad as well as their reasons for deciding or declining to do so. The survey was actually 5 separate instruments, with students choosing which pertained to them most, based on the following options:

1. Those who had studied abroad.
2. Those who had not studied abroad, but definitely planned to.
3. Those who had not studied abroad, but were considering studying abroad.
4. Those who were undecided as to studying abroad.
5. Those who did not plan to study abroad.

Students were invited to participate in the survey through email, and during the 5 days that I administered it, 516 students, or 25% of the 2,045 students in Spring 2003, responded.

Based on the literature and my study-abroad experience, I hypothesize that a large majority of students who have studied abroad have enjoyed their experiences, with many wishing they had had time to go abroad for another semester. I also predict that students will report that they had to surmount many hurdles before they could study abroad, and I hope that my research will show that these hurdles can be minimized or removed with some effort on IWU's part. Among those students who have not studied abroad, I predict that a vast majority, upon looking back, will wish that they had done so. Furthermore, I predict that most students who have not studied abroad have not done so because they believe their majors do not allow for a semester or more of off-campus study.

I will analyze the result not only to examine these hypotheses, but also to determine whether there are significant differences in responses based on gender, year in school, major(s)/minor(s), ethnicity, and hometown background.

The results of this study will be used to help increase student enrollment in study abroad programs in the future. The International Office will benefit directly by being enlightened as to study abroad perceptions that were previously unknown and can use the findings to improve services including, but not limited to advertising, increased cooperation with academic departments, and better communication with students. In the longer run, IWU will benefit from an increased rate of study abroad participation, allowing it to be more competitive in national rankings. Perhaps most important, an increase in study abroad participants will improve students' perceptions of the world and bring a greater appreciation for diversity to the campus.