

DAVIS, ELIZABETH M., Ph.D., May 2019

Higher Education Administration

A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF HOW SEMESTER-LONG EDUCATION ABROAD STUDENTS COME TO KNOW THEMSELVES WHILE STUDYING ABROAD (281 pp.)

Dissertation Director: Martha Merrill, Ph.D.

The purpose of this study was to understand how semester-long education abroad students come to know themselves while studying abroad. A multiple case study methodology and grounded theory coding data analysis procedures were used. The bounded system of the cases was the shared student experience of studying abroad while participating in the guided reflection provided by the study. The participants were 14 traditional college-aged private liberal arts students. Participants were interviewed before they went abroad, at the mid-point of their program, and after the end of their program. Additionally, participants completed seven writing prompts over the course of the semester. The two key themes arose: (a) coming to know self through shifting awareness and salience of social identities and personal characteristics and (b) the role of reflection on how students came to know themselves. The findings are useful to education abroad professionals as they demonstrate the importance of guided reflection on students' understanding of themselves and host location. This information can be used to assist in advising, program design, and curricular design.