

3-2009

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## Recommended Citation

Kutner, Laurie, "Think Locally, Act Globally: Understanding Home Institution Library Engagement among Study-Abroad Students" (2009). *University Libraries Faculty and Staff Publications*. Paper 2.  
<http://scholarworks.uvm.edu/libfacpub/2>

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# Think Locally, Act Globally: Understanding Home Institution Library Engagement among Study- Abroad Students

Laurie Kutner

This study focuses on developing an understanding of U.S. study-abroad students' knowledge and confidence levels in using their home institution libraries from abroad. Data from a questionnaire survey administered to students at the time of active engagement in ten different study-abroad programs in Costa Rica are presented; the data reveal relative uncertainty by the students about the possibilities of interfacing with their home institution libraries while abroad. Further consideration of this distinct user group is warranted, and the article includes data-driven recommendations for better serving our study-abroad students.



The Institute of International Education's latest statistics indicate that American students are studying abroad at record levels, reporting an 8.5 percent increase from the previous year and a 150 percent increase in the past decade.<sup>1</sup> Although steadily increasing numbers of students are engaged in overseas study, relatively little attention has been paid to these students as a growing library user group with distinct needs and issues. Yet significant additional challenges exist in conducting library research remotely from international locations. In addition to functioning in differing cultural contexts with varying levels of available information and communications tech-

nology infrastructure, there is widely divergent knowledge among students about how to access and best utilize library resources, services, and support back home. The research presented below provides a starting point for developing a deeper understanding of student engagement with their home institutions' libraries while abroad.

Conducted on site, in Monteverde, Costa Rica, this study focuses on students' understanding and use of their home college or university library resources and services while studying abroad. Students from ten different study-abroad programs from institutions around the U.S. who were in Monteverde, Costa Rica, during the spring 2007 semester participated in

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a questionnaire survey regarding use of their respective college or university libraries at home and from abroad. The intent was to gather data at the time of active engagement in the study-abroad experience while away from respective U.S. home institutions and while dealing with all the complexities of navigating one's way around very different cultural, social, economic, technological, and physical landscapes. The purposes of the research were to: 1) develop insight into how study-abroad students use their college or university libraries while in residence at their institutions; 2) begin to understand to what extent study-abroad students, while actively engaged in their programs, perceive a need to utilize and interact with their home institution libraries from abroad, and in what ways; 3) gauge study-abroad student knowledge and confidence levels regarding library use from abroad; and 4) use the data generated to provide insight into how we can better serve and respond to the distinctive needs of our study-abroad user populations.

Conducted as part of a sabbatical project, this research represents a portion of a larger study that concentrated on developing a greater understanding of the information needs and challenges of the increasing body of researchers on any university campus—faculty, graduate student researchers, and undergraduates—that conduct research in international locations, with a particular focus on the Global South.<sup>2</sup> Monteverde, Costa Rica, was selected as the location from which to base this study, due to the presence of a relatively high number of researchers and students in a relatively small, accessible area. As the larger study took form, interactions between the local research community in Monteverde and the international research community became a necessary additional focus. This broader discussion is beyond the scope of the research being presented here; however, developing an understanding of study-abroad student library knowledge,

use, and confidence levels has provided valuable insight into the issues faced by our larger international research community. While our study-abroad students face similar information challenges to the wider international research community, as a group of primarily undergraduate student researchers, their information needs and understanding of what is available to them is unique enough to warrant a separate focus. The resulting data suggest that there is merit to paying greater attention to providing expanded information support for this growing and distinctive body of remote library users.

### **Literature Review**

Three bodies of literature have been examined to provide context for this study. First, the theme of internationalization of the higher education curriculum, as it applies to increasing opportunities for students to study abroad, is discussed. Next, evidence of a lack of a significant body of library literature that focuses on understanding study-abroad students as a distinctive group of library users is presented, while recognizing that a large related, but not equivalent, third body of literature exists that focuses on provision of library resources and services to distance education students.

### ***Internationalization of Higher Education as Related to Study Abroad***

Not only have the numbers of American students studying abroad been steadily increasing over the last decade, but current initiatives are underway that will most likely result in further increases in these figures into the future. At the time of writing, the Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act is waiting to go to the U.S. Senate floor for a vote, after having passed unanimously in the U.S. House of Representatives, as well as by the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee.<sup>3</sup> This Act will provide funding for a national study-abroad program that will enable at least one million students to study abroad each year. The primary goals of

this bill are to increase both number and diversity of students studying abroad and to send more students to “nontraditional” locations.<sup>4</sup>

On individual college campuses, universities are working to incorporate education abroad experiences into undergraduate curricula,<sup>5</sup> and innovative programs are being established to more fully engage faculty in facilitating study-abroad opportunities. For example, at Goucher College in Maryland there is a study-abroad requirement for all undergraduates, and each student receives a voucher for \$1,200 toward his or her study-abroad expenses.<sup>6</sup> Chatham College in Pennsylvania is requiring faculty from multiple disciplines to work as teams to design and lead study-abroad programs, purposefully working toward including disciplines that have been traditionally less represented in the study-abroad experience.<sup>7</sup> At the University of Richmond, a Faculty Seminar Abroad program has been established to further engage faculty in the development of study-abroad programs.<sup>8</sup>

As increasing numbers of students are engaging in study-abroad opportunities as part of their higher education experience, it is important for academic librarians to be cognizant of these trends and the implications they present for best serving this growing body of users. For example, not only are more students studying abroad, but more students are studying in the Global South and in nontraditional locations. This has implications for student access and use of technology, which, according to authors Donatelli, Yngve, Miller, and Ellis, should be addressed as part of the study-abroad experience, through informational programming and advising.<sup>9</sup> As faculty design curricula for their study-abroad programs, particularly in the Global South, uses and limitations of technology must be factored in, and, as librarians striving to support all our users, this information has bearing on the way we best present and offer our resources and services.

As locations for study-abroad programs expand to more “nontraditional” areas, the goals and curricula of study-abroad programs are also changing. In the latest edition of *NAFSA's Guide to Education Abroad for Advisors and Administrators*, authors Edwards, Hoffa, and Kanach state that education abroad programs are responding to the need for our students to become productive citizens in an increasingly globalized society by seeking to understand and respond to global issues, while at the same time focusing on the study of local issues.<sup>10</sup> To accomplish these multifaceted goals, education abroad programs are now increasingly engaging in service learning,<sup>11</sup> internships, and fieldwork.<sup>12</sup> The changing nature of study-abroad curricula clearly impacts the types of research conducted by students engaged in these programs, as well as the demands for library resources and services from students' respective home institutions.

#### *Academic Library's Role in Supporting Study-Abroad Programs*

Notably absent in the study-abroad higher education literature is mention of the potential role of the home institution library in supporting the research needs of study-abroad programs. NAFSA-Association for International Education publishes a comprehensive manual for advisors and administrators of study-abroad programs that contains chapters on such areas as Faculty Roles, Technology and Education Abroad, Education Abroad in the Campus Context, and Predeparture Orientation;<sup>13</sup> however, no mention can be found in the manual about the importance of incorporating information regarding resources and services available to study-abroad students from their home campus libraries.

While not an overly surprising omission from the study-abroad literature, the larger surprise has been the notable lack of library literature on the topic. This represents a significant gap in our understanding of the distinctive needs of our

students who are engaged in research-based projects from overseas, including from some of the more remote areas of the world.

Two older articles allude to the importance of recognizing the library needs of our students studying abroad. In a 1985 article by Eugene Engeldinger that appeared in *College and Research Libraries News*,<sup>14</sup> he points out, based on his own involvement with a study-abroad program in Japan, that there are significant library challenges for our students who are engaged in research from abroad that have not been adequately addressed. "I... came to the realization that although proponents of bibliographic instruction have expressed concern in the literature for many types of students, one group of students that has been overlooked: American students who go abroad to study."<sup>15</sup> In 1990, author Martha Brogan notes that the number of study-abroad programs are increasing, and librarians should be prepared to assist with these students' information needs.<sup>16</sup> She mentioned study abroad as one of five areas of international education that librarians should stay abreast of and called for ACRL to take a more proactive and organized role in incorporating international issues into the field of academic librarianship. While visionary in their own right, these articles were written before the wide availability of the Internet to deliver information resources and services to our constituents, regardless of their physical location. Our current online information environment presents unprecedented opportunities for serving our study-abroad students, as well as a host of distinctive issues for this user group. However, it has proven challenging to locate evidence that study-abroad students have been researched as a distinct group of library users in the more recent literature, with the following exception.

In a poster session presented at the 2007 ACRL Conference, Alica White and Henry Pusciotta reported their initial findings of a research study they conducted, which

focused on information-seeking behavior of study-abroad students enrolled in four different study-abroad programs in Italy.<sup>17</sup> Through a combination of interviews and questionnaires administered to 36 students in these programs, they learned that these study-abroad students had substantive information needs and used the library and resource center space that was available through their programs. These students, however, were not fully aware of all the library resources available to them from their home institution while studying abroad, and the researchers concluded that home institution libraries should focus on communication about library resources and services for their study-abroad students.

A related article worth noting, published in 2002, focuses on the challenges of providing library services to international site-based graduate programs that utilize their U.S. home institution's library.<sup>18</sup> Authors Chakraborty and Tunon raise issues regarding document delivery, access to online resources, technology infrastructure, and provision of reference and instruction, all of which are highly relevant when considering library resources and services for students in primarily undergraduate, short-term study-abroad programs. An article published by authors Ren and Williams in 2000 discusses library services for Rutgers University students engaged in graduate MBA programs in Singapore and China,<sup>19</sup> and, in a 2006 article, author Linda Becker describes the importance for Australian libraries to be cognizant of the provision of library resources and services to their students engaged in overseas programs.<sup>20</sup> While these examples demonstrate that there is a closely related body of literature, library needs of the increasing primarily undergraduate and short-term study-abroad student population have not been sufficiently addressed in the recent literature. A robust recent literature does exist on international student experiences in academic libraries,<sup>21</sup> which suggests that librarians are addressing issues related to

the internationalization of higher education. However, study-abroad students' need for and use of library resources and services is apparently just beginning to be systematically examined.

#### ***Provision of Library Resources and Services to Distance Education Students***

The ACRL *Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services*<sup>22</sup> demonstrates the commitment by academic librarians to provide an equivalent level of library resources and services to all patrons, no matter where they may be physically located.<sup>23</sup> While there is a demonstrated paucity of literature focusing specifically on the library needs of study-abroad students as a distinctive user group, the broader body of recent library literature that focuses on distance learners covers a number of relevant themes.

Similar to the study-abroad students who are the subject of this study, the literature demonstrates a relative unawareness by the wider distance learning community of library resources and services available to them, pointing to the importance of targeted promotion to this user group.<sup>24</sup> Authors Cahoy and Moyo focus specifically on distance faculty unawareness of available library resources and services, suggesting that faculty, through course pedagogy, expectations, and assignments, exert an influence on student use or nonuse of the library.<sup>25</sup> Collaboration between the library, distance education faculty, and administration, to promote library services available to distance students, is well documented in the literature.<sup>26</sup>

The higher education study-abroad literature points to the importance of building alliances and collaborative relationships with units across campus in the creation of successful study-abroad experiences,<sup>27</sup> but libraries are not mentioned as a unit with which it is important to collaborate. Both the lack of library literature that focuses specifically on the provision of library services and resources to study-abroad programs, and lack of

higher education study-abroad literature that recognizes the role of the academic library in supporting the research needs of these programs, provide the overarching context for this research.

#### **Methodology**

##### ***Setting***

The location of this study was Monteverde, Costa Rica, where the author lived for six months, from January to June 2007, during sabbatical leave from the University of Vermont. Monteverde is located high up on the Continental Divide, in the Tilarán Mountains in northern Costa Rica. Renowned for its spectacular cloud forest ecosystem and resultant species biodiversity, Monteverde is simultaneously a small rural Costa Rican community, a North American Quaker community, and an international tourist destination. The uniqueness of Monteverde as place attracts students and researchers interested in the study of tropical ecology, conservation, sustainability, ecotourism, community development, sociocultural issues, and more. According to local naturalist educator Mark Wainwright, more than 40 study-abroad programs spend some amount of time in Monteverde each year.<sup>28</sup>

##### ***Study Population***

Students engaged in study-abroad programs that were situated in Monteverde for at least two weeks during the spring 2007 semester were the target population for this study. While many study-abroad programs spend shorter periods of time in Monteverde, a minimum two-week time frame was chosen to focus on programs that were engaging with the place in some depth and would be more likely to have assignments requiring research associated with them. The intent was to administer a questionnaire survey to as much of this target population as possible at the time of active engagement in their respective programs. To accomplish this, all the study-abroad programs in the Monteverde area for at least two weeks during this time

frame were identified, and faculty and local administrators of these programs were contacted. Because study-abroad students spending time in Monteverde go through one of only three small local institutions,<sup>29</sup> including one with which the author was affiliated, identifying all the faculty and local administrators associated with the programs was easily achieved through on-site communication, e-mail, phone calls, and site visits.

In total, ten different study-abroad programs were identified as meeting the study criteria. Programs ranged in size from seven students to thirty students, and, within these ten programs, students were enrolled in a wide representation of colleges and universities from around the country. For example, one semester-long program that was included in the sample was a CIEE (Council for International Education Exchange) program that attracts students from many different colleges and universities throughout the United States. Other programs combined students and faculty from a few colleges and universities, while others were single college or university programs. Students surveyed were primarily undergraduates, though one program did include a few graduate students. However, all programs were short-term study-abroad programs, in Costa Rica for six months or less.

Out of a possible 182 students in the sample universe, 139 students responded to and returned completed questionnaire surveys, representing a 76.4 percent response rate. Times and locations of administering the questionnaire survey were prearranged through communication with faculty and administrators of the programs included in the sample and determined on the basis of when and where students would be gathered in one place at one time. While there were situations where

some students could not participate in the survey because they were out in the field conducting research or away from the main group for a variety of other reasons, a relatively high response rate was nevertheless achieved.

#### *Respondent Profile*

To learn more about the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents, five initial questions elicited information helpful in defining the scope of the study population. Table 1 presents the demographic data. Most students (67%)

<b>TABLE 1</b>		
<b>Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents</b>		
<b>Length of Study Abroad Program in Costa Rica (n = 139)</b>		
Program Length	# of Responses	% of Responses
< 2 weeks	4	3%
2–4 weeks	23	17%
1–2 months	25	18%
2–4 months	70	49%
4–6 months	16	12%
> 6 months	1	1%
<b>Size of Students' College/University (n = 139)</b>		
University/College Size (# of Students)	# of Responses	% of Responses
< 2,000	18	13%
2,000–5,000	21	15%
5,000–10,000	16	12%
> 10,000	84	60%
<b>Respondents' Year in College (n = 139)</b>		
Year in College	# of Responses	% of Responses
Freshman	3	2%
Sophomore	23	17%
Junior	63	45%
Senior	42	30%
Graduated	1	1%
Grad Student	7	5%

were engaged in study-abroad programs that were between one and four months in length, though 20 percent indicated that they were in programs less than one month in duration. While the survey was administered only to students in programs over two weeks long, three percent of the respondents (four individuals) indicated that they were in programs that were there for less than two weeks. It can be postulated that this was due to a misinterpretation of the question by these four individuals.

Students were also asked about the size of their home college or university. Most of the respondents (60%) indicated that they were attending universities with more than 10,000 students, while the other 40 percent were split almost evenly in three categories of smaller-sized institutions. A third demographic question was asked regarding respondent's year in college. As is pretty typical of students studying abroad, most do so as upperclassmen, and this was the case in this study. Most respondents were juniors (45%) or seniors (30%); however, there was representation of underclassmen and graduate students in the sample as well. Two additional questions asked respondents to define their major and subject-area focus of study-abroad program. Majors were well represented in areas such as Art, Education, Latino Studies, Spanish, History, Psychology, Anthropology, Business, Environmental Studies, International Studies, and Urban Planning, but the majors mentioned with the most frequency were in the biological and ecological sciences. This was consistent with the most frequently mentioned subject of study-abroad program, which was biology/tropical ecology, though there were other wide-ranging subject areas of study-abroad programs included in the study.

#### *Questionnaire Survey*

The questionnaire survey, administered in paper format, was

composed of a total of eighteen questions and took students about ten minutes to complete. (See Appendix I.) A series of closed-ended questions were designed to elicit data regarding student use of their college or university libraries from home and while in Costa Rica and to assess their knowledge and confidence levels regarding use of their home institution libraries from abroad. Open-ended questions at the end of the survey provided an opportunity for respondents to reflect on and consider the challenges they face conducting research from abroad and to make suggestions as to how their college or university libraries can better support them as students engaged in education abroad.

#### *Data Analysis*

For the purposes of this initial study, analysis is confined to examining the study population as a whole, to examine general trends in the total population across colleges and universities and provide some initial inferences from the data. Therefore, the data presented below reflect the ways in which the entire study population responded to each question, through presentation of basic descriptive statistics, including total numbers and percentages of varying responses to the survey questions. Additionally, qualitative responses were compiled and examined for trends as well as breadth of responses. While results from 139 completed surveys were

**TABLE 2**  
**Frequency of Library Use at Home**  
**Institution Libraries (n = 139)**

Frequency	# of Responses	% of Responses
More than once a week	60	43%
Every 1-2 weeks	24	17%
Twice a month	19	14%
Twice a semester	28	20%
Once a semester	3	2%
Less than once a semester	5	4%



**TABLE 3**  
**Student Uses of Library While at Home Institution (from Most to Least Used)**

Library Use	# of Responses
Library's databases to locate articles and other resources for research	117
Use computers in library for Internet access	104
Library Catalog	103
Reserve materials	95
Use computers in library for Word, PowerPoint, Excel, or other programs	66
Get assistance from Reference staff with research	61
Use ILL to request materials library doesn't own	44
Other (defined by respondent)	16
Use e-mail reference service or chat reference service	14

compiled, not all respondents answered all the survey questions, accounting for some slight variability in the number of responses received for individual questions. Preliminary conclusions are drawn based on analysis of both quantitative and qualitative survey data.

### Results

The first purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of library use by the study population, while in residence at their home institutions, to provide a basis from which to begin to understand engagement with their libraries from abroad. This was addressed through two survey questions. First, a question was asked about the frequency of library use at students' college or university libraries. (See table 2.) Of note, 43 percent of the respondents indicated that, while at home, they use their college or university library more than once a week, and an additional 17 percent indicated that they use their library every one to two weeks, demonstrating that the majority of this group of study-abroad students are regular users of their libraries back home. Next, a ques-

tion was asked to determine the frequency with which the study population uses different library resources and services while in residency at their home institution. Respondents were asked to select as many resources and/or services as they use from a list. Results are presented in table 3. The most frequently selected option, using the library's databases to locate articles and other resources for research, indicates that students view access to subscription databases for research as a basic and most important function of their college or university libraries. While the study population uses basic library resources such as the library catalog and reserves with higher frequency than

services such as reference assistance and interlibrary loan, generally these students are using the array of resources and services that their home institutions offer them.

The second purpose of the study was to determine whether the respondents perceived a need to use their home institution library while abroad and to determine what library resources and services they may need to use or have already used while in Costa Rica. This was addressed through two questions. In response to the statement "I will need to use my library's resources while I am

**TABLE 4**  
**Responses to the Statement: I will need to use my library's resources while I'm in Costa Rica: (n = 136)**

	# of Responses	% of Responses
Agree	61	45%
Not Sure	37	27%
Disagree	38	28%

**TABLE 5**  
**Perceived Student Uses of Home Institution Library from Costa Rica (from Most to Least Used)**

Library Use	# of Responses
Databases for locating journal articles and other resources for research	63
Electronic reserves	41
E-mail or chat reference service	35
None	29
Library Catalog	14
Other (defined by respondent)	4
Interlibrary Loan	2

in Costa Rica," study participants were asked to select one of three options: Agree, Not Sure, Disagree. Table 4 shows a summary of responses to this question. Of note here is that 45 percent of respondents felt certain that they would need to use their home institution libraries from Costa Rica, while an additional 27 percent were not sure, demonstrating that they might potentially use their home institution libraries from abroad. Next, a question was asked to determine which library resources and services from their home institutions respondents thought they might use (or have already used) from Costa Rica. Again, respondents were asked to select as many responses as applicable. (See table 5.) The resource cited by respondents as being used with the most frequency was databases for locating journal articles and other resources for research, pointing again to the importance that students place on access to these materials, from wherever in the world they may be. Overall, this question appeared to generate some confusion among respondents,

which was demonstrated in the high number of responses to both use of e-mail and chat reference service and use of electronic reserves.<sup>30</sup> Because of the apparent confusion surrounding this question, the author is hesitant to place much value on these data.

The third purpose of the study was to develop an understanding of student knowledge and confidence levels regarding library use from abroad. Five survey questions elicited information to address this central purpose of the study. Table 6 reflects the results of two questions that focused first on the possibility

of accessing students' home library subscription databases for research and then on student confidence levels in accessing these resources. Although almost two-thirds of the study population agreed that it was possible to access their library's subscription databases from Costa Rica, the remaining one-third were unsure or

**TABLE 6**  
**Student Perceptions and Confidence Levels Regarding Access to Library Databases from Costa Rica**

Responses to the statement: From Costa Rica, it is possible to access my college/university library's subscription databases for research. (n = 136)		
	# of Responses	% of Responses
Agree	87	64%
Not Sure	43	32%
Disagree	6	4%
Confidence levels in ability to access college/university library's subscription databases from Costa Rica (n = 135)		
Confidence rating	# of Responses	% of Responses
1 (very confident)	50	37%
2	24	18%
3 (not sure)	40	30%
4	10	7%
5 (no confidence)	11	8%

<b>TABLE 7</b> <b>Responses to the Statement:</b> <b>It is possible to get copies of articles</b> <b>that I may need for research</b> <b>while I'm in Costa Rica, through</b> <b>my college/university library's</b> <b>Interlibrary Loan service:</b> <b>(n = 136)</b>		
	# of Responses	% of Responses
Agree	33	24%
Not Sure	89	66%
Disagree	14	10%

disagreed about this possibility. When students were asked to rate their confidence levels in their ability to achieve this function, they demonstrated an elevated level of uncertainty. Rating their confidence levels on a five-point scale (1=very confident to 5=no confidence), 55 percent of respondents were either very confident or somewhat confident at their abilities to perform this task, while the remaining 45 percent of respondents indicated that they were not sure or had little or no confidence in their abilities to perform this task.

Another question focused on the possibility of students obtaining articles needed for research through their home institution interlibrary loan service. The responses to this question, reported in table 7, demonstrated a very high degree of uncertainty in student use of interlibrary loan from abroad. Only 24 percent of respondents agreed that they could use their college or university's interlibrary loan service to get articles needed for research from Costa Rica, and the other three-quarters of respondents were unsure or disagreed about this possibility.

Respondents were also asked whether their home institution library makes available information about its services for study-abroad students. Results are represented in table 8. While 30 percent of respondents agreed that their college

or university library makes this information available, the remaining 70 percent were either unsure or disagreed that this information was available.

Last, respondents were asked to rate their confidence levels in getting help from someone from their home institution library, if they had a question while studying in Costa Rica. See table 9 for a complete breakdown of the results. While 48 percent of respondents expressed some level of confidence in their ability to do so, the remaining 52 percent were either unsure or had little or no confidence in their ability to successfully contact someone from their home institution library who could help them.

<b>TABLE 8</b> <b>Responses to the Statement:</b> <b>My college/university library makes</b> <b>available information about its</b> <b>services for study abroad students:</b> <b>(n = 138)</b>		
	# of Responses	% of Responses
Agree	42	30%
Not Sure	64	47%
Disagree	32	23%

<b>TABLE 9</b> <b>Confidence Levels about the</b> <b>Following Statement: If I have</b> <b>a question regarding any aspect</b> <b>of utilizing my college/university</b> <b>library while I am in Costa Rica,</b> <b>I know how to contact someone who</b> <b>could help me. (n = 137)</b>		
Confidence rating	# of Responses	% of Responses
1 (very confident)	41	29%
2	26	19%
3 (not sure)	35	26%
4	24	18%
5 (no confidence)	11	8%

### Open-ended Question Results

Three open-ended questions presented at the end of the survey provided qualitative responses that both supported the general study results and elicited an important breadth of information not possible in the closed-ended survey questions. The final question was simply a solicitation for additional comments. Results of the open-ended questions were recorded and analyzed for trends. In response to the first question, "What do you think some of the challenges are for study-abroad students in getting information for assignments that require some research while you are in Costa Rica?" the following recurring themes were noted:

- making decisions about whether to use a Costa Rican university library and language barriers and library system issues associated with this
  - limited and unreliable Internet
  - difficulty in getting books, though very limited physical libraries are available through programs
  - not knowing how to access databases and what is available through home institution libraries
  - finding someone to help with research questions

The second open-ended question, "In what ways will your research and information-gathering habits need to change while you're in Costa Rica?" yielded the following themes in responses:

- more patience and planning is needed
- more reliance on professors for assistance
  - more reliance on books and hard copy sources that are available from small program resource libraries
  - more reliance on online sources
  - using the computer to access materials takes more time—greater efficiency in searching is needed

The following themes in responses were noted in the last open-ended question, "What ways do you think your college or university library can better help study-abroad students?"

- communicate with students, in different venues, about resources and services available, both before departure and while the programs are in progress
  - provide full access and easy access to online resources
  - subscribe to more online resources
  - general satisfaction with home institution library from abroad

### Discussion

#### *Study Limitations*

Discussion of the study results must be tempered by an understanding of the study's limitations. First, the study represents only students studying abroad in one particular physical location in the world, and survey responses to some degree necessarily reflect student experiences relative to that particular location. For example, particularly in the qualitative responses, slowness and unreliability of the Internet was repeatedly mentioned either directly or indirectly as a factor that affected a student's ability to do research from abroad. This is a significant challenge that is important to consider for students in Monteverde, Costa Rica, and for our increasing numbers of study-abroad students in the Global South and other remote areas of the world; however, the majority of U.S. students (58.3%) studying abroad do so in Europe,<sup>31</sup> where information and communications infrastructure is significantly more developed and more easily accessed.

Perhaps both the study's greatest strength and greatest weakness are the demographics of the study population. The cross-section of respondents from multiple colleges and universities around the country, at different stages in their studies, and from different study-abroad programs, bring widely varying backgrounds and experiences to the survey responses. Such a diversity of respondents enables one to develop a broad view of study-abroad student engagement with home institution libraries that may be considered particularly rich. However,

it also restricts the level of analysis that would be possible with a more homogeneous population that, for example, originates from one institution and interacts with one university library system with clearly definable resources and services. Because respondents' experiences with their home institution libraries vary so greatly across institutions, only the broadest generalizations can be made from the data presented here, and the study can only hope to draw preliminary attention to issues that should be more methodically researched in the future.

As a user-centered study, this research focuses broadly on study-abroad students' own perceptions of home institution library services and resources available to them while abroad, making recommendations based on these perceptions. As such, it has been beyond the scope of this study to conduct any institutional-level analyses that might demonstrate more clearly the ways in which libraries may already be communicating with their study-abroad students. Further research with a different methodological approach would be required to develop a deeper level of understanding of institution-specific initiatives and their relative levels of success, and future research with this focus is recommended.

### *Reflections on Survey Results*

At home, the majority of study respondents are regular library patrons, and 60 percent use their library at least every two weeks, taking advantage of a variety of library resources and services. Almost three-quarters of respondents either agreed or were not sure that they would need to use their library's resources from Costa Rica, indicating that most of these study-abroad students perceive a definite or potential need to engage with their home institution libraries from Costa Rica. But what do these students know about how they can use their home institution libraries from abroad?

Both from home and from abroad, study respondents placed high value

on using library databases to locate articles and other resources for research, by selecting this option most frequently in two separate questions, from lists of library resources and services used both at home and from abroad. However, when study respondents were asked about the possibility of accessing library databases for research from abroad, 36 percent were not sure or disagreed about this possibility, and 45 percent were either not sure or had little to no confidence in their ability to perform this task. As just about every academic library provides a mechanism for its affiliates to access subscription library resources remotely, these percentages seem quite high. Why do so many of these study-abroad students lack awareness and confidence to perform this basic task? Have they not needed to access library subscription resources remotely from home, or are a percentage of students not making the connection that remote access to library subscription resources means access from wherever in the world they may be? Whatever the reason, this points to the need for information about remote access to library resources to be communicated clearly to study-abroad students before their departure. Access to subscription databases as well as electronic journal and book collections provide study-abroad students the basis for engaging in high-level research. Study-abroad students are involved increasingly in service learning and place-based education opportunities, and research produced by students has great potential to give something significant back to local host communities. In Monteverde, Costa Rica, for example, student research has contributed greatly toward sustainable community development efforts and understanding of a host of local issues, and the power of information to which American students have access is very highly valued.<sup>32</sup>

When asked about the possibility of using interlibrary loan from abroad to obtain articles needed for research, student respondents indicated a great deal

of uncertainty. While there are differing interlibrary loan policies across institutions, particularly for undergraduates, the fact that more than three-quarters of the respondents were not sure or disagreed about the possibility of using interlibrary loan from Costa Rica points to both a need and opportunity for libraries to proactively educate students about how they can use interlibrary loan from abroad. For example, Interlibrary Loan offices now routinely send electronic copies of journal articles to their patrons. Looking at the data more closely reveals that only about one-third of respondents, while at their home institutions, identified interlibrary loan from a list of library resources and services that they use. Low use of interlibrary loan at home then translates into a low level of understanding about using interlibrary loan from abroad. However, from abroad, interlibrary loan service may assume more importance; for instance, at the author's home institution a greater level of interlibrary loan service is available to distance students and study-abroad students than to students in residence. Students engaged in distance learning can request through interlibrary loan PDF files of journal articles to which the library holds print subscriptions and PDF files of chapters in books that the library owns. Use of interlibrary loan through electronic document delivery has great potential to increase the number of resources to which study-abroad students have access.

When asked about confidence levels in knowing how to contact someone at their home institution libraries with questions while abroad, over half the respondents indicated that they were unsure or had little to no confidence about how to do this, which was not entirely surprising given that respondents also indicated comparatively little use of e-mail and chat reference services while at home. These students may not be used to asking for help remotely, as they are generally not engaged in education from a distance. Although there are multiple venues to

receive assistance with questions through library Web sites, these services should be actively promoted specifically to study-abroad students, who may have any number of questions that are compounded by distance and other external and challenging factors.

Seventy percent of students were not sure or disagreed that their home institution library makes information available about its services for study-abroad students. Have we, as academic librarians, overlooked our increasing numbers of study-abroad students as unique library users, while focusing our attention on the needs of a wide variety of other specific user groups? While the internationalization of education has been recognized through library initiatives with international students, and through providing support to long-term programs housed in international locations, the needs of the short-term, primarily undergraduate, study-abroad student population have not yet been systematically and widely addressed.

### *Recommendations*

The fourth, and arguably most important, purpose of this study has been to use the data generated to provide insight into how we can better serve and respond to the distinctive needs of our study-abroad user populations. Repeatedly demonstrated in the survey responses is a significant degree of uncertainty and lack of confidence by the study population about how students can engage with their home libraries from abroad. Therefore, widespread promotion of library resources and services targeted to study-abroad students, and greater communication from librarians to study-abroad students and programs, are recommended as a result of this study. The qualitative survey responses revealed the following student suggestions as to how this can occur:

- "Tell (us) about services before we leave."
- "Make sure there are ways of contacting librarians by e-mail."

- “Have a workshop about library options and how databases operate.”
- “Maybe there should be a (Web) page for abroad students.”
- “Let students know how to access material overseas.”
- “(Libraries) can assign people to be correspondents with students abroad who will help with research.”
- “Maybe give us a handout with helpful resources.”
- “I think the library should coordinate with the study-abroad office to inform students of their options for library use while abroad.”

Survey respondent suggestions cover a range of important communication venues and, as user-driven suggestions, bear significant consideration. In addition, building collaborative relationships with individuals and units across campus who are engaged in education abroad would enable incorporation of library information in a variety of venues. For example, offices for international education and libraries have not traditionally collaborated; however, such an enhanced relationship could enable inclusion of important library information into study-abroad orientation packets, a librarian being invited to speak at a study-abroad orientation meeting, or a librarian being invited to a department meeting. Collaboration with administrators of specific study-abroad programs could lead to a greater understanding of library research possibilities from abroad that could then be incorporated into course and program design from the outset. Collaboration with faculty responsible for teaching study-abroad courses and programs could lead to course pedagogy that is conducive to library usage from abroad. As in the case of distance learning, faculty often are unaware of how the library can support their courses; for example, use

of electronic reserves from abroad may provide faculty a venue for distributing necessary course readings. With increasing library liaison programs and greater communication between libraries and academic departments, unprecedented possibilities exist to extend established relationships to include librarian connections with specific study-abroad courses.

### Conclusion

Students engaged in short-term study-abroad programs face challenges in interfacing with their home institution libraries from abroad that warrant consideration of this distinct user group by academic librarians. To date, little empirical research has been done that focuses on understanding student engagement with their home institution libraries from abroad, and this study has attempted to begin to fill that gap. Data presented suggest that there is a need for study-abroad students to receive information about library resources and services, in a systematized fashion and in a number of venues. While some libraries are already providing this information to their students who study abroad, there are opportunities for all libraries to promote themselves more proactively to our growing and diverse study-abroad populations. With students traveling to more far-reaching locations and engaging in different kinds of active learning experiences, the types of information and research support that study-abroad students require is continually changing. As librarians work more closely with these students and programs, we will better understand library and information issues and challenges for our increasing numbers of students studying abroad, resulting in an increased level of service for this growing user group.

**APPENDIX I****Survey for Students Currently in Study-Abroad Programs in Costa Rica**

This survey is being conducted by a faculty librarian from the University of Vermont as part of a multiphase research project. Its intent is to learn about your information needs and challenges, as students coming from North American colleges and universities, while you are studying abroad in Costa Rica.

The survey should take about 10 minutes to complete. Thanks very much for your participation.

Please read the Information Sheet attached to the back of this survey before completing the survey.

**Part 1:**

1. I will be in Costa Rica with my Study-Abroad Program for:

less than 2 weeks

2–4 weeks

1 to 2 months

2 to 4 months

4 to 6 months

more than 6 months

2. My college or university can be described as:

small undergraduate college with under 2,000 students

undergraduate college with 2,000–5,000 students

college or university with 5,000–10,000 students

college or university with more than 10,000 students

3. What subject area(s) is(are) your Study-Abroad Program focusing on?

4. What is your major?

5. I am a:

Freshman  Sophomore  Junior  Senior  Graduate Student

**Part II:**

6. When I am at my college or university, I use my college or university library: (Choose the one best answer)

more than once a week

every 1–2 weeks

a couple times a month

a couple times a semester

once a semester

less than once a semester

7. Choose as many answers as apply:

When I am at my college or university, I do the following in my college or university library, or through the library's Web site:

use the library catalog to locate books in the library



- use Reserve materials, either on electronic reserve or in the library
- use the library's databases to locate articles and other resources for my research
- use the computers in the library for Internet access
- use the computers in the library to access Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and other programs
- get assistance from reference staff with research
- use Interlibrary Loan to request books or articles that my library doesn't own
- use e-mail reference service or chat reference service to get assistance with research or library questions
- Other (please identify) \_\_\_\_\_

8. I will need to use my library's resources while I'm in Costa Rica.

Agree  Not sure  Disagree

Comments:

9. Choose as many answers as apply:

I believe I will use (or I already have used) the following services from my college or university library while I'm in Costa Rica:

- Library catalog
- Databases for locating journal articles and other resources for my research
- Electronic reserves
- e-mail or chat reference service
- Interlibrary Loan
- e-mail communication with specific librarian
- Other (please identify) \_\_\_\_\_
- None

From this list, rank the top 3 that you are most likely to use:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

10. It is possible to access my college or university library's subscription databases for research (such as InfoTrac, Academic Search Premier, ProQuest, etc.) from Costa Rica.

Agree  Not sure  Disagree

11. Rate your level of confidence in your ability to access your college or university's subscription databases from Costa Rica.

1 = very confident 3 = not sure 5 = no confidence

Very confident  1  2  3  4  5 No confidence

12. It is possible to get copies of articles that I may need for research while I'm in Costa Rica, through my college or university library's Interlibrary Loan service.

Agree  Not sure  Disagree

13. My college or university library makes available information about its services for study-abroad students.

\_\_\_ Agree \_\_\_ Not sure \_\_\_ Disagree

14. Rate your level of confidence in the following: If I have a question regarding any aspect of using my college or university library while I am in Costa Rica, I know how to contact someone who could help me.

1 = very confident 3 = not sure 5 = no confidence

Very confident \_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_ 5 No confidence

**Please answer the following open-ended questions:**

15. What do you think some of the challenges are for study-abroad students in getting information for assignments that require some research while you are in Costa Rica?

16. In what ways will your research and information-gathering habits need to change while you're in Costa Rica?

17. What ways do you think your college or university library can better help study-abroad students?

18. Please provide additional comments regarding any aspect of this survey.

Thanks very much for completing this survey!

## Notes

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8. Ibid.
9. Lisa Donatelli and others, "Technology and Education Abroad," chap. 8 in *NAFSA's Guide to Education Abroad for Advisors and Administrators*, 3rd ed., eds. Joseph Brockington, William Hoffa, and Patricia Martin (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2005).
10. Jane Edwards and others, "Education Abroad at the Beginning of the Twenty First Century," chap. 1 in *NAFSA's Guide to Education Abroad for Advisors and Administrators*, 3rd ed., eds. Joseph Brockington, William Hoffa, and Patricia Martin (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2005).
11. Nicole Branan, "Lending a Helping Hand," *International Educator* 17, no. 1 (2008). Available online at [www.nafsa.org/File/\\_jan08\\_cover\\_story.pdf](http://www.nafsa.org/File/_jan08_cover_story.pdf). [Accessed 21 March 2008].
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13. Joseph Brockington, William Hoffa, and Patricia Martin, eds., *NAFSA's Guide to Education Abroad for Advisors and Administrators*, 3rd ed. (Washington, D.C.: NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2005).
14. Eugene Engeldinger, "Bibliographic Instruction for Study-Abroad Programs," *College and Research Libraries News* 46, no. 8 (1985):395–98.
15. Engeldinger, 395.
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Students and Language Preferences in Library Database Use," *Technical Services Quarterly* 24, no. 4: 1–13; Ann Curry and Deborah Copemar, "Reference Service to International Students: A Field Stimulation Research Study," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 31, no. 5: 409–20; Pamela Jackson, "Incoming International Students and the Library: A Survey," *Reference Services Review* 33, no. 2 (2005): 197–209.

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23. In the *Guidelines*, distance learning library services is defined as services that support programs "away from a main campus" or in the absence of one. The *Guidelines* indicate that this includes courses "in all post-secondary programs designated as: extension, extended, off-campus, extended campus, distance, distributed, open, flexible, franchising, virtual, synchronous, or asynchronous." Lack of specific mention of study abroad or internationalization of higher education anywhere in the *Guidelines* may be an omission worthy of consideration in future iterations.

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25. Ellysa Cahoy and Lesly Moyo, "Faculty Perspectives on E-Learners' Research Needs," *Journal of Library and Information Services in Distance Learning* 2, no. 5 (2005): 1–17.

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27. Maryelise Lamet and Mell Bolen, "Education Abroad in the Campus Context," chap. 4 in *NAFSA's Guide to Education Abroad for Advisors and Administrators*, 3rd ed., eds. Joseph Brockington, William Hoffa, and Patricia Martin (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2005).

28. *Rhythms in the Clouds: A Film about Biodiversity and Conservation in Monteverde, Costa Rica*, DVD, directed by Mark Wainwright and Alexander Villegas (2006; Costa Rica: Sonidos e Imágenes Naturales de Costa Rica S.A.).

29. These local institutions provide the infrastructure from which to run the study-abroad programs; each of these three institutions have small libraries with very small, focused physical collections and some access to computers with relatively slow Internet connections.

30. It seems evident that a number of students interpreted the e-mail and chat reference option to simply mean e-mail use in general; in terms of electronic reserves, none of the programs surveyed were making use of electronic reserves to the researcher's knowledge, and therefore the associated high number of responses is unexplainable.

31. NAFSA: Association for International Educators, "Public Policy: Demographics for Study Abroad" (2008). Available online at [www.nafsa.org/public\\_policy.sec/study\\_abroad\\_2/demographics\\_of\\_study](http://www.nafsa.org/public_policy.sec/study_abroad_2/demographics_of_study). [Accessed 4 May 2008].

32. The high value placed on access to scientific and scholarly information by the local Monteverde research community was consistently noted through interviews with the local research community, which were conducted as part of the author's larger sabbatical research project.

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