

# *AIFS Study Abroad*

## *Alumni Outcomes*

A longitudinal study of personal, intercultural and career development based on a survey of our alumni from 1990 to 2017

*Volume 2*

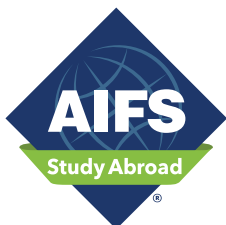




*Sir Cyril Taylor*

*1935-2018*

In remembrance of Sir Cyril Taylor, GBE, founder and former Chairman of the American Institute For Foreign Study.



*Published 2018  
American Institute For Foreign Study  
(AIFS), Stamford, CT, USA*

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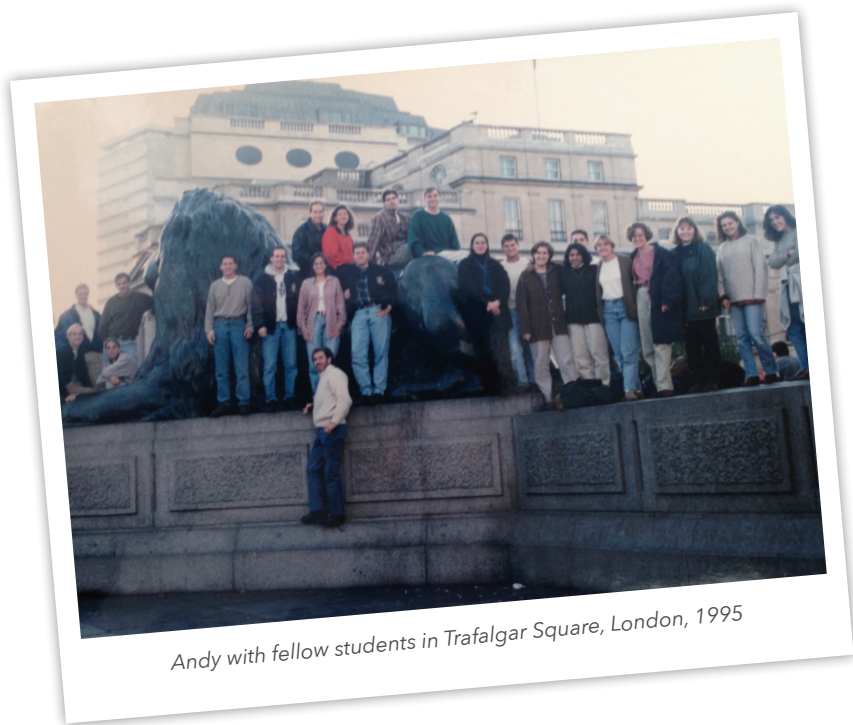
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Andy with fellow students in Trafalgar Square, London, 1995

“ Studying abroad was a valuable asset in helping me develop skills for working in a diverse environment that I could not have achieved by staying on campus. Those skills have always been transferable to whatever role I have assumed throughout my career. My study abroad experience was often a topic of conversation when meeting with potential employers, and I believe it gave me an edge as a job candidate. ”

- Andy Scharber, London 1995  
Target Corporation

# Introduction

Examining the impact of our programming is central to our mission at AIFS. With the recent increase in political, racial and cultural conflict in the U.S. and beyond, AIFS believes that this commitment to examine our students' outcomes is not only important, but essential. Knowing how our alumni respond about the impact of our programs is vital to our continued program assessment. In this second phase of our Alumni Outcomes Survey, we offer information reported by more than 1,000 participants of the past five years, categorized by Cultural Understanding and World View, Personal Growth & Values, and Career & Professional Development. We now add this group to the respondents from 2012 and have a set of data with information from more than 2,600 alumni. With this second survey we can also report on the changes in responses over time of a group of over 400 alumni - comparing their perceptions of the impact of studying abroad now with their responses from five years ago.

This report addresses trends that point to specific points of program impact and offers some thoughts on how we will consider them in our program design for the short and long term. It is important to understand how our alumni interpret their AIFS experience as we continue to serve U.S. students and their institutions by providing opportunities for learning abroad - through our semester, year-long and summer programs at nationally-recognized host universities, internship placements and customized faculty-led programming.

## SURVEY DESIGN

The first survey launched for this project in 2012 resulted in nearly 1600 responses from alumni who had participated in AIFS programs between 1990 and 2010. In this second round (conducted entirely online), we surveyed program participants from 2011 to 2015, resulting in an addition of 1045 new alumni respondents to our data set. We also sought follow-up responses from the 2012 group, resulting in 414 second-time respondents. We are proud to share the findings of a longitudinal study with such a significant number of the same subjects. Looking to the future, it is our intention to examine the quantitative responses as well as conduct interviews with alumni who are at various stages in their lives post-study abroad. With information on how alumni regard their experience over time, we will look at patterns and themes from which it may be possible to formulate a model of the impact study abroad has over one's lifetime.



86% of AIFS alumni agree that studying abroad with AIFS was the most meaningful experience of their undergraduate education.



## TODAY'S CONTEXT FOR EDUCATION ABROAD

With increasing pressure on higher education to produce career-ready graduates, as well as an imperative for increased cultural understanding in the U.S. and beyond, study abroad has a significant purpose in this early part of the 21st Century. While the massification of higher education in the last half of the 20th century combined with the changing/growing needs of the labor market have secured employability as a desirable outcome for higher education (Matherly & Tillman, 2015), the field of education abroad continues to examine how an international experience builds transferable skills for the workplace.

“Seventy-eight percent of U.S. employers agreed that all students — regardless of chosen field of study — should gain intercultural skills and an understanding of societies outside the United States.”

*From the study commissioned by the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) titled It Takes More Than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success (Hart Research Associates, 2013, p. 9).*

Now more than ever before, having skills and traits that model versatility and adaptability are key. In this global workplace, an employee may be expected to succeed in a multitude of environments. A number of studies point to projections that a shifting and complex set of skills will be needed in this age of digital and automated jobs; this makes the attention paid to the outcomes of an international experience both welcomed and critical. A recent Oxford University study predicts that 47 percent of today's jobs will become automated in the next 25 years. It may seem counterintuitive, yet the authors claim that “to win the race. . . [workers] will have to acquire creative and social skills” (Frey & Osborne, 2013, p. 45). Higher Education cannot ignore the fast pace at which change is taking place, nor the new skills that are needed for career competence. Education abroad is a path to fulfilling these objectives.

Along with knowledge of language and culture, students returning from abroad affirm that the opportunity for developing transferable skills is a core aspect of international learning. This examination of personal growth, intercultural learning and the development of skills as the result of studying abroad is a focus of our study. The most recent Open Doors Survey (Institute of International Education, 2017) reports that 325,339 U.S. students studied abroad in

2015-16. This is a slight annual increase, yet it means that only an estimated 10% of U.S. students include a learning abroad experience in their undergraduate education. AIFS research holds significant importance in describing the student outcomes of an international experience at a time when initiatives such as IIE's Generation Study Abroad strive to increase this number. Understanding the impact of the experience for students contributes to the understanding of its importance in higher education internationalization and beyond.

### **AIFS students report development of transferable skills abroad, high levels of cultural engagement, and career impact.**

Students report that study abroad impacted their lives in number of different and positive ways. The development of transferable skills (i.e., initiative, flexibility, problem-solving, communication) propelled by the transformational experience of learning abroad has relevance in a multitude of workplace settings. The transferable skills reported by employers as having the highest value overlap with many of those fundamental to defining intercultural competence. Employer surveys commonly point to skills such as teamwork, problem-solving and open-mindedness as being among the most valued (British Council, 2013; Hart Research Associates, 2015; NACE, 2017b). The ability to build, recognize and articulate one's intercultural skill set has been relevant with regard to one's employability.

The Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) identifies study abroad as a high-impact practice, which means it contributes to increased student retention rates and engagement levels for the institution (Kuh, O'Donnel, & Reed, 2013). The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, 2015) explains that “High-Impact Practices (HIPs) represent enriching educational experiences that can be life-changing. They typically demand considerable time and effort, facilitate learning outside of the classroom, require meaningful interactions with faculty and other students, encourage collaboration with diverse others, and provide frequent and substantive feedback” (p. 1). There are two critical features of engagement which contribute to the quality of the collegiate experience. One is the amount of time and effort students put into their academic and extra-curricular activities. The second is how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum to get students to participate (NACE, 2017b). AIFS is proud to collaborate with sending institutions in the U.S. as well as the host institutions abroad in their efforts to support students studying abroad.

“Today, colleges and universities are asked to prepare tomorrow’s citizens not for a single career but for a life of unpredictable velocity and volatility. Simultaneously, they are asked to produce graduates who are capable of communication across borders and citizens who are invested with the capacity to navigate a transparent, permeable world.”

(American Council on Education, 2011, p. 6)

### DO EMPLOYERS VALUE STUDY ABROAD?

Studies of employers’ most-desired skills show how study abroad outcomes may contribute to the needs of the workforce. A number of recent studies indicate that indeed, employers seek students with knowledge about other cultures, intercultural skills and the ability to adapt to a diverse workplace setting (British Council, 2013; Hart Research Associates, 2015; Molony, Sowter, & Potts, 2011). Yet, there are inconsistencies among the surveys of U.S. employers as well. For example, with 260 employers reporting from around the U.S. in a National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2014), study abroad held very little influence as a desired student attribute. Still, 77 percent of employers scan a student’s resumé for evidence of ability to work on a team, 71 percent seek problem-solving skills and 62 percent seek flexibility/adaptability (p. 32) – all of which are frequently reported by students returning from abroad. This gap – in employers not understanding the outcomes of an international experience – points to work that needs to be done in the field of International Education to communicate the impact of study abroad. The NACE Career Competencies (NACE, 2017a) developed after extensive research among employers, offer what is considered important for career readiness:

1. Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
2. Oral/Written Communications
3. Teamwork/Collaboration
4. Digital Technology
5. Leadership
6. Professionalism/Work Ethic
7. Career Management
8. Global/Intercultural Fluency

Nearly all of these skills align with the findings of the AIFS Alumni Outcomes project, and point to an important intersection of intercultural skills and

transferable skills being sought in the workplace. NACE intends for these defining competencies to serve as shared objectives between higher education and the working world. Talking about these competencies with students, faculty, administration and employers helps promote a common vocabulary and recognition of established competencies (para. 4)

**The top transferable skills reported by employers overlap considerably with the skills that help define intercultural competence – for example: flexibility, open-mindedness, empathy.**

Internationalization efforts in higher education have intercultural competence emerging as a central focus and a desired student outcome (Deardorff & Jones, 2012). Intercultural competence may be initially learned in the context of a single culture, but it’s ultimately one’s set of skills that may be applied across cultures that has the greatest value. That includes knowing where differences exist across all cultures and enabling one to identify, explain and navigate through them into the future. Those same skills are also utilized in diverse settings once returning home. This process requires guidance; the AIFS approach is for our Resident Directors and staff to both challenge and support students in this process. UNESCO (UNESCO, 2013) addresses intercultural competence as “a new kind of literacy” and states: “Acquiring intercultural competencies is a thrilling challenge since no one is, naturally, called upon to understand the values of others. This challenge is a unique opportunity in the history of humankind” (p. 5).

### AIFS ALUMNI AS GLOBAL CITIZENS

The AIFS Alumni Outcomes project measures factors that comprise the concept of global citizenship: a way of thinking that engages with global issues or with different cultures (even in a local setting), cultural self-awareness and awareness of others; cultural empathy, principled decision-making and participation in social and political community processes (Green, 2012). There is considerable complexity in expecting undergraduates to blend the discipline-specific knowledge they have acquired with more implicit knowledge such as social norms, values and cultural appropriateness. AIFS is committed to including these as part of our holistic programmatic approach. We believe that with guidance, modeling and mentorship by our staff – from the Field representatives whom students may first meet on campus, to our Admissions Officers, and of course our on-site staff around the world – this important aspect of cultural learning will continue to serve as central to our mission.

\*For citation sources, see Reference list on page 35

# Executive Summary

The alumni surveys we conducted in 2012 and 2017 show remarkable consistency over the five-year period. AIFS alumni continue to report that their study abroad experience resulted in significant impact in key areas of personal and professional development. Once again, 86% of respondents reported that studying abroad with AIFS was 'the most meaningful experience of my undergraduate education.' We are happy to know, that even over a significant period of time, studying abroad on an AIFS program remains an important event in the lives of our alumni.

With nearly 1,600 responses in our 2012 survey and another 1,000 new responses in 2017, this data provides a set of key indicators in viewing the long-term and sustaining impact that AIFS has made in the lives of its college program participants since it was founded in 1964.

The multi-faceted survey we created in 2012 captures self-reported information on the impact of the AIFS experience on Cultural Understanding & World View; Professional & Career Development; and Personal Growth & Values. In this second phase, we had 414 repeat respondents from the 2012 study which allow us to begin to track changes in their responses and monitor their perception of the impact of their experience over time.

Key outcomes of the survey include:

- 90%** of respondents agreed that studying abroad contributed to their "willingness to counter stereotypes about other cultures."
- 85%** said that participating in an AIFS program "broadened the range of sectors in which I am interested in working."
- 58%** of respondents agreed that studying abroad contributed to "developing skills and intercultural competencies which contributed to obtaining my first job after graduation" and **86%** report that it contributed to "my ability to adapt in diverse workplace environments."

There are additional significant findings from our survey:

## CAREER IMPACT

While students may not all have enhancing their career as a top reason to study abroad, alumni report positive impact on numerous facets to their career and professional development. Seventy-nine percent report that study abroad impacted "the importance I place on working in a field I find interesting," and 81% believe that it contributed to "the importance I place on having personal fulfillment in my work."

Studying abroad also has some impact on career choice and related considerations. Forty-four percent of alumni report that studying abroad contributed to their choice of field of employment; 48% reported that as a result of studying abroad they had "sought a job with an international/intercultural aspect," while 57% have been asked to speak about their study abroad experience in a job interview.

Gabriel Benedict studied in London in 2011 and after graduating in 2013, he began working at PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP in New York City. After passing the CPA exam, he transferred to PWC's London office. Gabe writes: "I currently work near Trafalgar Square in London focusing in fast growth and Small/Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the London region. Studying abroad definitely broadened my view, including career options, and greatly improved my flexibility in the workforce; yet what I would champion most is how it helped me grow personally in my open-mindedness and my ability to adapt to change. That is the most important and lasting personal benefit."



## ACADEMIC IMPACT

While in 2012, 32% reported their “desire to study abroad influenced their selection of undergraduate college”, that number increased to 40% in the 2017 survey. Those students who did so report a greater impact on nearly every developmental factor and a significantly more positive experience abroad. This is an interesting correlation which continues to point to the need to consider both outreach to high school advisors and to universities understanding the importance of their study abroad opportunities and making certain they are communicated to prospective students. This correlation also points to what is likely the positive pre-disposition of students who already are thinking about international experience in their high school years and who may have already traveled outside the United States with their families.

In addition, 66% of alumni reported that studying abroad contributed to their “desire to further my education (e.g., post-graduate degree), and 28% indicated that it has influenced their choice of college major.

## IMPACT ON PERSONAL GROWTH & VALUES

As we conduct this survey over time, our findings show that study abroad often carries its impact well beyond the immediate return home. With 96% of alumni reporting that studying abroad resulted in a “better understanding of myself and my values” and 81% that it impacted “the importance I put on developing my skills and talents,” it becomes clear that many consider studying abroad a transformative experience.

Eighty-seven percent report an impact on their “desire for more diverse friendships and social networks,” and 80% say it impacted their “willingness to work hard and sacrifice in order to do well in school or in my job.”



of AIFS alumni agree that studying abroad resulted in a better understanding of themselves and their values

“ Studying abroad had such a huge impact on where I have gone and what I have done - it completely changed my life. After I studied abroad in Limerick, Ireland with AIFS, I got two visas to live in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, living with friends and working. I have been married for 11 years to my Irish husband (whom I met studying abroad) in Waterford, Ireland. I am currently an academic advisor at a university in Seattle and anytime a student mentions the opportunity to study abroad, I tell them to do everything they can possibly do to make it happen. ”

- Sara McDermott, Limerick, Ireland, 2003-2004



Sara (on the left) with housemates from Ireland, Germany, Finland and Switzerland

# Summary Findings

## LONGITUDINAL/FOLLOW-UP ALUMNI FINDINGS

The 414 repeat respondents allow us to start in examining participants' perceptions of the impact of their experience changes over time. This group offered information in our Phase I study in 2012 and again in 2017; we share some of our findings here.

Overall, the mean scores for nearly all factors remain very consistent between the 2012 and the 2017 responses. The perceived impact of studying abroad remains strong and, with exception to a slight decline\* in the assessment that study abroad was the most meaningful experience of their undergraduate education, all of the significant changes between 2012 and 2017 were in a positive direction. Given that the study abroad experience remains such a positive influence on alumni, and there was a significant increase in all attitude measures, we interpret the slight decline in overall meaningfulness to be the result of alumni's increasing their evaluation of other aspects of their undergraduate experience. If correct, this suggests that alumni recollections of the impact of their undergraduate experience are dynamic and merit further study in the future.

Alumni assessment of how studying abroad impacted them remains strong & and many factors indicate the perceptions are increasing slightly over time. The chart below is intended to provide at-a-glance results, indicating whether the change in reported impact increased or decreased from the 2012 to the 2017 responses. Note that many changes are small yet informative in terms of direction or overall consistency. For complete data tables, please refer to the appendices.

### CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING & WORLD VIEW FACTORS

#### An increase in the strong & positive impact reported from 2012 to 2017

My participation in an AIFS program contributed to:

- My knowledge about another culture
- Developing my awareness of political, economic or social events around the world
- My interest in global and transnational issues
- My involvement with a global issue
- My involvement with a civic cause

### PERSONAL GROWTH & VALUES FACTORS

#### The strong & positive impact reported in 2012 was unchanged in 2017

My participation in an AIFS program contributed to:

- A better understanding of myself and my values
- My sense of confidence in new situations or when meeting new people
- My ability to be more flexible and open-minded
- My tolerance of ambiguity in a variety of situations
- My ability to be independent
- My ability to take initiative

See appendices for complete data by category.

\*2012 average = 1.72; 2017 average = 1.91, where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree

## SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP FACTORS

### The strong & positive impact reported in 2012 was unchanged in 2017

My participation in an AIFS program contributed to:

- My ability to accept differences in other people
- My desire for more diverse friendships and social networks
- Strengthened relationships with my family members
- Strengthened relationships with my friends



## CAREER & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FACTORS

### No reported impact in 2012 and unchanged in 2017

My participation in an AIFS program contributed to:

- My choice of work sector (e.g., non-profit, private or public)
- My choice of field of employment
- Helping clarify my professional goals



### Slight decline in the moderately positive impact reported in 2012 & 2017

My participation in an AIFS program contributed to:

- My willingness to work hard and sacrifice in order to do well in school or in my job
- Developing my ability to understand an organization's culture



### The strong & positive impact reported in 2012 was unchanged in 2017

My participation in an AIFS program contributed to:

- The importance I put on development my skills and talents
- My desire to further my education (ex: post-graduate degree)
- My ability to adapt to a diverse workplace
- Developing my skills and intercultural competencies which contributed to obtaining my first job after graduation
- The importance I place on working in a field that I find interesting
- The importance I place on having personal fulfillment in my work



#### Change in Reported Impact from 2012 to 2017:

↑ Increase    ↓ Decrease    ↔ No change\*

*\*Non-significant differences are reported as "No change"*

See appendices for complete data by category.

## GENERAL FINDINGS

### Impact of Study Abroad on Employment Opportunities

Several new questions were formulated for the 2017 survey regarding employment. Forty-eight percent of alumni report that their study abroad experience influenced seeking a job with a cross-cultural aspect; 75.3% report that it broadened their willingness to work in other locations; and 50.9% that it broadened their willingness to work in other business sectors.

### Other career-related findings:

**66%** of the 2017 alumni report that they were asked to speak about their study abroad experience in job interviews.

**40%** report that they were told in the interview that study abroad set them apart from other candidates when being selected for the job.

**24%** percent reported being given a job assignment as a result of their study abroad experience.

### Impact in English vs Non-English-Speaking Country

While respondents from non-English-speaking countries reported a greater increase in their ability to speak a foreign language and overall knowledge of another culture, there was no other impact factors with significant difference based on whether the student studied in an English or non-English speaking country. This was true of both the 2012 and 2017 survey.

### Gender Differences

Overall, women tend to attribute a stronger overall impact to studying abroad than do men. One exception is that men attribute a greater improvement in speaking a foreign language after studying abroad. This finding however may be explained by a slightly larger proportion of men studying in a foreign speaking country and as a consequence, understandably, report a slightly greater attributed improvement in language skills. If one compares men and women who study in a foreign speaking culture, men still report a greater improvement but in this case the difference is not significant. The other notable gender difference is where men attribute a greater importance to available study abroad programs when choosing a college. One inference might be that although men study abroad less than women, men that want to study abroad prior to starting college were potentially more discerning of available programs than were women. These findings are consistent between 2012 and 2017 study populations.

### Perceived Impact by Program Year

There is considerable variation within each question across program years but overall there is a trend towards alumni reporting an increased impact over time with exception to the overall meaningfulness of study abroad in alumni's undergraduate program. It is interesting to observe, however, that a means plot of program years suggests other factors, potentially many other factors may be moderating group perceptions. For example, there is a distinctive decline of reported impact in the 2001 study abroad group, and then in 2007-08 there begins a multi-year trend towards increasing the perceived impact of study abroad. Looking at 2001, many of those respondents experienced the events of 9/11 while abroad; and it is also noted that the severe economic downturn in 2008 caused great uncertainty for many. However, further research is required to test some of these hypotheses, including how major national or international events impact students' experience abroad.

### Timing of Measurement Effect

Students who study abroad as freshman or as sophomores report a significantly stronger impact of the experience while they are still in college compared to after they graduate. (Note that 26% of the sample went abroad as sophomores but only 2.3% as freshmen). For juniors that travelled abroad the only significantly elevated pre-graduation score related to the experience helping them to define their professional goals. There were no differences, pre/post graduation for seniors that travelled abroad. A future research question will be to examine differences for freshman with a larger sample size and to determine if this finding is also evident when using other measures of cross-cultural competency.

### Prior Travel with Family or Other Group Before Study Abroad

The survey contained questions seeking information about previous travel outside of North America (and whether with family or an academic trip). There was no indication that this influenced alumni perceptions of the impact of studying abroad.

### Impact of Engagement Abroad

As with the 2012 study, being engaged in some form of activity (internship, community service or student club) positively and significantly impacted the students' study abroad experience. Involvement in even one of these indicates a stronger reported impact of the study abroad experience. Community service and 'involvement with a community organization' were combined to examine impact. Of the three remaining activities, internships, community engagement and student clubs, community engagement/service is significantly more impactful than the other two. It is also noteworthy that we are talking about incremental improvement. The overall level of student involvement between 2012 and 2017 is approximately the same. Only one-quarter of respondents indicated that they had participated in any of these activities (see section on "Programming Considerations" for discussion on this topic).

### Choice of College

In the 2017 study, 40% of alumni reported that their "desire to study abroad influenced [their] selection of undergraduate college" moderately to strongly. This is a significant increase over the 31.5% who reported the same levels of influence in 2012.



*“ I can still remember one of my first weeks in Granada when I was walking back to my apartment at dusk, lost and confused. After finding my way home, there was such a feeling of independence and accomplishment that gave me the confidence to travel to other countries and explore before returning home. To this day, the confidence I gained is part of who I am and has helped me any time I have experienced a new situation, job, moved to a new city, or met new people. I am more open to new things and comfortable experiencing them because of my time abroad with AIFS. ”*

- Bethany Smith Gerber, Granada, Spain, 1992



# Program Impact

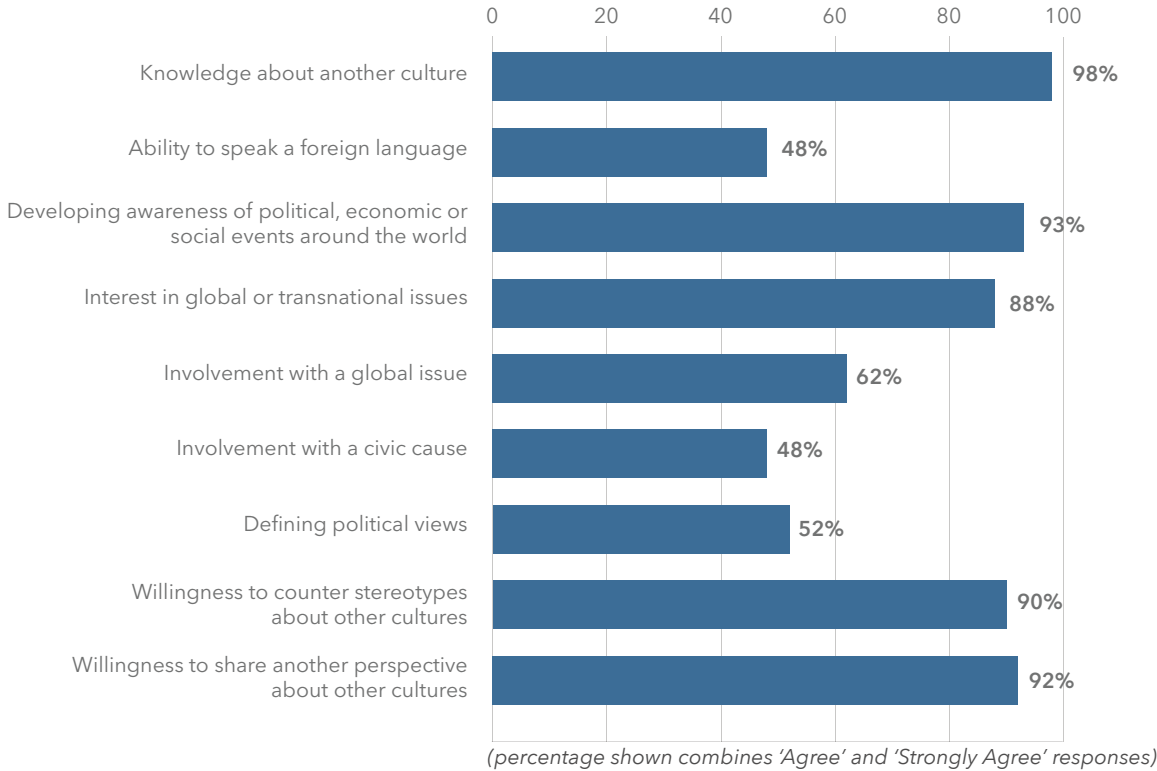
The descriptive data presented here show impactful – and positive – outcomes for participants of AIFS programs. The majority of the respondents perceived their international experience to have intra- and interpersonal benefits as well as positive impact on their communication skills and their employability due to the development of transferable skills.

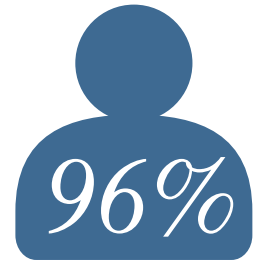
98%

of AIFS alumni agree that studying abroad contributed to their knowledge about another culture

## IMPACT ON CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING & WORLD VIEW

My participation in an AIFS Study Abroad Program contributed to:



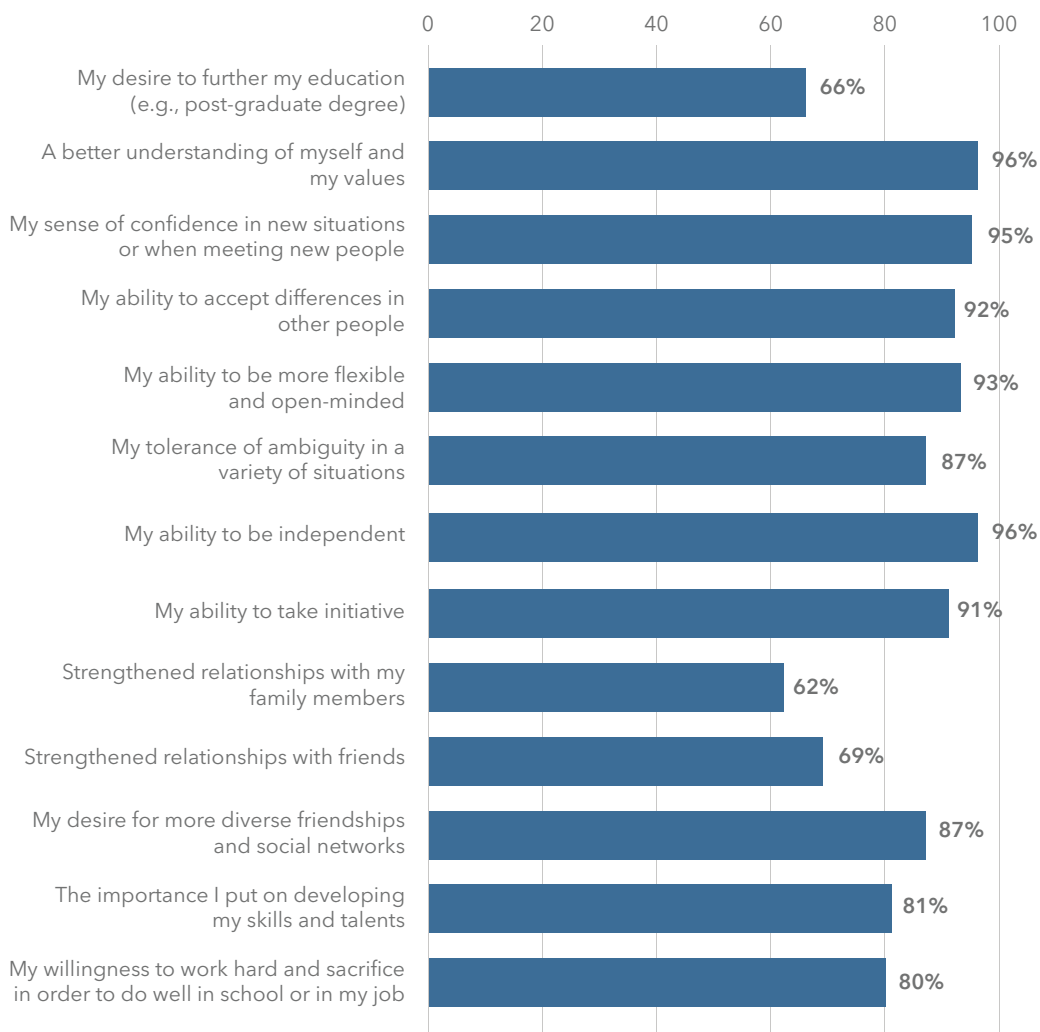


of AIFS alumni agree that studying abroad contributed to their ability to be independent

### PERSONAL GROWTH & VALUES

The impact of studying abroad is also overwhelmingly positive on personal growth and values factors. Even the lowest rate of agreement in this category - the impact of strengthening family relationships - still represents close to two-thirds of the respondents at 62% agreement.

My participation in an AIFS Study Abroad Program has contributed to:



81%

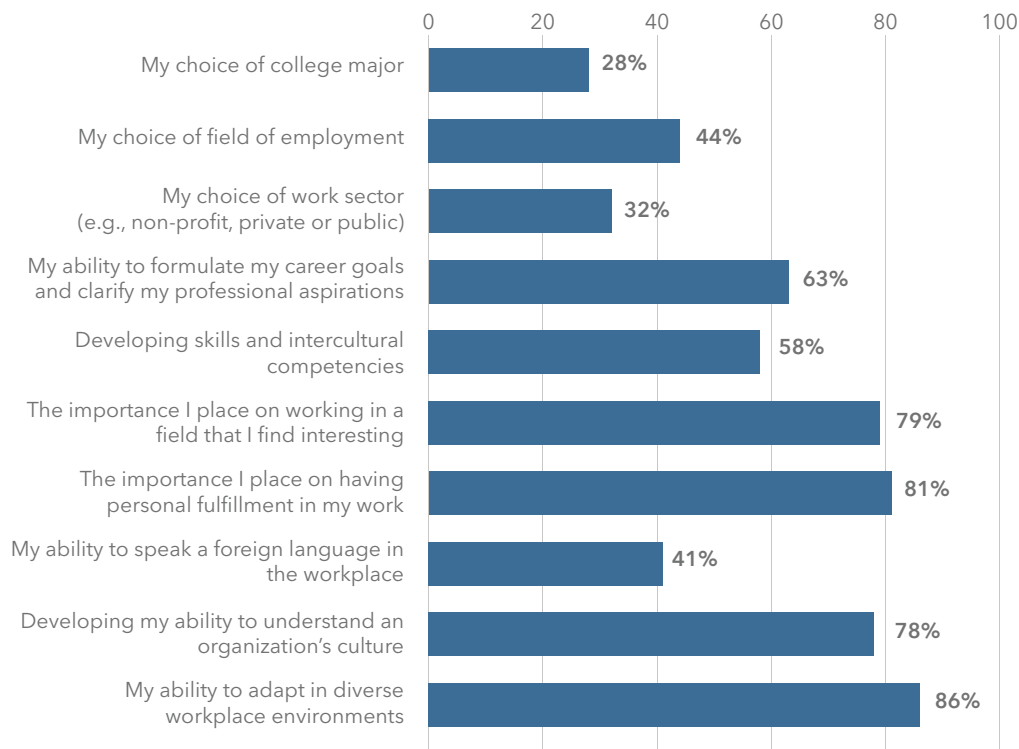
of AIFS alumni said studying abroad contributed to the importance they place on having personal fulfillment in their work

**CAREER & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Alumni give clear affirmation to the value of studying abroad with regard to career impact. Over half (55%) of alumni reported “developing skills and intercultural competencies which contributed to obtaining my first job after graduation”, and 86% reported that it impacted their “ability to adapt in diverse workplace environments”.

While many students return from abroad with a broadened set of interests for their professional lives, there is also an impact on intrapersonal considerations - with an inward focus on how to match interests and skill sets. A large majority of respondents reported that studying abroad contributed to the importance they place in finding interesting and fulfilling work (79%) and the “importance I place on having personal fulfillment in my work” (81%).

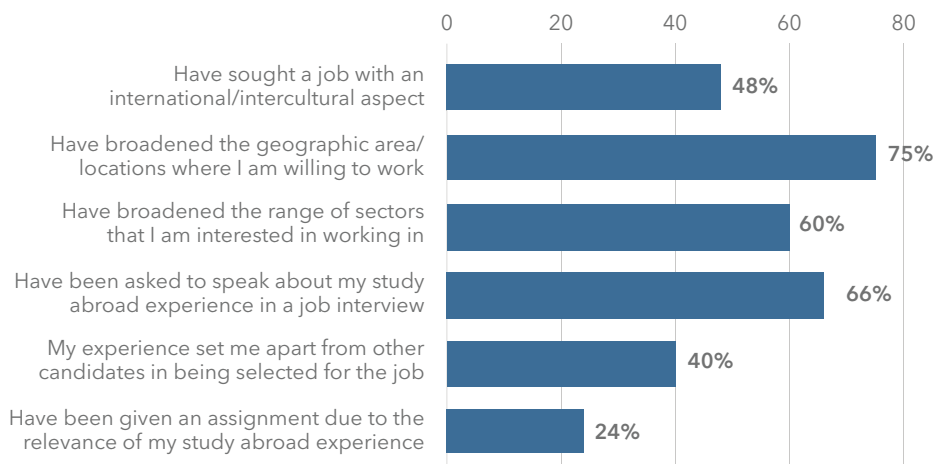
**My participation in an AIFS Study Abroad Program contributed to:**



(percentage shown combines 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' responses)

**NEW CAREER-RELATED QUESTIONS ASKED IN 2017 SURVEY:**

As a result of studying abroad, I:



(Percentage of YES responses are listed)

While studying abroad is not the only way to acquire knowledge of other cultures or awareness of world events, it certainly affords a 'first-hand' experience. The responses bode very strongly for the impact of AIFS programs, with nearly complete consensus on gaining knowledge about another culture and developing awareness of world events and interest in global issues.

**SURVEY BACKGROUND**

In 2012, AIFS sought to survey its alumni across all countries and program lengths. Using 1990 as a starting year (due to data storage), the survey was sent to over 19,000 alumni resulting in 1,584 responses (an 8% return rate). In 2017, the survey was sent to 20,207 alumni from the years 2011 through 2016 with 1045 respondents (a 5% return rate).

In 2017, the survey was also sent to all 2012 survey respondents resulting in 414 repeat respondents, as well as to the previous non-respondents from the 1990-2010 period adding 100 'new' respondents from this era. The cumulative total is now 2,729 alumni respondents since 1990.

The 5-page survey contained questions to establish the year abroad, program location, term length, class year, accommodation type, academic profile including language study, internship or service learning, and prior travel and language study. Optional biographic information was requested including race/ethnicity, highest level of education attained and current field of work. (Note that the survey was sent to some recent alumni who may still have been college students when responding).

As with all research involving human responses, there were limitations to the design of this study. AIFS alumni respond voluntarily to the survey, and those willing to do so may have a strong perceived value of their study abroad experience. The practice of self-reporting may also contribute to bias in the data.



of AIFS alumni have been asked to speak about their study abroad experience in a job interview



of AIFS alumni agree that studying abroad contributed to their ability to adapt in diverse workplace environments

# *AIFS Programming: Looking Forward in the 21st Century*

In its continual examination of the ever-changing field of education abroad, AIFS looks to its students, sending institutions, staff and advisory board, while watching current trends and unmet needs in order to modify and expand its programs. We know that the results in this new set of alumni data should impact our innovation and programming. In the list below, we look back to the ideas we proposed five years ago as well as look ahead for ways to focus our operations as we embark into the 21st century:

## **PROGRAMMING**

Our findings point to the importance of encouraging students to engage with the host culture. In the past few years, we have expanded the number of sites where students may opt to include a credit-bearing internship. While it takes careful planning, networking and preparation, our resident staff are committed to making these a successful experience for both students and those at the placement sites. Internship opportunities are available in many locations, some of them requiring previous language study. For a current list of internship options and locations, visit [www.aifsabroad.com/internships](http://www.aifsabroad.com/internships).

Volunteer opportunities are available to students in many locations, and AIFS continues to expand the types of opportunities available as well as increase the locations that offer volunteer options.

Many U.S. students choosing to study abroad continue to focus on traditional destinations in the UK and Europe. However, there is a growing need to offer study abroad opportunities in the developing and non-western world. AIFS will look to expand its offerings to meet this need.

Study abroad has become more discipline-specific as students look for programs that correlate to their field of study. AIFS will continue to expand its course offerings on its programs to better enable students from diverse majors to consider study abroad.

While the benefits of longer-term study abroad experiences, whether they be a semester or academic year in duration are obvious, shorter term options are an essential part of expanding study abroad participation. AIFS has an extensive offering of

summer and January-term programs. AIFS will continue to expand these offerings and include thematic content that again enables students identify programs that complement their academic interests.

## **DIVERSITY INITIATIVES**

AIFS has created a full-time staff position responsible for Diversity Initiatives. Our goal is Improve programming, outreach and support to better enable students with diverse backgrounds and needs to consider and successfully engage in a learning abroad experience.

AIFS is long-time support of the organization Diversity Abroad, and has recently collaborated in preparing a booklet titled "You Can Afford to Study Abroad," which is made available to advisors and students.

AIFS continues to offer grants and scholarships to support from groups historically under-represented in study abroad as well as those with exceptional financial need.

## **STUDY ABROAD & CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

AIFS has long given attention to the career-related aspect of study abroad, including the "Student Guide to Study Abroad & Career Development" publication, webinars for campus-based advisors that serve as 'train-the-trainer' session for taking students through a reflection process to identify and articulate their skills. Also, see publication section below for information on a white paper on this topic.

*A Connect the Dots: Transferring Skills from Study Abroad to the Workplace* handout was developed for use by resident directors to introduce students to the idea that time spent abroad holds opportunity for skill development.

## **STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

AIFS regularly conducts Resident Director training, periodic in-person workshops and webinars. Time is devoted to a variety of topics including academic programming, health and safety, Incident management and reporting, prevailing student traits, intercultural development, inclusive practices, and trends in U.S. higher education.



AIFS supports the involvement of its field staff (Regional Directors each responsible for certain states) in professional organizations' memberships. Several staff serve in leadership roles, or as reviewers or trainers, and many present at national and regional conferences (such as NAFSA and Forum on Education Abroad) each year.

### ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

A website for our alumni offers re-entry advice, suggested ways to become involved both locally and globally upon returning home, ways to study, volunteer or work abroad, and how to reflect on their international experience in the job search.

The AIFS Alumni Ambassador program began in 2013 and has grown to include 40 students annually. Alumni are competitively selected by AIFS in collaboration with their home-school study abroad office. They serve on their home campuses, and while promoting AIFS programs they also help the study abroad office with

planning, organizing and participating in recruitment events and orientations. They participate in a year-long professional development program where they are required to attend a 2-day training and join in monthly online meetings. They receive reviews of their resume, LinkedIn profile, e-portfolio and a letter of recommendation, in addition to a travel voucher upon completion of the program.

### PUBLICATIONS

In addition to this Alumni Outcomes report, AIFS has recently co-sponsored the publication of a white paper with IIE on the topic of study abroad and employability titled "Study Abroad Matters" (see [iie.org](http://iie.org) for more information). The intended use of this document is for education abroad professionals to share with campus administrations, policy makers, legislators and others in order to affirm the value of study abroad in promoting skill development and supporting the objectives of higher education in advancing the common good.



*“ While abroad in Spain, I was enrolled in course called Creative Economy. Our semester project was to find a problem, create a product that addressed it, and ‘sell it’ to the class. I chose to work with three others each from a different country. We had to use creative brainstorming techniques (such as mind-mapping); we found that we each had different solutions and this initially seemed to create a road block. But we worked together and found a solution that involved a piece of each of our individual ideas. After we presented to the class, we realized how challenging it was with different backgrounds but felt that we knew one another much better, appreciated our differences and would look forward to working together again. ”*

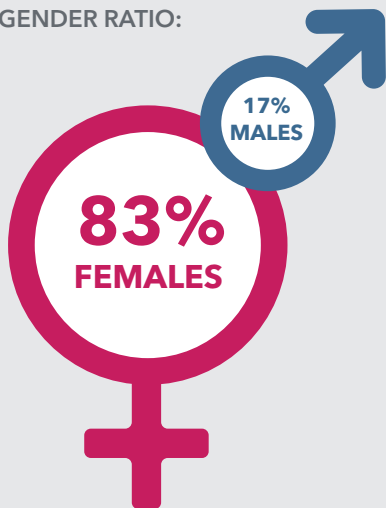
- Nick Surovec, Barcelona, Spain - Spring, 2017  
Grand Valley State University

\*See bibliography: British Council 2013, NACE Job Outlook 2015, AAC&U 2015.

## RESPONDENT PROFILE



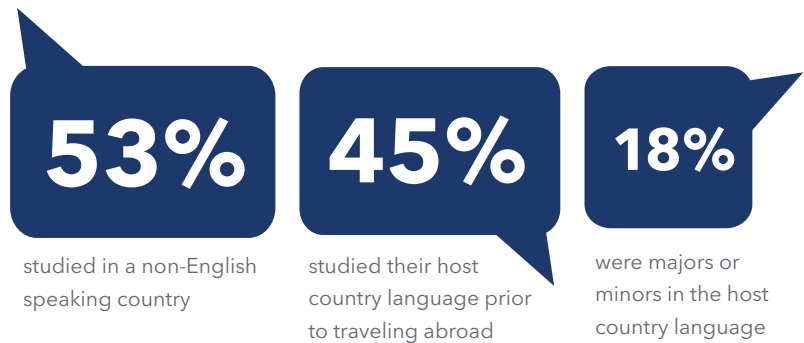
### GENDER RATIO:



### TERM ABROAD:



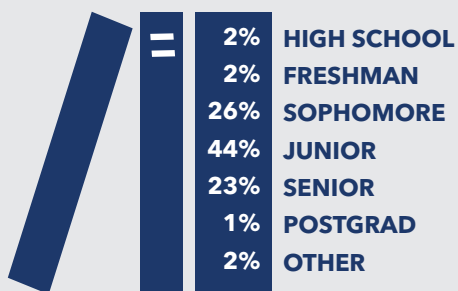
### FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY:



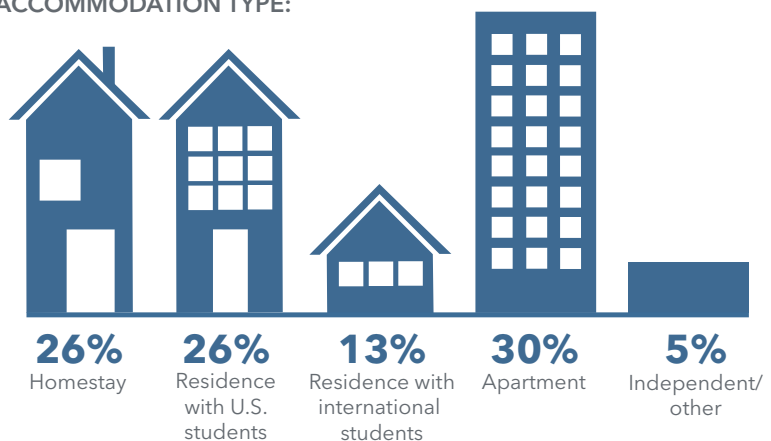
### ACADEMICS:



### CLASS YEAR ABROAD:



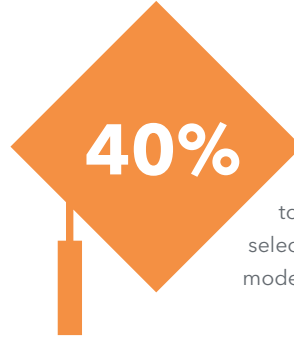
### ACCOMMODATION TYPE:



**PROGRAM IMPACT:**

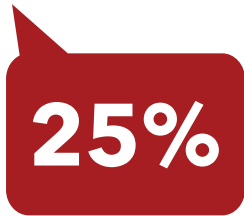


reported that studying abroad with AIFS was the most meaningful experience of their undergraduate education



of students said their desire to study abroad influenced their selection of undergraduate college moderately, very much or extremely

**LANGUAGE BENEFITS:**



continued studying the host country language upon their return home

**TRAVEL-RELATED**



traveled within host country while abroad



traveled outside host country while abroad



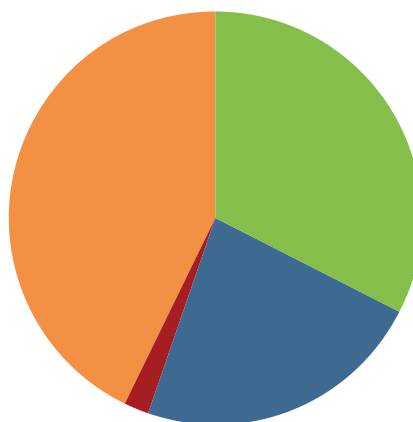
traveled abroad prior to their AIFS Program



Students in homestays reported the greatest gains in speaking another language

**RESPONSE BY YEAR OF PARTICIPATION:**

This includes all respondents from both the 2012 and 2017 surveys; for additional breakdowns, see appendices.



- 42% studied abroad between 2011-2016
- 33% studied abroad between 2006-2010
- 23% studied abroad between 2001-2005
- 2% studied abroad prior to 2000

# Appendices

## PROGRAMS REPRESENTED IN THE SURVEY RESPONSES

<b>Argentina</b> Buenos Aires	<b>China</b> Beijing Nanjing Shanghai	<b>England</b> London Oxford	<b>Greece</b> Athens	<b>Mexico</b> Guanajuato Playa del Carmen	<b>Russia</b> St. Petersburg
<b>Australia</b> Cairns Sydney	<b>Costa Rica</b> Heredia San Jose	<b>Europe</b> Study & Travel	<b>Hungary</b> Budapest	<b>Netherlands</b> Amsterdam	<b>South Africa</b> Cape Town Stellenbosch
<b>Austria</b> Salzburg	<b>Cuba</b> Havana	<b>France</b> Cannes Grenoble Paris	<b>India</b> Hyderabad	<b>Peru</b> CUSCO Lima	<b>Spain</b> Alicante Barcelona Granada Santander
<b>Canada</b> Montreal	<b>Czech Republic</b> Prague	<b>Germany</b> Berlin Frankfurt	<b>Ireland</b> Dublin Limerick	<b>Puerto Rico</b> San Juan	
<b>Chile</b> Vina del Mar			<b>Italy</b> Florence Perugia Rome	<b>Poland</b> Krakow	

## ADDITIONAL PROFILE INFORMATION

### Alumni Responding by Breakdown of Time Period:

All 1045 of the new respondents in the 2017 survey had studied abroad between 2011 and 2016.

### The breakdown of repeat respondents by period:

Pre-2000:	11% (44)
2001-2005:	35% (147)
2006-2011:	54% (223)
Total:	414

### Gender Ratio:

Males:	17%
Females:	83%

### AIFS Ten-Year Average 2006-2016

Males:	22%
Females:	78%

### Term Abroad 2017 Data

Fall:	31% (326)
Spring:	32% (330)
Summer:	35% (366)
Academic Year:	2% (23)

### Class Year Abroad

Freshman:	2% (20)
Sophomore:	26% (271)
Junior:	44% (459)
Senior:	23% (245)
High School:	2% (20)
PostGrad:	1% (11)
Other:	2% (19)

### Race/Ethnicity

Asian:	6% (60)
Black or African-American:	4.6% (46)
Hispanic Latino:	4.9% (49)
Multiracial:	8.5% (85)
Native American:	0.6% (6)
Native Hawaii or Pacific Islander:	0.4% (4)
White:	72% (721)
Other:	3% (31)

## ACADEMICS

**Type of Classes** (*because some were enrolled in more than one type of class setting, combined total exceeds 100%*)

Enrolled only U.S. Students:	90% (946)
Enrolled U.S. and other foreign students:	60% (623)
Regular University System:	25% (270)

### Coursework:

Was challenging:	61%
Helped me learn about host country:	91%
Impacted my Choice of Major:	13%

*Combined 'Strongly Agree' & 'Agree' percentages*

### Participation in Site Visits & Excursions Organized by Program:

All:	42% (443)
Most:	42% (438)
Some:	11% (112)
Few:	4% (42)
None:	1% (10)

### "My desire to study abroad influenced my selection of undergraduate college"

Extremely:	8.3%
Very Much:	14.4%
Moderately:	17.3%
Slightly:	16%
Not at all:	44%

## Foreign Language Study

Fifty-three percent (or 553) of the first-time survey respondents in 2017 studied in a non-English-speaking country. Of these students:

45% reported having studied their host country language prior to traveling abroad

18% of these students were majors/minors in the host country language

25% responded that as a result of studying the language of the host country while abroad, they continued studying that language upon their return home

Students in homestays reported the greatest gains in speaking another language

## TRAVEL-RELATED QUESTIONS

### Had You Traveled Abroad Prior to your AIFS Program?

No:	32%
Yes:	68%

**Traveled within Host Country:** 90% (940)

**Traveled outside Host Country:** 76.3% (797)

## OVERALL PROGRAM IMPACT

With a consistent 86% of alumni in both the 2012 and the 2017 survey reporting that *studying abroad with AIFS was the most meaningful experience of their undergraduate education*, it confirms the success of the AIFS mission and vision.

“*Before studying abroad, I was always planning carefully and did not do well with ambiguity. However, after spending a semester in Australia, I have learned that everyone has their own way of doing things, and as long as that is communicated, everything will work out. It is important to see things from different point of views, because you may find holes in your own plans, and can collaborate with others to make an overall stronger project. Now, I am more relaxed when approaching group work and more open to and capable of handling unforeseen changes.*”

Sara Whitman, Perth, Australia, Spring 2017



## LONGITUDINAL DATA RESULTS

\*The data tables reveal the mean scores from 2012 and 2017 for each factor (where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree).

### Cultural Understanding and World View Factors

My Participation in an AIFS Program Abroad Contributed to:	Date of Study	Mean	N	Std. Dev	Sig. 2-tailed
My knowledge about another culture	2012	1.35	414	0.581	0.009
	2017	1.27	414	0.486	
Developing my awareness of political, economic or social events around the world	2012	1.71	414	0.813	0.018
	2017	1.61	414	0.69	
My interest in global and transnational issues	2012	1.79	414	0.829	0.002
	2017	1.66	414	0.728	
My involvement with a global issue	2012	2.6	413	1.047	0.002
	2017	2.45	413	0.968	
My involvement with a civic cause	2012	2.93	413	0.992	0
	2017	2.73	413	0.969	

### Personal Growth & Values Factors

A better understanding of myself and my values	2012	1.58	0.669	0.033	0.122
	2017	1.53	0.64	0.032	
My sense of confidence in new situations or when meeting new people	2012	1.53	0.666	0.033	0.415
	2017	1.56	0.682	0.034	
My ability to be more flexible and open minded	2012	1.62	0.698	0.034	0.836
	2017	1.62	0.656	0.032	
My tolerance of ambiguity in a variety of situations	2012	1.73	0.751	0.037	0.418
	2017	1.76	0.752	0.037	
My ability to be independent	2012	1.36	0.594	0.029	0.43
	2017	1.34	0.571	0.028	
My ability to take initiative	2012	1.66	0.786	0.039	0.472
	2017	1.69	0.76	0.037	

### Social Relationship Factors

My ability to accept differences in other people	2012	1.69	0.763	0.038	0.233
	2017	1.65	0.662	0.033	
My desire for more diverse friendships and social networks	2012	1.71	0.771	0.038	0.722
	2017	1.72	0.728	0.036	
Strengthened relationships with my family members	2012	2.35	1.012	0.05	0.055
	2017	2.44	0.97	0.048	
Strengthened relationships with my friends	2012	2.26	0.983	0.048	0.078
	2017	2.35	0.921	0.045	

### Career and Professional Development Factors

My choice of work sector (e.g., non profit, private or public)	2012	3.23	413	1064	0.005
	2017	3.09	413	1.027	
My choice of field of employment	2012	3	413	1.197	0.439
	2017	2.96	413	1.103	
Study Abroad Helped Clarify Prof Goals	2012	2.76	414	1.044	0.785
	2017	2.74	414	0.985	
The importance I put on developing my skills and talents	2012	2.14	413	0.885	0.07
	2017	2.22	413	0.863	
My desire to further my education (e.g., postgraduate degree)	2012	2.48	413	1.078	0.081
	2017	2.39	413	1.067	
My willingness to work hard and sacrifice in order to do well in school or in my job	2012	2.17	413	0.981	0.045
	2017	2.27	413	0.933	
Developing my ability to understand an organization's culture	2012	2.32	413	1.017	0.02
	2017	2.44	413	0.897	
My ability to adapt to a diverse workplace	2012	1.98	414	0.916	0.258
	2017	2.04	414	0.809	
Developing skills and intercultural competencies which contributed to obtain 1st job after graduation	2012	2.45	413	1.13	0.818
	2017	2.46	413	1.098	
The importance I place on working in a field that I find interesting	2012	2.37	414	1.088	0.693
	2017	2.35	414	0.982	
The importance I place on having personal fulfillment in my work	2012	2.26	414	1.065	0.506
	2017	2.3	414	0.965	

*“ Studying abroad made me think more about what being a global citizen means. I think global citizenship means being an active member of an international society and staying knowledgeable about the events occurring not only in my own country, but in others places in the world too. I studied abroad in Australia and took a Pacific Studies course in Fiji, where I learned about how climate change is impacting the Pacific Islands and the Great Barrier Reef. Becoming more knowledgeable and aware of human impact on the environment has led me to make more environmentally friendly choices at home and eager to learn more about what I can do to make a difference. ”*

– Nicole Remus, Perth Spring 2017

# AIFS Students as Global Citizens

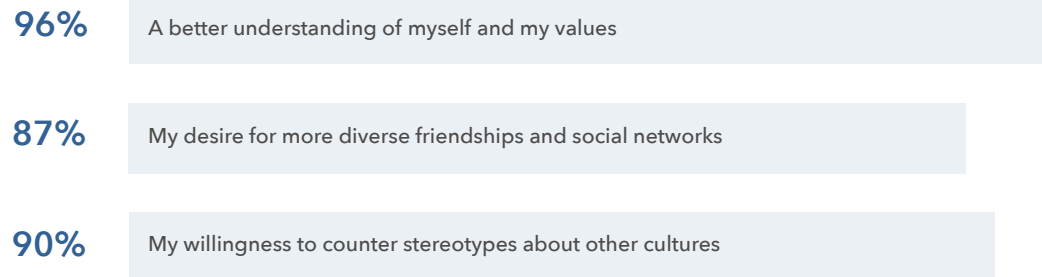
By using the framework of Global Citizenship offered by Madeline Green (NAFSA 2012) a number of the measures in our survey align with the components, and create a profile of AIFS alumni as global citizens.

## STUDYING ABROAD WITH AIFS CONTRIBUTED TO:

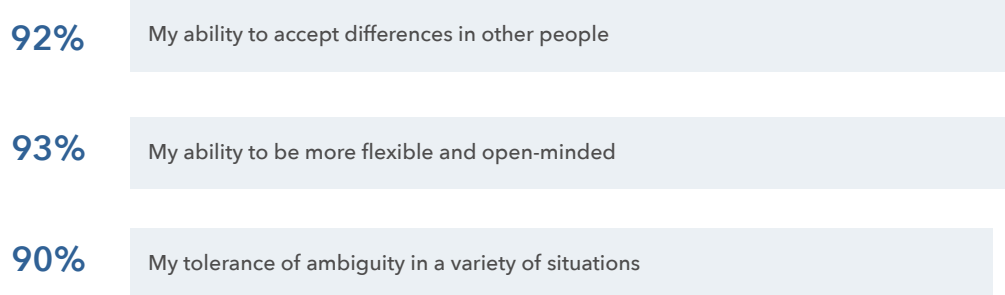
### A choice and a way of thinking\*



### Self-awareness and awareness of others



### Practice of cultural empathy

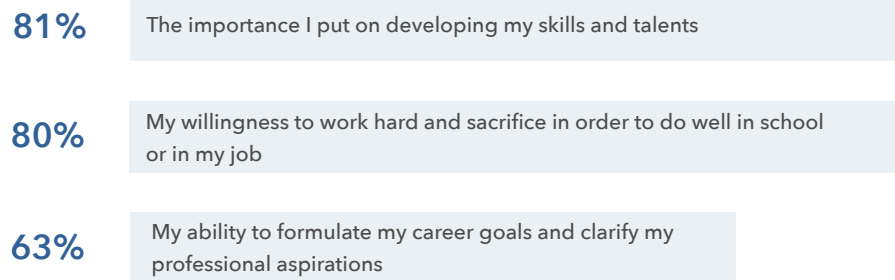


“ Spending a semester in Costa Rica was the most therapeutic, eye-opening, mind shifting four months of my life. I formed deep friendships with people in Costa Rica and those I traveled with. I bungee jumped, explored bat caves, snorkeled with sharks and zip lined through forests. When I returned, I completed my senior thesis project on minorities abroad. The dean of the School of Business was so impressed that he thought it would be a great business idea. That project was the catalyst for my entrepreneurial work inspiring and strategizing with others to follow their dreams, no matter how big or unattainable they seem. My study abroad experience has given me a perspective to connect with people of all different backgrounds which serves me well as a corporate technology trainer and professional speaker. ”

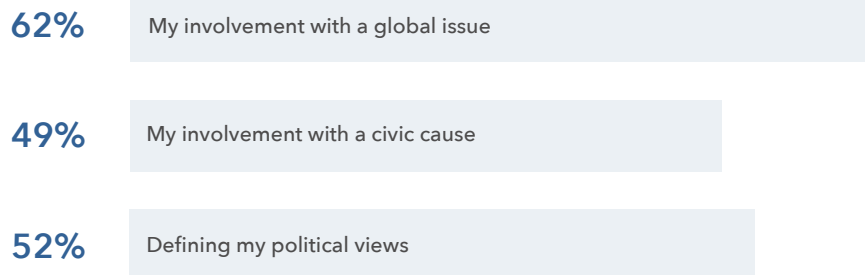
- Casey Sharperson, Costa Rica, Fall 2012



#### The cultivation of principled decision-making



#### Participation in the social and political life of one's community



(percentages are combined "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" responses)

\* "A Choice and way of thinking" refers to that while national citizenship happens by birth, global citizenship is by choice. It is practiced by engaging in global issues or with different cultures in a local setting, or by first-hand experience with different countries, peoples and cultures. . . a connection between the global and the local (NAFSA, 2012).

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*In memory of Sir Cyril Taylor GBE (1935-2018),  
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# *About AIFS*

## **AIFS Vision**

We bring the world together.

## **AIFS Mission**

To provide the highest quality educational and cultural exchange programs to enrich the lives of young people throughout the world.

## **Goals of AIFS Programs:**

- Promote students' curiosity and intellectual growth through high-quality academic programming which utilizes the host country & culture as context.
- Promote cross-cultural learning and increased understanding through both academic and extra-curricular events and activities focused on the interaction with the host culture.
- Facilitate students' self-awareness of their own culture by providing opportunity to compare and contrast cultural differences.
- Enhance students' personal growth, including qualities such as independence, confidence, self-reliance, curiosity and willingness to be in new and different surroundings and environments.
- Contribute to students' career and professional development by exposure to different fields of study and work, encouraging the development of skills sought by employers, and helping them to identify and articulate the applicable knowledge and skills acquired by studying abroad.

## **Values we are committed to in order to achieve our goals:**

- Excellence in programs, operations, people
- Respect and understanding of different cultures
- Exceptional caring support for our program participants to ensure their safety and well being
- Honest, equitable and non-discriminatory treatment of program participants, partners and employees
- Technological innovation
- Teamwork and collaboration both within the organization and with partners
- Encouragement of employee initiative and professional development
- Responsible financial stewardship



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*“In today’s social climate, it’s more important than ever that what we see, consume, read, and view content that is reflective of the diverse world we all live in. My semester abroad increased my ability to adapt and succeed in everything from challenges at work, to everyday interactions with those I live alongside here in our nation’s capital. Whether it be through business ownership, education, or climbing the corporate ladder - including diverse views and voices makes for a better society for all. Experiencing different cultures, like you do with traveling, opens doors and opportunities that you may not have otherwise encountered. ”*

Rachel Hampton, Granada Spain - Fall 2014

*“ I participated on an AIFS summer high school program\* in Durham, England when I was 16. That experience in 1967 changed my life in many ways. After six weeks studying history and literature with Durham University professors, I knew I wanted to spend a college year abroad (I went to Berkeley and studied for a year in Padua, Italy). I knew I wanted to travel more, learn another language, and feed my curiosity about other cultures. I didn't know at the time that I would go on to have a 35-year career in international higher education and become an advocate for cross-cultural learning. ”*

Jan Kieling, Oakland, California

\*Note: AIFS began as a high school travel program in 1964.