

**Abstract:***Student Barriers to Study Abroad*

Study abroad programs give students the opportunity to develop cultural awareness, as well as intellectual and personal growth, among a plethora of other competencies. Despite the potential benefits of studying abroad, few students actually partake in these experiences. At Mississippi State University, fewer than 250 students studied abroad between Fall 2013 and Summer 2014. Agriculture is Mississippi's number one industry, and is a global industry, making it even more advantageous for agriculture students to study abroad. In order to convince students to take this adventure, however, we must first identify what is preventing them. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to better understand why some students elect to study abroad while others do not. Researchers sought to identify factors that influence this decision using the theory of planned behavior (TPB). The TPB states a person's behavioral intention is determined by three factors, including attitude toward the behavior, degree of social pressure felt to perform or not perform the behavior, and the degree of control over performing the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Researchers replicated a study conducted in the College of Agriculture at a peer institution. Students in the Colleges of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Forest Resources were invited via email to complete the previously developed instrument online. The survey will close April 15, and data collected will be analyzed. Descriptive statistics will describe the three constructs. Regression analyses will be conducted to test relationships between the constructs and produce a model predicting students' intent to study abroad. It is anticipated that the TPB predictors will be highly correlated with students' intent to study abroad, meaning that a significant portion of students' intent can be explained by the TPB constructs. The results of our research may provide assistance to faculty in influencing students in CALS and CFR to study abroad.

# **Student Barriers to Study Abroad**

## **Conclusion Report**

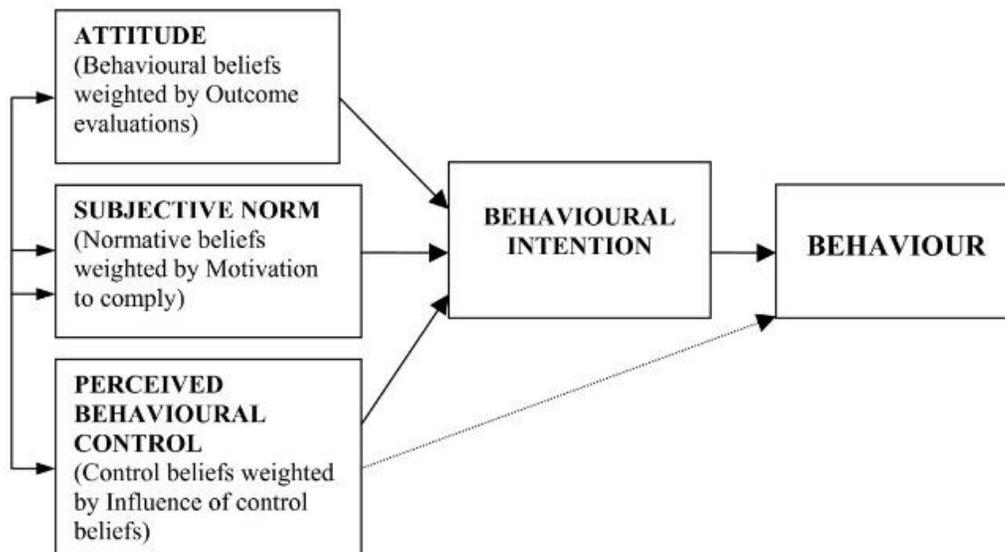
### **Overview:**

Using the Theory of Planned Behavior, we conducted a study on the barriers students perceive to study abroad. Study abroad programs give students the opportunity to develop cultural awareness, as well as intellectual growth. Despite the benefits of studying abroad, fewer than 250 Mississippi State students studied abroad last school year. To explain why students choose to study abroad, or why not, we used an instrument previously developed by the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Texas Tech. The survey was based on the Theory of Planned Behavior and administered to the College of Agriculture and Life Science students via Qualtrics.

### **Findings:**

We conducted the study by using a survey based on the Theory of Planned Behavior to explain CALS students' intent to study abroad. According to Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior, performance is determined by that person's intent to perform the behavior. Behavioral intention is depicted as a function of three basic determinants: attitude toward performing the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. Attitude is how the student feels about studying abroad. An example attitude question would be, "How do you feel about developing a deeper understanding and respect for global issues?" A subjective norm is how one feels about the acceptance of those around them. It can be further explained as whether everybody else is doing it, or if they feel it's acceptable for them to do something. For instance, a subjective norm

survey question would be, “How likely will others think you should participate in a study abroad program?” Perceived behavioral control is defined by the degree to which an individual believes an action is under their active management. A sample question would be, “based on costs, I will have a difficult time participating in a study abroad program.”



Out of the 2,207 College of Agriculture and Life Sciences students, 195 students participated in the Student Barriers to Study Abroad survey. Seventy- eight percent of the students who responded were female, with the remaining twenty- two percent of students being male. Our survey revealed several different facts, which will help us improve studying abroad in the future. For example, we found that over fifty- two percent of students are strongly interested in studying abroad, but only thirteen percent of students who completed the survey have actually studied abroad.

Below is a table of Question twelve from the survey. The table depicts students’ self- reported interest in studying abroad.

Question 12

*Participating in a study abroad program is something that interest me.*

<u>Construct</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly Agree	102	52.3
Agree	60	30.8
Neither Agree nor Disagree	20	10.3
Disagree	6	3.1
Strongly Disagree	7	3.6
<u>Total</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100.0</u>

This is a strong indicator that the desire to study abroad is there, but our College must do a better job of making students aware of the study abroad opportunities. In fact, the survey results state that sixty- seven percent of the students already have a passport. The College of Agriculture and Life Science faculty can use this data to create tactics in order to make students aware that the opportunities are there.

After viewing the results of our survey based on Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behavior, we found that we are able to explain nearly forty percent of students’ intent to study abroad. Our results indicate that attitude toward studying abroad was the strongest of the three constructs that Ajzen defines, with an overall mean of 3.91 on a five point scale. Perceived behavioral control is the second predictor, with a mean of 3.01, followed by subjective norms with a mean of 2.54. These findings indicate that faculty at Mississippi State University in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences may be able to increase students’ intent to study abroad by focusing on helping students develop a positive attitude toward study abroad experiences and opportunities. Additionally, the other two determinants, perceived behavior and subjective norm, may provide

opportunities for faculty to help students develop perceptions of greater behavior control, along with more prominent expectations for students to study abroad.

Below is a table of the overall findings from Ajzen's three predictors in the Theory of Planned Behavior.

Table 1

*Intentions of Participating in a study Abroad Program*

<u>Construct</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Attitude	3.91	.68
Subjective Norms	2.54	.68
Perceived Behavioral Control	3.01	.63
<u>Overall</u>	<u>3.73</u>	<u>1.04</u>

**Student Experiences:**

As a first year researcher, I learned a great deal about how to conduct a research study, the required time you must input, and how the research study can benefit others in the future. I am grateful to have been chosen to conduct this research study for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Dr. Lemons went out of her way to personally teach me how to correctly submit my research to the Institutional Review Board for approval, how to conduct a survey by using Qualtrics.com, how to read statistics and frequencies, and multiple other tools to make my research professional and worthy. However, Dr. Lemons did not "hold my hand" through this experience, which I valued from the most. Through trial and error, I sent documents multiple times until I met her expert expectations. The many hours in her office and researching on my own were very well spent. The information and techniques I learned about conducting a research study will greatly benefit me in the future, as I intend to attend graduate school, as well as,

research I plan to conduct in the work force. But most importantly, I hope that the research study that I was fortunate enough to be a part of will in the future increase the desire and amount of students who participate in the study abroad program in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Agriculture is Mississippi's most prominent industry, and it's an international industry. I believe it's important that CALS students get involved in the study abroad program to broaden their international spectrum, and to appreciate international agriculture and what it has to offer. As a graduating CALS student, it was Dr. Lemons' Contemporary Issues class that sparked my interest in international agriculture. Since that class, I have traveled to Germany and seek to pursue a Master's in International Agriculture. Because of this interest I also applied to AgriCorps, where I have been accepted to serve in a rural village in Ghana, Africa for a year. Although I never studied abroad with our College as an undergraduate, I hope that students will have a better understanding and perception of the study abroad program, and can learn from my experiences in Africa for the future. I have no doubt that the faculty will use this research to improve the desire and overcome any barriers students view to study abroad.

### **Learning outcomes:**

My greatest learning outcome was the experience of doing a research study on my own and how much impact it can have. With the help of Dr. Lemons, I am now able to correctly submit an IRB for acceptance. This simple task will help me with research in the future, whether it be graduate school, or in my career. I also learned so much about theories and why Ajzen's theory correlates so well with what the CALS department is trying to accomplish. Ajzen uses three determinants that allows CALS to be able to influence nearly forty percent of students' intent. It surprised me that attitude was the number predictor, but it is a predictor that can be easily used to overcome the barrier. Another task I learned that will benefit me so much in the future, is how to accurately

and professionally present my research. I have taken multiple presentation courses in the past, but with the help of Dr. Lemons and Ms. Calico, I feel more confident than ever when presenting my research. I learned that no matter how much research you conduct and how effective it may be, if you don't take the time to properly record all of your information in an orderly manner and if you don't spend time on your presentation, then your research will not have as much impact.

Dr. Lemons spent time with me in her office teaching me how the questions based off of the Theory of Planned Behavior correlate with each other. I found it very interesting how in-depth and accurate the instrument was. After spending many hours putting together a professional research poster for the undergraduate research symposium, thankfully Ms. Calico offered to help me. With her education and previous experience in design, Ms. Calico taught me how to make my poster not only professional, but how to make it stand out from the rest. I learned how to navigate through different programs to ensure my poster looked just how I wanted it to. I learned that making a poster look professional and distinctive is a time consuming process, and if I could do it over, I would start applying the research information and designing the poster weeks in advance to the research symposium. Also, learning to apply the Theory of Planned Behavior to my survey, and how to conduct a survey using Qualtrics.com was a timely, yet beneficial learning outcome. By adding an incentive to the survey, I felt that not only did we make the survey unbiased to students who are more interested in improving the study abroad program, but I noticed how many more students were willing to complete the survey. Not only did I gain personal knowledge from this research study, but this research study will benefit my future in graduate school and with AgriCorps. I can thank Dr. Lemons and the CALS department for any future research than I conduct and complete.

## **Deliverables achieved:**

At the Undergraduate Research Symposium, I successfully presented my research study to two symposium judges and multiple attendees. Both judges asked very good questions, in which I was able to confidently answer. Attendees of the symposium were very interested in my research, and most agreed that as a university Mississippi State should use my research to improve students' intent to study abroad and remove any barriers they view. My research poster went along great with the theme of studying abroad and caught the attention of those passing by. My poster attracted attendees and was to- the- point, which allowed me to present and further explain the study and why we should improve the study abroad program. I found that my overall presentation went very well, and there were only minor improvements that I could make when presenting research in the future.

# Student Barriers to Study Abroad

Kelsey Barnes, Dr. Laura Lemons, & Carley Calico



## Introduction

Study abroad programs give students the opportunity to develop cultural awareness, as well as intellectual and personal growth. Despite the benefits of studying abroad, fewer than 250 MSU students studied abroad last school year. Agriculture is Mississippi's number one industry, and is a global industry, making it even more advantageous for agriculture students to be involved with study abroad opportunities. The purpose of this study was to apply Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior to explain why students choose to study abroad or why they do not.

## Methods

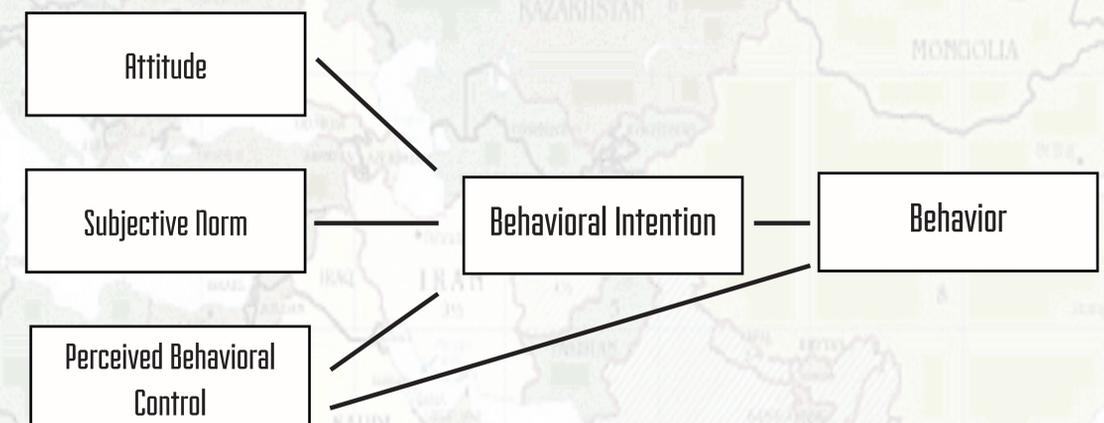
We replicated a study conducted in the College of Ag and Life Sciences at Texas Tech University. A previously developed instrument based on the Theory of Planned Behavior was used to collect data from the students in the College of Ag and Life Sciences at MSU. The instrument was administered via Qualtrics.

## Conclusions

Ajzen's theory helps to explain nearly 40% of students' intent to study abroad in our sample. Attitude toward studying abroad was the strongest predictor of the three that Ajzen defines. These findings indicate that faculty at MSU in the College of Ag and Life Sciences may be able to increase students' intent to study abroad by focusing on helping students develop a positive attitude toward study abroad experiences and opportunities. Additionally, the two other factors may provide opportunities for faculty to help students develop perceptions of greater behavior control along with more prominent expectations for students to study abroad.

## Theory

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, a person's performance is determined by that person's intent to perform the behavior. Behavioral intention is depicted as a function of three basic determinants: attitude toward performing the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavior control (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980).



## Findings

Table 1

*Intentions of Participating in a Study Abroad Program*

Construct	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Attitude	3.91	.68
Subjective Norms	2.54	.68
Perceived Behavioral Control	3.01	.63
Overall	3.73	1.04

The regression analysis revealed the three predictors in the Theory of Planned Behavior help explain 39% of students' intent to study abroad.

Ajzen, I. 1991. The theory of planned behavior. *Organizations behavior and human decision processes* 50(2): 179-211.  
Ajzen, I. & Fishbein, M. 1980. *Understanding attitudes and predicting behavior*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

