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Discovering the Perfect Study Abroad: Using the Five Factor Model to Fit Students to Their
Ideal Program

An honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Science in Business Administration in Accounting

By

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is to examine the relationship between personality types and study abroad program selection. This paper explores the different factors that play a role in the decision making process of individuals as well as the multiple dimensions of personality. In order to research the relationship between these two elements, a survey was sent to a portion of the University of Arkansas student population that had taken part in study abroad programs. It was discovered that there is indeed a relationship between personality types, study abroad program selection, and the successfulness of study abroad experiences.

Keywords: Personality, Five Factor Model, Study Abroad, Travel, Success

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Lastly, I would like to thank the University of Arkansas Office of Study Abroad for assisting me in obtaining survey participants, which aided the research of this study. I wholeheartedly appreciate the assistance of all individuals mentioned above.

Dedication

First, I would like to dedicate this paper to my loving parents. Dad, I cannot be more grateful for you passing on your love of travel to me, which in a round-a-bout way served as inspiration for this thesis. Mom, you have always been an amazing role model, and I would not be where I am today without your unfailing love. Thank you both for the sacrifice and encouragement you have provided me throughout my life.

Secondly, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandparents. Nama and Papa, you were the brave souls who chose to take my cousin, Rachael, and I abroad for the first time. I have you to thank for my infatuation with different cultures and longing to see the world. Grandmommy, your wildly free spirit has taught me the importance of living in the moment and making the most of the opportunities placed before me.

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Introduction

Studying abroad is becoming increasingly popular among the student population. I believe the degree to which students find success while studying abroad greatly depends upon whether or not the program they chose is a good fit for them on a personal level. There are several components that comprise the program decision-making process for students. I consider one of these key factors to be student personality.

The Five Factor Model details information about an individual's personality, which can be used as insight into how they perceive the world and make decisions. For the purpose of gaining further understanding into why University of Arkansas students have chosen certain study abroad programs, I have evaluated their dimensions on the five factors of personality through the utilization of a brief survey.

Furthermore, this survey was used to measure how successful the study abroad experience was for aforementioned students. This method not only uncovers the reasoning behind students' selection of their specific program, but also whether or not it was an appropriate choice for them. Ideally, I would like the results of my thesis to be used as a tool for future students during their study abroad program selection process. This process would involve students completing a personality assessment and using characteristics of their personality to determine which program would best suit the specific student.

Chapter 1: Research

Prior Topical Research

Through scouring the Internet, it becomes quickly apparent that there is a vast selection of study abroad programs to choose from. Studying abroad can be one of the most enriching experiences an individual chooses to partake in, yet it also can be rather costly. Consequently, it is logical that individuals put a great deal of thought into selecting their specific program. A search engine will return countless quizzes for individuals to take in order to see which program would be a best fit for them. These questionnaires for the most part have the same type of questions. These inquiries are generally geared towards asking about the student's preference for housing situations, course offerings, and the type of city they would like to live in. However, personality type is not a factor that comes into play. Through all of my research, I have not found a similar assessment striving to identify a relationship between study abroad program selection and personality type.

Assessing Personality

With a population around seven billion people, it is evident that there are a multitude of personalities present in the world. Assessing personality can provide insight into the decisions, behaviors, and thought processes of an individual. Two prominent personality assessments of modern society are the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the Five Factor Model. In order to determine which assessment I would utilize for my research, I compared these two personality inventories.

Through my research, I discovered several invalidities of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Experts estimate that about one third or even up to half of the published MBTI

material has been produced for and edited by advocates who benefit from its use in the psychological community. For this reason, many believe that the statistical analysis of the MBTI has lacked appropriate scrutiny (Pittenger, 1993).

One of the major fallacies with the MBTI involves bimodal distribution. Results for the MBTI are scored using a normal distribution. This method of scoring disregards the fact that most individuals do not fall perfectly into one characteristic out of the four MBTI subsets of characteristics – extroversion/introversion, sensing/intuition, thinking/feeling, and judgment/perception. The MBTI forces an individual into one specific subset and disregards the dimension of how highly an individual scored in that given characteristic (McCrae & Costa, Jr., 1989).

Due to these apparent invalidities, I chose to use the Five Factor Model for my research. The Five Factor Model shows consistency across all personality inventories – interviews, self-descriptions, and observations. This personality profiling system is made up of five domains with six facets each as shown in **Table 1** below (McCrae & Costa, Jr., 2003). The Five Factor Model assesses personality on a continuum, which does away with the issue of bimodal distribution. Defining personality in this way denotes that all individuals have the five personality traits, but differ on the level of which they exhibit each trait (Nettle, 2007).

Table 1: Thirty Facets of Personality

<u>Openness</u>	<u>Conscientiousness</u>	<u>Extraversion</u>	<u>Agreeableness</u>	<u>Neuroticism</u>
Imagination	Self-efficacy	Friendliness	Trust	Anxiety
Artistic Interests	Orderliness	Gregariousness	Morality	Anger
Emotionality	Dutifulness	Assertiveness	Altruism	Depression
Adventurousness	Achievement-striving	Activity level	Cooperation	Self-consciousness
Intellect	Self-discipline	Excitement seeking	Modesty	Immoderation
Liberalism	Cautiousness	Cheerfulness	Sympathy	Vulnerability

Personality and Decision-making

Though no prior research has been done to trace personality type and study abroad program selection, there is bountiful research showing the affect that personality has on decision-making. McCrae and Costa specifically go in depth on how personality plays a role in career choice. If people are given a choice, they will lean towards a profession that allows them to express their unique personality traits. Individuals with enterprising and social vocational interest tend to be more extraverted. People that score highly on openness to experience tend to thrive in artistic fields. Conversely, if an individual scores low on openness to experience, they are more likely to choose a more conventional vocational role (McCrae & Costa, Jr., 2003).

These assertions could be easily transferred from career choice to study abroad program selection. Furthermore, Daniel Nettle stated that a female who lived abroad for over a decade

scored highly in extraversion. It could be hypothesized that her high level of extraversion played a role in her interest in living abroad (Nettle, 2007). This would leave one to conclude a high score of extraversion could be present in responses of students who have chosen to study abroad.

Other Factors Involved in Decision-making

De Marchi and Hamilton went into great depth as to the factors that lead to decision-making in their book “You Are What You Choose.” A prevalent economic view of what leads to decision-making is the Rational Choice Theory. This theory states that an individual will maximize their utility in regards to the resources they are allotted. Based off of what is available to them, they will make what seems to be the most rational decision. However, De Marchi states that not all decisions we make are rational. There are a multitude of factors that play a significant role in our decisions, which are exhibited through De Marchi’s TRAITS model (De Marchi & Hamilton, 2009).

The first component of this model is “Time.” Before making a decision, individuals will assess whether they are to reap benefits now or in the future. This long-term and short-term focus can cause individuals to act in different ways when faced with decisions. Next, De Marchi states that “Risk” is also vital in the decision making process. An individual will evaluate the dangers and payoffs of any given decision. The third component is “Altruism.” De Marchi believes that an individual will take into account how their choice will affect the welfare of other people (De Marchi & Hamilton, 2009).

Another component of this model is “Information.” Before making a decision, individuals can gather as little or as much information as they feel necessary. The length of time that it takes an individual to make a decision can be directly correlated to the amount of information they

choose to gather. For instance, if one wants to gain vast amounts of information before making a decision, it could take them relatively longer than someone who is willing to make a decision based off of limited information (De Marchi & Hamilton, 2009). Through my research, I discovered through reading Malcolm Gladwell's book Blink that split-second decisions do not differ greatly from a decision that has been mulled over for a long period of time (Gladwell, 2005).

Yet another component of De Marchi's TRAITS model is "meToo," which says that the opinions of others can also affect our decisions. Lastly, De Marchi's final component is "Stickiness," which is referring to the concept that people will often make decisions that are consistent with past decisions (De Marchi & Hamilton, 2009). De Marchi's research on decision-making factors, aided me in formulating my assessment as it kept me aware of the other factors – besides personality – that are involved in selecting a study abroad program.

Chapter 2: Methods

Survey Formulation

In order to determine a correlation between study abroad program selection and personality type, I created a brief survey that was sent out to a portion of the University of Arkansas student population. I asked several general questions such as the participant's class ranking when they studied abroad, their gender, and what college they are a part of within the University of Arkansas.

Next, I asked participants about their specific program. I chose to divide up study abroad programs into four main categories. The first of these being "community-service oriented." A program of this type could entail working with a community to complete various projects to

benefit that community. The second trip category I devised was “cultural/travel oriented” programs. I described to participants that this could be a program that was geared towards allowing students to experience one or many diverse cultures. The next category I included in my assessment was “foreign language oriented programs.” This type would be applicable for students who chose to study abroad in a foreign country in order to further their ability to speak a foreign language. My final category for types of programs was “education oriented,” which would entail a student selecting to be a part of a program at a prestigious academic institution. I acknowledge that not all students will classify a specific program in the same category. Two students could go on the same study abroad trip and label their program in different categories. In order to be able to analyze if this occurred in my assessment, I included a question that asked participants to give the name of their program.

After learning more about which program my survey participants were a part of, I wanted to gain knowledge about any external factors that could have affected their decision in selecting a program. I felt that one of the key factors for many students would be related to the finances of their trip. For this reason, I asked participants to reveal how much of their trip was funded through financial aid and scholarships.

The next portion of my survey was a succinct personality inventory. I utilized the Newcastle Personality Assessor, which is a brief instrument for assessing the big five that has been recently developed. According to Nettle, the authors of this inventory have found a concise survey of carefully chosen items has a high correlation with the results produced from traditional lengthy questionnaires (Nettle, 2007). In order to increase the responses I received from students, I thought it best to keep my personality assessment brief. After having students answer

twelve questions about their tendencies to take part in certain behaviors, I summed several of these dimensions in order to see how highly they exhibit each of the five personality domains.

The final segment of my survey was geared towards assessing whether or not the participant's study abroad program selection was indeed a good match for the student. I assessed this through two inquiries. First, I asked the student to rate on a scale of 1-100 how much they enjoyed their trip. Secondly, I requested the student to use the same rating system to answer the extent to which they felt their program was a good fit for them personally. Through asking these questions, I was able to discover the extent of success that certain personality types have on certain study abroad programs.

Population Obtainment

I obtained my population by means of reaching out to the University of Arkansas Office of Study Abroad. Their office granted me permission to send out an email requesting participation to a list of student email addresses that they had on file. This outlet served as an effective way for me to reach out to a portion of the student population who had all taken part in study abroad experiences.

Chapter 3: Results

Survey Participation and Questions Analyzed

Through sending my survey out to the Office of Study Abroad's listserv, I received 379 student responses. Of that aggregate number, I analyzed 339 survey responses, as forty of the surveys were not finished in their entirety. There were fifty different countries that survey

participants had studied abroad in and all six of the University of Arkansas's colleges were represented in my results.

I examined my data to answer two key questions. First, I wanted to determine if personality type plays a role in the selection of study abroad programs. Secondly, I wanted to discover if people that exhibit certain personality traits that chose certain programs, had success in that given program. This second question would determine not only if personality types were geared towards selecting certain programs, but also if that program was an appropriate fit for them.

Determining the Relationship Between Personality and Program Selection

In order to gain insight on my first question, I ran four multiple regressions – one for each type of aforementioned program categorization. I examined each trip type individually by using dummy variables. For example, in my first regression, I examined the relationship between “community service” study abroad programs and the Big Five dimensions of personality – extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness. I coded my results so that if a survey respondent took part in a “community service” program, they would be coded as a “1.” Likewise, if the survey respondent took part in one of the other three types of programs, they would be coded as a “0.” Then, I ran a regression using the program type as my dependent variable and the respondent's different scores on the five dimensions of their personality as the independent variables. I repeated this process three more times so that a regression was run for each trip type.

To determine if my regressions revealed any relationships between variables that were statistically significant, I examined the p-values of each regression as shown in **Tables 2-5** below:

Tables 2-5: Relationship between Personality Type and Study Abroad Program Selection

Table 2		Table 3	
Community Service Programs		Cultural/Travel Programs	
	<i>P-value</i>		<i>P-value</i>
Intercept	0.606315536	Intercept	0.009689607
Extraversion	0.577133249	Extraversion	0.440937848
Neuroticism	0.814867181	Neuroticism	0.706587897
Conscientiousness	0.024187982	Conscientiousness	0.376511903
Agreeableness	0.779356339	Agreeableness	0.500225053
Openness	0.233207274	Openness	0.295907801

Table 4		Table 5	
Foreign Language Programs		Educational Programs	
	<i>P-value</i>		<i>P-value</i>
Intercept	0.699191504	Intercept	0.181937904
Extraversion	0.900087209	Extraversion	0.593153827
Neuroticism	0.140230829	Neuroticism	0.438848572
Conscientiousness	0.944042131	Conscientiousness	0.494572176
Agreeableness	0.575481511	Agreeableness	0.994543788
Openness	0.324092806	Openness	0.257077161

Through analyzing all of the p-values given through running these four regressions, I found one value to be statistically significant. As shown in **Table 2** above, the p-value for “community service” study abroad programs and the personality dimension of “conscientiousness” was 0.0241. This value signifies that there is about a 2.5% chance of someone who scores highly on the dimension of “conscientiousness” to randomly select a study abroad program that is community-service oriented. Consequently, it can be reasonably assumed

that individuals who are more conscientious are predisposed to selecting “community service” study abroad programs. I believe this finding to make sense logically. If an individual is conscientious, this elicits that they are concerned with doing things correctly. This could lead an individual be more concerned with giving back to the community. Furthermore, another facet of conscientiousness is self-efficacy. An individual that scores highly on this dimension would be likely to enjoy taking part in hands-on activities and projects.

The remainder of the p-values that resulted from running these four regressions did not prove to be statistically significant. An insignificant p-value signifies that there is no evidence of a causal relationship between the two variables examined. It can be concluded from these findings that study abroad programs that were categorized as “cultural/travel,” “foreign language,” and “educational” are well suited for a multitude of scores on the five dimensions of personality.

To further examine the results of my survey, I created a correlation table. As shown in **Table 6**, I ran several correlations to determine the statistical relationship between the five personality dimensions and four study abroad program types. After analyzing the data, it is clear that none of the correlation figures that were calculated are of any statistical significance. Consequently, it is apparent that the interaction between these two variables discovered through running multiple regressions (results presented in **Tables 2-5**) holds more significance.

Table 6: Correlation between Personality Type and Study Abroad Program Selection

	Extraversion	Neuroticism	Conscientiousness	Agreeableness	Openness
Community Service	-0.0182	-0.0286	0.1306	0.0177	-0.0757
Cultural/Travel	0.0399	-0.0315	-0.0437	-0.0297	-0.0593
Foreign Language	-0.0088	0.0864	-0.0139	0.0236	0.0674
Education	-0.0216	-0.0236	-0.0391	-0.0029	0.0603

Measuring the Success of Personality Types on Specified Program Types

In order to examine my second question regarding whether personality types that chose certain study abroad programs had success in that program, I ran four more multiple regressions. I divided the individuals by program type, and then ran a regression to determine the relationship between the success measure of the program and the five personality dimensions. The success measure was determined by averaging the results of two of my survey questions. The first question had survey participants rate how much they enjoyed their study abroad program on a scale of 1-100 with 100 representing complete satisfaction. Secondly, I had survey participants use the same scale to rate the extent to which they felt their program was a good fit for them personally. I averaged these two success measures and used the average as the dependent variable in my second set of regressions. As with my first set of regressions, I examined the p-values of the second set of regressions to determine if any of the variables had a causal relationship. The p-values for the second set of regressions are shown in **Tables 7-10** below:

Tables 7-10: Relationship between Personality Type and Success Measures

Table 7

Community Service Programs	
	<i>P-value</i>
Intercept	8.09744E-05
Extraversion	0.92596308
Neuroticism	0.730631918
Conscientiousness	0.622913828
Agreeableness	0.201790387
Openness	0.227984165

Table 8

Cultural/Travel Programs	
	<i>P-value</i>
Intercept	3.07206E-11
Extraversion	0.097308614
Neuroticism	0.370983344
Conscientiousness	0.343180083
Agreeableness	0.014956605
Openness	0.987064853

Table 9

Foreign Language Programs	
	<i>P-value</i>
Intercept	1.94576E-08
Extraversion	0.710700957
Neuroticism	0.498037784
Conscientiousness	0.582657543
Agreeableness	0.999011006
Openness	0.215024146

Table 10

Educational Programs	
	<i>P-value</i>
Intercept	4.16524E-12
Extraversion	0.284428777
Neuroticism	0.238663037
Conscientiousness	0.623660208
Agreeableness	0.632133857
Openness	0.722872817

Table 8, which illustrates the regression that examined the relationship between survey participants that took part in “cultural/travel” oriented programs, was the only table to return p-values of statistical significance. Specifically, the p-value for “agreeableness” was the most statistically significant and amounted to 0.0150. This signifies that about 98.5% of individuals who took part in “cultural/travel” programs and scored highly on agreeableness, had success in their program. It makes sense that an individual who scores highly on “agreeableness” would fare well in a “cultural/travel” oriented program. If someone were agreeable, they would have little difficulty adjusting to new cultures and customs of a foreign country.

The p-value for “cultural/travel” and “extraversion” was 0.0973, which is marginally significant. This value shows that people who scored highly on extraversion and studied abroad

on “cultural/travel” programs scored relatively high on the success measure. This is logical since people who are extraverted would be more likely to step out of their comfort zone and be willing to submerge themselves in a culture that is different from their own.

I calculated the overall average success measure of all respondents at 90.92%, which spanned across all four categorizations of study abroad programs. With this being said, it is evident that the vast majority of survey respondents enjoyed their study abroad program and felt that it was a good fit for them. I believe that this fact could attribute greatly to the remainder of p-values for my second set of regressions being insignificant statistically.

Conclusion

It is evident that there are a variety of factors that go into both of the variables I have decided to research – personality type and study abroad program selection. When selecting a program, students may consider the location, program costs, courses offered and other individuals that are taking part in the program. Likewise, an individual’s personality cannot be simplified to one specific factor. There are many different aspects to an individual’s personality, as exhibited through the five dimensions of the Five Factor Model – openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. Though these two components are multi-faceted, I do believe there to be a relationship between them. Through having a sample of the student population that has studied abroad take a survey, I recognize that this correlation has been brought to light.

My assessment returned statistically significant values for both of the questions that I wished to answer. While analyzing the relationship between study abroad selection and personality type, I found one p-value value of statistical significance. The regression I ran for

“community service” study abroad programs showed that people who are conscientious are likely to choose that type of program. The second set of regressions that I ran returned one statically significant value and one marginally significant value. I found that students who scored high on extraversion and agreeableness found great success on study abroad programs that are “cultural/travel” oriented.

In conclusion, I do believe the dimensions of an individual’s personality to be one of the deciding factors of study abroad program selection. Though it may have a relatively small impact in the decision-making process, it can partially attribute to the final decision. Furthermore, I believe that an individual’s personality not only influences which program they decide to take part in, but also the extent to which that program was a good fit for them personally.

My research has answered the question of whether or not certain personality types are predisposed to selecting certain study abroad programs. If I were to continue researching this topic, I would strive to analyze the affect that different dimensions of personality have on the choice of taking part in study abroad programs in general. This is a limitation of my research as the survey I developed was only sent out to students who had taken part in study abroad programs. Delving deeper into this topic would require an additional study.

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