

In this issue

Student perceptions of distance education at Stockton

Dennis Fotia

Assessing the bread and butter of your course

Jill Gerhardt

CLA 2010-2011 results

Heather McGovern

CFP, Are your students learning what you are teaching? Aka: Summer 2012 Assessment Institute

Study abroad vs. study tour

Melaku Lakew

Student perceptions of distance education at Stockton

Dennis Fotia

HOT TOPICS

Distance ed.

Course assessment

CLA

Study abroad

Background

Associations and organizations such as the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), and The Sloan-C Foundation have recommendations for best practices regarding distance education. While many of the best practices address the pedagogy behind effective online instruction, some deal with student support and program and course assessment. The Office of Distance Education at Stockton receives anecdotal feedback regarding student experiences in Stockton online courses, either from enrolled students or through other students or faculty, but it had not collected empirical data systematically until relatively recently. Following nationally recommended best practices, we set forth to assess our students' experiences in their distance education courses.

Loosely following the ADDIE Instructional Design model (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation), we began by asking "what are we looking to find out?" and "what are we looking to measure?" The process involved reviewing best practice pedagogical principles as well as issues regarding technical and academic support services, student demographics, student preferences, etc. We reviewed how other colleges were assessing their (similar) program offerings and constructed a survey instrument to elicit responses that would reflect our students' *perceptions* of their experiences with Stockton distance education courses. While analyzing our course offerings, we wrote questions that spoke to many accepted pedagogical principles of best practices, focusing some on student support and others on objective data, e.g., gender, number of courses being taken by the student that semester. We fine-tuned the questions with input from faculty and staff on the Distance Education Advisory Board.

We chose Zoomerang to administer the survey. We also applied for and received IRB approval. We then sent the survey to all students enrolled in a distance education course (not including hybrid courses) in a given semester. Being keenly aware of the high nonmatriculated student population in the summer, we controlled for Summer or Fall/Spring semesters. The results discussed below represent four semesters of study (Summer 2010-Summer 2011).

Student perceptions of distance education at Stockton, cont.

Findings

Respondents were predominantly female: 78% to 22% male. Most were upper class:

- 54% seniors
- 29% juniors
- 15% sophomores
- 2% freshmen

Most of the students had taken online courses prior to the semester they responded:

- 23% had taken one course
- 22% had taken two courses
- 21% had taken three courses
- 34% had taken four or more

Most online students were employed part-time or full-time (47% to 24%). We wondered why students chose to take online courses. Most (66%) responded that they seek flexibility in scheduling because they prefer working on their own time or cannot get to campus regularly.

Although the Office of Distance Education has been working to eliminate the need for face-to-face mandatory orientations, 79% of students responded that they were required to attend one. (Note: Two years ago, a committee of faculty and staff created an [online orientation to distance education](#) that faculty can require for students in lieu of a face-to-face mandatory orientation.)

Most distance education students access their online courses from home (65%) or a building on campus (17%). Almost 75% of those who sought technical support rated that support as excellent or good. To get a better sense of the use of different types of online classroom interaction, we listed possibilities to elicit the following responses:

- 20% -- asking and having questions answered by your instructor via Blackboard e-mail
- 18% -- other students responding to your discussion posts or you responding to theirs; and collaborating on papers or projects with other students in the course
- 18% -- the instructor responding about your papers and projects through Blackboard
- 16% -- the instructor responding to your discussion posts
- 15% -- having questions answered by other students via Blackboard's discussion tool or chat rooms
- 13% -- asking and having questions answered by your instructor via Blackboard's discussion tool or chat room.

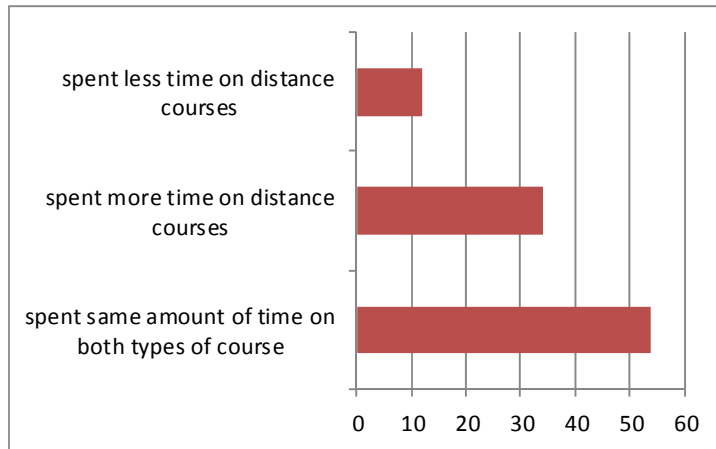
It was disturbing to find that student interaction with distance education instructors versus face-to-face instructors did not follow best practices: 45% of students responded that they had less interaction with their online instructor; 41% thought their degree of interaction was "about the same as;" and 14% stated that they had more interaction with their instructor in the online course than in face-to-face courses. Respondents also reported on the degree of their course-related interaction with other students in their distance education versus face-to-face courses: 51% indicated less interaction, 28% had about the same amount of interaction, and 21% reported more interaction with other students in the online course.

Lending support to the idea that distance education courses are not easy, most students found that distance education courses (compared to their face-to-face courses in terms of time spent on lessons, activities, and homework, not including travel time) held similar time requirements: 54% reported that they spent the same amount of time on both types of courses; 34% responded that they spent more time on distance courses; and 12% spent less time. Numbers were similar for fall and spring only. Also, most students reported having learned the same amount as they would have learned in a face-to-face course (63%, with 65% for fall-spring only). And finally, a large percentage, 83%, would take more online courses from Stockton if they could.

79% of student responders noted they were required to attend a face-to-face orientation.

Faculty can also use an [online orientation](#)

Student perceptions of distance education at Stockton, cont.



Graph 1. Percentages of students reporting they spent the same, less, or more time on their distance course compared to their face-to-face courses (fall and spring courses).

Conclusions

The results were somewhat expected. While we were encouraged that students generally found their learning experiences to be similar to those of their face-to-face courses, we were somewhat discouraged that they reported less interaction with their professors in distance education courses. Looking at this question on interaction between student and professor longitudinally, the percent of those replying “about the same as” declined, while those reporting “less than” increased considerably (31% in Fall 2010 to 49% in Fall 2011).

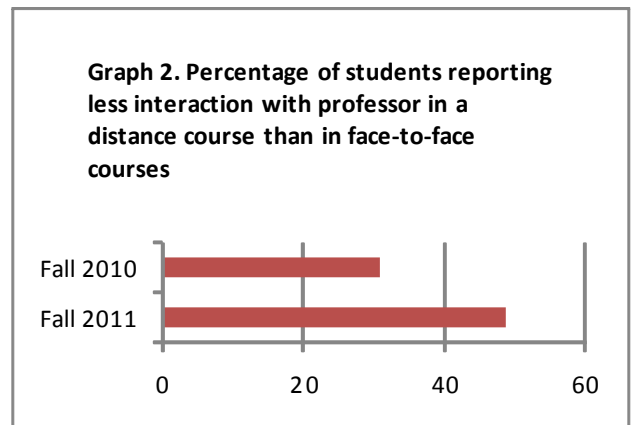
This change concerns us and compels us to encourage greater faculty-student interaction in online courses. Student to student interaction indicated similar results, and this, too, is disappointing. Collaborative learning is at the heart of a strong learning experience. While it is somewhat more difficult to achieve in an asynchronous, online environment than in a face-to-face classroom, it is still attainable. And anything less is unacceptable.

Stockton’s technical support rated highly, which is encouraging, as this is an important benchmark for college distance education programs. Also encouraging was the student response to why they decided to take an online course: a majority responded they sought flexibility in scheduling. As such, if the results are valid, Stockton is satisfying a demand for distance education in our region.

In addition to the perception that respondents’ learning experiences were similar to those of their face-to-face courses, we found that a clear majority reported that their distance education courses were essentially just as rigorous. This is supported by a 2009 meta-analysis by the U.S. Department of Education’s Center for Technology in Learning, which found that student learning outcomes in online courses were essentially equivalent to, or greater than, those in face-to-face courses (Means, et. al., 2009).

With the establishment of the Distance Education Advisory Board in 2010, these data, along with other information, are shared among faculty and staff who suggest ways in which we can improve our program. We also offer workshops for faculty to discuss—and learn from one another—the pedagogical practices unique to distance education. Our main objective is to offer a distance education program with excellence. And this we can achieve through continued assessment and revision.

Means, B., Toyama, Y., Murphy, R., Bakia, M., Jones, K. *Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies*. U.S. Department of Education, Center for Technology in Learning, 2009.



Graph 2. Percentage of students reporting less interaction with professor in a distance course than in face-to-face courses

Assessing the bread and butter of your course

Jill Gerhardt

In order to assess the Bread and Butter of my course, "Systems Analysis and Design," I adjusted a validated tool to better fit my circumstances. The tool is called the "Inherent/Knowledge/Skills Checklists" found in the book *Classroom Assessment Techniques* (Angelo, 1993). I revised the Checklist to reflect the topics covered in my course. It is called "Self-Assessment of Related Skills and Knowledge."

The skills and knowledge assessment tool listed 11 topics that the students rated from 0-3, depending on their level of skill in relation to the topic. The lowest total could be 0 and the highest could be 33. A rate of change statistic was calculated (i.e. [last day - first day] / first day). No one had a total of 0 on the first day; therefore there was no problem with dividing by 0.

The results with the systems analysis and design skills assessment was an overall increase in skills of 156.12%. The category with the biggest increase was CASE Software which was 794.68%. This was understandable considering most students had never heard of CASE before this course.

Written communication had the smallest increase which was 11.80%. This is also what would be expected since students did feel fairly competent in written communication before entering this course and also written communication was not a major topic in the course, but something I hoped to improve to some extent. All categories are listed in the table below.

Categories	Percent Increase
System analysis	347.22
System design	268.42
Input and output design	125.29
User interface design	171.83
Project management	135.10
Oral communication	18.95
Written communication	11.80
Presentation software	156.10
Case software	794.68
Process modeling	669.60
Using a project repository	656.01
OVERALL INCREASE	156.12

This is an excerpt from the following article: Gerhardt, "If You Can Teach It, You Can Measure It," The Journal of Computing Sciences in Colleges, v 20 (3), 114-120, February 2005.

Reference

Angelo (1993) Classroom Assessment Techniques

CLA 2010-2011 Results

Heather McGovern

Our first year and senior students now take the CLA (standardized test of critical thinking and writing skills) every other year, first year students in the fall and seniors in the spring. Thanks to those faculty who gave up a day in their class for their students to take the test in the last testing cycle. Unfortunately, the test continues to provide us with feedback indicating that our seniors underperform compared to how we would expect them to perform. The seniors who took the test had an entering academic ability (SAT score or proxy) percentile ranking of 33. We would have expected their scores on the CLA itself to be higher.

The seniors (97, 57% transfer, 67% female, 75% white, and mostly split among math/science (32%), business (20%), and social science majors (35%)) who took the test in spring 2011 performed below expected on the total CLA score. We recruited classes with high-senior enrollment and tried to recruit those with a high percentage of Stockton native students. In any given year, this sampling technique does not allow for a true cross section of seniors, but Stockton's performance has been mediocre at best on the CLA now over many years, and the combined senior sample overall includes more representation from the humanities, business, and other areas. Our value-add percentile ranking was 4. Our seniors did slightly better (percentile rank of 12) on the performance task (the hardest portion and portion that most simulates real-life tasks). Stockton faculty have been active for many years now at creating their own performance—task like activities for use for program assessment and, even more importantly, as learning tools in the classroom. Perhaps this activity has had a positive effect on student scores in this area.

Sadly, however, students scored well below expected in analytic writing—both make-an-argument and critique-an-argument. For analytic writing the mean score percentile rank is 9. This year CLA provided sub-score break downs, so we can see how our students performed, compared to others nationally, on a rubric from 1 to 6 in various areas. Looking at these bar graphs as a whole, our students are much more likely to receive a 2 on the rubric compared to other students nationally, while the national sample is more likely to score a 4. See the following page for descriptions of 2, 3, and 4 scores on the CLA rubric for each skill area.

While we hoped that the sub-score breakdown would provide us with additional guidance about where to focus our efforts to better educate our students, they demonstrate that our students (on average, with strong individual exceptions) score well below the national average in analytical reasoning and evaluation, problem solving, writing effectiveness, and writing mechanics. A weak argument might be made that we perform relatively well (for us) in writing mechanics.

Our first year students, as they often do, scored comparatively well (in the 40-50th percentile). Their sub-scores track fairly well with the national averages in each area.

CLA participants nationwide over represent public colleges (51% of CLA participants; only 32% of colleges) and the median SAT scores for participating colleges are lower than the national median. Other colleges regularly also struggle to motivate seniors to do their best—next year Institutional Research will sweeten the deal for seniors with some gift cards as they've used with NSSE. We at Stockton in the meantime must face that our in-house data (General studies pilot) and CLA data demonstrate that we can do better by our students.

We've already begun working hard at helping our students learn more in the critical areas of writing and critical thinking. We've also developed additional ways of assessing so that CLA need not be the only, or the most important, of the measures of these skills that we rely upon. Programs have developed their own tools to assess students differently or better. The writing program has tried to investigate where we go wrong with writing—current evidence points to our W2 system, as currently implemented and/or experienced by students, being inadequate to hone student communication skills to the desired level, at least in the area of analytical writing. In addition, faculty have developed and then used performance tasks as teaching tools, and faculty have tried different pedagogical techniques in areas like Experimental psychology or first-year writing where faculty often find that students progress well in some areas of the curriculum but do not achieve some of our more important goals for them.

In response to CLA scores and other data, initiatives, and goals, the college is defining ten Essential Learning Outcomes, including communication and critical thinking. In addition, the college supported a group led by Rodger Jackson last summer that explored ways to teach (and define) critical thinking, and the college will now support a major, multi-year effort led by Jed Morfit, Bill Reynolds, and Mark Berg to help faculty develop and hone critical thinking pedagogy.

We can certainly hope that our students lack motivation to do their best as seniors on the CLA (and then we might be concerned about why they are so much less motivated than other seniors nationwide!) or that our students are learning well at the many things not measured by the CLA (like program-specific objectives, where students do seem to often perform well). The CLA is but one imperfect measure, and our sampling and administration are imperfect. However, all of these factors combined do not satisfactorily explain our senior students' fairly consistently dismal performance. Let us presume that we fail to help too many of our typical students (as opposed to the strongest) to develop some of the skills that we think will be most important for them in their careers, as engaged citizens, and in their personal lives. Then, let us act to improve all of our students' learning in these areas. There is little to be lost and much to be gained by this approach.

CPP for the “Are your students learning what you are teaching?” Summer Institute, aka the 2012 Assessment Institute

Apply to this summer's professional development Institute, "Are your students learning what you are teaching? Designing courses and/or curricula to find out" (aka the Assessment Institute). Participants will attend [May 16 and 17](#) and one day TBD from 9-3:00 and will receive a [\\$400.00](#) stipend.

Participants will work with colleagues to develop a tool box (vocabulary, theory, plans and materials) for systematically examining whether their students are learning what they are teaching. Apply if you would like to work on revisiting a course or curricula (major, minor, certificate program, track, General Studies category) in ways that will yield better information about student learning and lead to course/curricular revisions that improve student learning.

Interested? Email Heather McGovern by [March 30](#) with a short, detailed description of your proposed project, including

- 1) For what group of students do you wish to investigate learning? (i.e., those enrolled in a particular course, track, minor, or major)?
- 2) What learning objectives are currently identified for that group?
- 3) What do you want to know about the students' learning?

Participants should expect to write about their projects in future editions of the campus assessment newsletter, *Evidence*. Preference will be given to proposals with a clearly identified focus.

CLA results, cont.

Our students score a mean of 2.7 in analytical evaluation and reasoning, 2.8 in writing effectiveness, and 3.0 in writing mechanics. The sub-score rubric defines scores of 2, 3, and 4 as noted below. You may access the entire institutional CLA report with appendixes, the full rubric, and more detail on student scores online.

	Analytic evaluation and reasoning	Writing effectiveness	Writing mechanics
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates accurate understanding of several aspects of the argument, but disregards a few. • Identifies several (at least 3) deficiencies in the argument. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizes response in a way that makes the writer's critique and its logic apparent but not obvious. • Provides valid elaboration on identified deficiencies several times. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates good control of grammatical conventions with few errors. • Writes well-constructed sentences with some varied structure and length. • Uses vocabulary that clearly communicates ideas but lacks variety.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disregards several aspects of the argument or makes minor misinterpretations of the argument. • Identifies a few (2-3) deficiencies in the argument. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a limited or somewhat unclear critique. Presents relevant information, but that information is not woven into an argument. • Provides valid elaboration on identified deficiencies a few times. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates fair control of grammatical conventions with frequent minor errors. • Writes sentences that read naturally but tend to have similar structure and length. • Uses vocabulary that communicates ideas adequately but lacks variety.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disregards or misinterprets much of the information in the argument. • Identifies very few (1-2) deficiencies in the argument and may accept unreliable evidence as credible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides limited, invalid, overstated, or very unclear critique. May present information in a disorganized fashion or undermine own points. • Any elaboration on identified deficiencies tends to be vague, irrelevant, inaccurate, or unreliable (e.g., based entirely on writer's opinion). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates poor control of grammatical conventions with frequent minor errors and some distracting errors. • Consistently writes sentences with similar structure and length, and some may be difficult to understand. • Uses simple vocabulary, and some vocabulary may be used inaccurately or in a way that makes meaning unclear.

Study Abroad vs. Study Tour

Melaku Lakew

Study Abroad and Study Tour programs are available in many colleges and universities. Stockton provides both programs.

Study abroad program

A Study Abroad program usually asks students to spend one semester in a foreign country. Students must apply and it is up to the student to research, learn and be knowledgeable about the country he/she will be visiting. The extent to which this learning is carried out depends on the student's own interests and motivation. Since the student will be living in the host country, it is useful (but not necessary) for the student to have previous knowledge of the language of the country. Students typically also take a language course. Other courses include subjects in the student's major or area of interest, as well as studies on the culture of the host country. A transcript and grade report are obtained at the end of the semester, and students may transfer the credits to their home university if the program is accredited and approved. During the semester abroad, the student lives on the campus of the host school or with a host family. The costs for Studying Abroad include airfare, room and board, meals, and tuition for the semester, excursions and personal spending. These costs vary with individual programs, but are higher than costs for a semester at home. The average cost continues to be in excess of \$15,000. The most popular majors for American students studying abroad are social sciences and humanities, business and management, foreign language (Study Abroad 1995, A Guide to A Semester and Year Abroad Academic Programs, Peterson's, 1995, Princeton, NJ 1996).

Not surprisingly, Europe is by far the most traveled destination for students. Over sixty-five percent of U.S. students go to Western Europe for Study Abroad. Only two to three percent of all college students travel to study in Africa (<http://www.forumea.org/research-data.cfm>). I found these facts significant because there is clearly a correlation when one examines the ethnic background of the students studying abroad. Most of the students who are studying Europe are of European descent and they may feel comfortable in such an environment. The overall number of Americans studying abroad represents less than one percent of the total US post-secondary school enrollments (Hayes, 85), so more students should be encouraged to have international experience. Many of those who managed to travel to Africa are reflective of our general traveling population: namely those from families with an annual income of \$90,000 to \$111,000 and well informed about travel in general (<http://tinet.ita.doc.gov/research/programs/ifs/index.html>). As for sex and ethnic breakdown, the survey done for 1994-95 stated that 86% of students who chose to study abroad were white; five percent were Hispanic-American; 5% were Asian-American; 3% were African-American; and 1% was multi-racial. According to the survey, 41% of the students attended research institutions and 18% went to Master's institutions, while only 22% were from Bachelor's granting colleges. Most low income and minority students attend public institutions with moderate requirements for admission that are fairly inexpensive. These students are underrepresented in the international study abroad programs mainly because of financial and time constraints.

Although financial aid is available for those who study abroad, the cost may be higher than most low-income students can afford to pay. A basic Study Abroad program located in Ghana, Africa is about \$6,500. However, this price does not include meals, textbooks, personal expenses, local travel, or round trip airfare. The two important variables, information and affordability, necessary to make students involved in the international experience do not seem to be accessible to many students in general, and to low income and minority students in particular.

Faculty led study tour program

A Study Tour is a two-part program that includes a one-semester intensive study (in the home university) on a country of interest and a two to three-week trip to that country. In the lecture portion of the class, students learn about the country's culture, people, politics, etc. through discussions, readings, and assignments. Knowing the language of the country to be visited is of benefit but it is not necessary since the students will not be staying for an extended period. During the trip, students travel in a group with the professor and perhaps a guide. The students do not take courses during the trip, but are expected to be observant and become educated about the country that they have studied and are experiencing. The instructors usually give assignments that focus on the student's experiences on the trip.

There are a few advantages to the Study Tour over the Study Abroad program. Course work allows more thorough planning for the trip. The costs for a Study Tour include tuition for the lecture portion and the cost of the trip, which usually includes airfare, most meals and lodging, and scheduled tours and activities. The cost of a Study Abroad can be at least three times as much as a Study Tour. Our study course in South Africa on average costs only \$3300 for three weeks,

Groups of students who have been historically excluded from Study Abroad due to cost and lack of information may be able to experience studying overseas, particularly Africa, through a Study Tour.

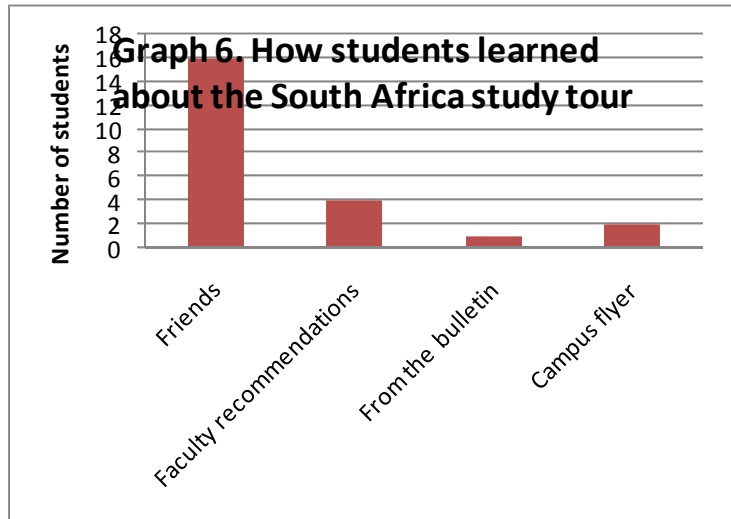
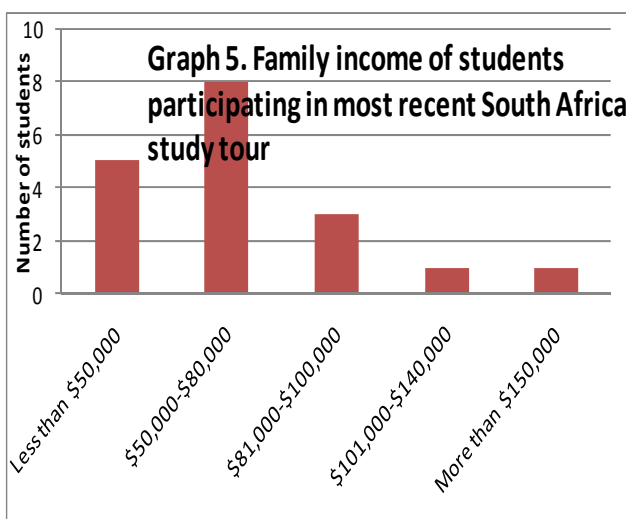
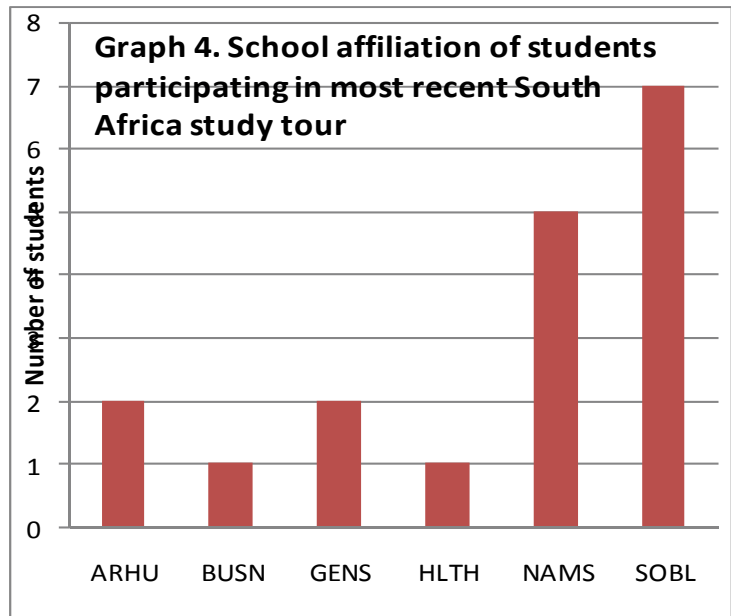
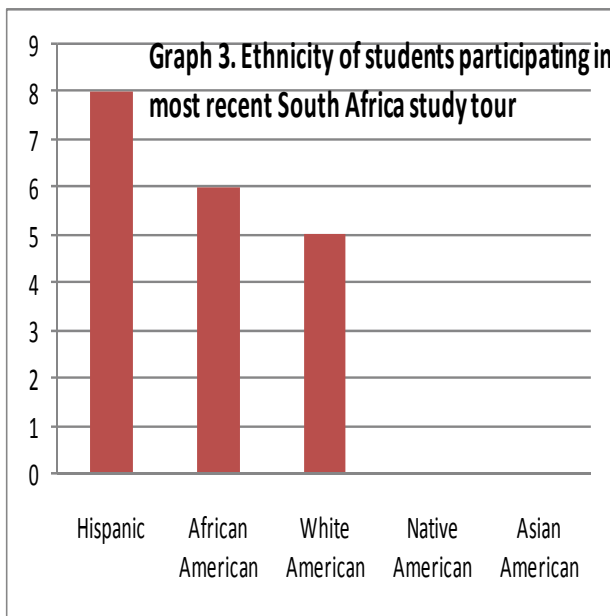
Study Abroad vs. Study Tour, cont.

Stockton South Africa Study Tour

Our Study Tour to South Africa focuses on three provinces of the country, Gauteng, Western Cape and Mupumalanga. We study how principal institutions play a role in local development. The students experience this firsthand-- meeting with people of South Africa and partaking in their culture. They also sightsee, witnessing more of the history and daily lives of the people of South Africa. The program allows students to experience firsthand what their culture and society are like. This gives students intensive learning and understanding of what they are going to study beforehand.

Our program is only 15 years old and it may be too early to make any definitive statement about its success at this time. Preliminary evidence suggests that interest among minority students is on the rise and for the first time recently they were the majority. During the past three tours, ninety-five percent of our students were first time passport holders and first time travelers. All the students who participate in the program are required to keep a reflective journal, receive lectures from a host county scholar, and to write a story in the campus newspaper on a topic of their interest to share their knowledge with the larger college community. The effort to transfer knowledge through these national expatriates has been effective in informing the larger student population about our program and initiating interest on the continent of Africa by and large.

We used a pre-trip and post-trip survey to gather data to help assess our Study Tour.



Study Abroad vs. Study Tour, cont.

Students responded to a survey question asking why they signed up for the study tour with responses like the following, "To learn about another country in an affordable way. By a study tour it sets up a schedule for learning experience rather than a tourist one." Two students directly mention the affordability; all student responses address a desire to learn about another culture.

Looking back at the time these students spent in South Africa, they cannot even begin to express how much they have become better persons. They have learned about South Africa, the United States and themselves and become more appreciative as to what they have in their life. After visiting some of the residents of South Africa, such as some of the poor people who did not have electricity, running water, or inside facilities to dispose of their waste, they realize how extremely fortunate their lives are in America. When asked what they learned about social problems in the country they visited, students responded similarly to this one, "Learned that there is still white/black tension & inequalities & that there is still a huge gap between the very poor & very rich" and this: "I think this trip made me more humble and appreciative of what we have in America & what opportunities are available. It taught me to not take everything for granted."

For some of these students learning comes also from fellow traveling students, most notably from fellow travelers of different ethnic backgrounds. Students in the post survey said things like, "I have an increased appreciation for all cultures. Glad that I traveled with diverse group." Some students were extremely hesitant to go on the trip to South Africa because they thought that they would be the only few white persons going on the trip. When they discovered that African-American students are going on the trip the majority of my students who are white thought their trip was going to be spoiled. They later told me that they "associated African-American students as someone who steals, breaks, and hurts things that did not belong to them. "Can you blame me?" said one student, "My parents were extremely prejudiced; subsequently I was brought up to hate black people. The media also did not help with changing my perception. They consistently portrayed African-Americans as low dirty fugitives who do not contribute anything to society." The white students' thoughts about African-American students started to change the minute they stepped on the bus to go to the airport to South Africa. After getting in South Africa and living, eating, talking all aspects of life their relationship with each other blossomed. Some considered themselves lucky that have met such honest and caring people. The white students' relationship with the African-American students made the white students' lives "enriching and complete." They went for extensive walks around Cape Town and discussed what it was like growing up black and white in America. South Africa's setting seems to invite discussion on prejudice. Most of my white students admitted that they could not, and would not ever, understand the struggle and fight African-Americans have to go through every day had it not been for the African-American students on the trip and the South African reality.

Students noticed that there are still social conditions that keep whites separated from blacks and colored. Even though apartheid is gone as legislation and a system but social relations remain separate and unequal. They still live generally apart from each other; they work in different jobs and shop at different places in general. Blacks walk while whites ride, blacks work lower paying, and unattractive jobs while whites still work in better paying government jobs. Student witnessed how the different races treat each other as well as foreigners. We have not seen the races mixing socially but when people look at us as a multi-racial group of Americans they often are surprised. As Americans we are going to South Africa as a mixed group demanding similar services for all our members sending a message of equal and fair treatment for all races. I am sure our presence helps accelerate the positive changes that are taking place in South Africa in general, and race relations, in particular.

Students also complete the trip with more appreciation for their opportunities, "I saw how the people in Africa fight so hard to get an education, some even walk miles to get to school. It make me feel like I should work harder to achieve the best in college." Furthermore, most plan to be actively involved with organizations post-trip, with 81% planning to be involved with Books Without Borders, 19% planning to participate with International Human Rights Club, and others planning other participation.

The course in effect becomes an agent of positive social change in America and South Africa.

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