

Developing Student Intercultural Communication, Intercultural Sensitivity, & Professional Identity Through Online International Study Abroad

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PURPOSE: This study aims to explore the relationship between online faculty-led international study abroad course and occupational therapy students' development of intercultural communication, intercultural sensitivity, and professional identity. Student and practitioner perspectives illuminate the need for cultural competence in occupational therapy education and practice (Dennis et al., 2020; Atwal et al., 2021) and some studies have posited that significant cultural competency gains result from a short-term study program with adequate faculty guidance (Gilliland et al., 2015).

DESIGN: This study used a non-randomized pretest-posttest descriptive quantitative design with three surveys administered directly before and after the five-week program. A total of 43 occupational therapy graduate students and two undergraduate students participated in this study at a public university in the USA. All participants were enrolled in an online faculty-led international study abroad course.

METHOD: The measures used were: the Intercultural Communication Competence Scale, the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale, and the Macleod Clark Professional Identity Scale. Descriptive statistics regarding demographic information, inferential statistics regarding gender differences, and differences in pre-and post-course participation were examined with paired t-tests. Correlational statistics between intercultural communication, intercultural sensitivity, and professional identity measures were recorded to investigate parallels between participant results among the three assessments.

RESULTS: This study found participants made modest but significant gains in cultural sensitivity after participation in an online faculty-led international study abroad course.

CONCLUSION: These findings demonstrate that virtual abroad programs may promote cultural and professional development for occupational therapy students as an alternative to other forms of abroad study.

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