Study Abroad and the Easy Promise of Global Citizenship:
Student Conceptions of a Contested Notion

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Abstract
The past decade has witnessed exponential growth in study abroad participation. During these same years the promise that studying abroad will develop students into Global Citizens has been a nearly ubiquitous feature in promotion of the experience. Yet, Global Citizenship remains a highly contested concept that promoters of study abroad rarely define, adequately explain or explicitly align with program outcomes. Among students as the main consumers of education abroad, little in the literature has so far documented how they conceive of Global Citizenship. This paper details findings from 29 in-depth interviews and 118 surveys of study abroad students from 41 higher education institution throughout the United States who were asked to explain how they understand and define Global Citizenship. Using variation theory and phenomenographic methodology, the study presents a typology showing five distinct ways these students conceive of Global Citizenship: 1) global existence; 2) global acquaintance; 3) global openness; 4) global participation; and 5) global commitment. These categories provide a student-centered vocabulary grounded in empirically derived data and available to study abroad providers to help align promises of Global Citizenship with desired program outcomes.

Keywords: Global Citizenship, study abroad, international education, phenomenography

1. Introduction

In an era in which international education has taken on growing significance, many colleges, universities and third party providers of study abroad opportunity market their programs as essentially guaranteeing Global Citizenship. Yet, most of these offer little or no guidance as to what Global Citizenship actually means. Within the academic discourse there is even less consensus, even if more thoughtful analysis of the notion and what it might entail. This lack of clarity has impeded what should be a more thoughtful analysis of Global Citizenship as it relates to what students actually do during study abroad and how educators expect them to make meaning of their experience. This paper details a study of college and university students in the United States and how they conceive of Global Citizenship. The argument highlights the need for more meaningful discussion as far as the promise of Global Citizenship is used to justify engaging more students in study abroad activities.

Over the last decade, study abroad participation has grown at a 150% rate, attesting to the importance that many American college and university students today attach to the value of international educational experience (IIE, 2008). Indeed, few observers by now dispute that study abroad is one of the most high impact activities of a well rounded educational experience. Most stakeholders are convinced that when students engage in education abroad they gain, perhaps above all, greater global awareness and international understanding among a host of other important competencies. Government funded reports, research studies, and declarations by heads of colleges and universities all promote the critical need to
develop a wide variety of global competencies in today’s higher education graduates (AAC&U, 2007; Lewin, 2009; NSSE, 2007; Stearns, 2009).

However, while literature on study abroad is replete with references to Global Citizenship and the concept is widely used and seems to be universally understood, it is rarely defined or explained by those using it. While scholars have long debated the contested status of the term, and some study abroad observers have also begun to criticize its blanket, one-size-fits-all use in study abroad promotional material, no research has yet shown how students, as the direct consumers of study abroad experience, interpret and articulate their own understanding of the notion. This paper provides empirical data on one sample of U.S. university students’ understanding of Global Citizenship.

1.1. Global Citizenship as an Intercultural Competency

For American higher education institutions, one of the most visible ways to be internationally minded today is to offer a host of study abroad opportunities. In an increasingly competitive world, study abroad has become a must-have notation on many students’ resumes. The pressure to create, sustain and build a broad range of programs abroad has increased. Universities and colleges tout a host of perceived and documented benefits from the experience, including greater intercultural competencies, an expanded worldview and sensitivity toward other cultures, adaptability, identity development, appeal to employers, improved in-class performance, language gains, and even increased creativity (Bennett, 1993; Bhawuk and Brislin, 1992; Burnouf, 2004; Deardorff, 2006; Dolby, 2004; Dwyer and Peters, 2004; Savicki, Downing-Burnette, Heller, Binder and Suntinger, 2004; Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman, 2003; Maddux and Galinsky, 2009; Medina–López–Portillo, 2004; Rayman, Trooboff and Vande Berg, 2008).

We now live in an age in which the term ‘Globalization’ has practically become a catch phrase for anything and everything that is international. The term pervades not only much of the comparative and international education research literature (Dodds, 2008; Spring, 2008) but can also often be heard in everyday, popular discourse. In international education activity in particular, making sense of Globalization and its implications for study abroad and student exchange is critical. As part of that challenge, research on study abroad over the last decade has sought to explore the competencies that students gain when they engage in international learning, including developing a ‘global citizenship’ ethos (ACE, 2009; Bennett, 2008; Musil, 2006; Deardorff, 2006; 2009; Olsen, Green and Hill, 2006). But, while Global Citizenship has generally been classified as one of several intercultural learning gains, little consensus yet exists about how to define or measure what intercultural competence really is and, particularly, where Global Citizenship fits into that (Deardorff, 2006; 2009).

Since 2001, the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ Shared Futures: Global Learning and Social Responsibility initiative has partnered with over 100 institutions to collectively grapple with how to define, operationalize and measure global learning. This initiative notes the difficulty of agreeing on definitions and successfully aligning learning goals with outcomes (Hovland, 2006; 2009). While some studies have looked at particular aspects of the student learning experience during study abroad and its longer-term impact (Dolby, 2004; Savicki et al, 2004; Paige, Fry, LaBrack, Stallman, Josic, Jon, 2009) empirical studies of how students who engage in international experiences understand Global Citizenship have not been conducted.

1.2. Global Citizenship and Study Abroad
In ancient Greece the idea of a Global Citizen was articulated through the notion of a *kosmou polite* or 'world citizen,' a person who was endowed with membership in both their community of birth but also defined by membership in a larger community of humans sharing fundamental capacities to engage in rational and enlightened thinking. This understanding of citizenship did not reject local identifications; rather, it viewed humans as surrounded by concentric circles in which local identifications widened to an outermost circle that included all of humanity (Nussbaum, 1996, pp. 7, 9). Later, Immanuel Kant invoked a Law of World Citizenship, even foreshadowing the possibility of universal governing bodies in his essay, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*. From the vantage point of his time, Kant argued that people might come to share ‘the common right to the face of the earth…[that] the human race can gradually be brought closer and closer to a constitution establishing world citizenship (Kant, 1795).’ While Kant’s sketch has been scrutinized and expanded over time, the debate about the possibility of a type of citizenship that transcends national boundaries has been further elaborated upon by more recent revolutionary thinkers and ion more recent times been associated with cosmopolitanism. These thinkers have included Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell and Juergen Habermas among others, and moral philosophers and political scientists including Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum, Andrew Linklater, Michael Walzer, Richard Falk, John Urry, to name only a few (Schattle, 2008).

In its most widely understood modern sense, Global Citizenship implies a general belief in the rights of all people to universal justice and basic human dignity; responsibility for the well being of others and the health of the planet; and an obligation to question or even challenge existing power structures and their associated political, social, governmental, and legal activities (Nussbaum, 1996; Roman, 2003). The rise of modern day conceptions of Global Citizenship have contributed to the founding of global organizations such as the United Nations, Oxfam, and Amnesty International, among many others that seek to ensure access to basic human needs and rights and foster an egalitarian ideal of global justice. The Global Citizenship these organizations espouse, and the attendant rise of ‘Global Citizenship education’ their work has engendered, have come in tandem with increased attention to universal human rights and growing globally-minded activism and grassroots protest. Advances in technology and increased levels of travel and migration have contributed to a sense of global interconnectedness and responsibility for a host of problems, from the environment down to civil strife at regional and national levels.

In the United States, a driving force behind the growth of education abroad has been the belief that more students living and studying abroad helps diminish the image of Americans in the world as being parochial or ethnocentric (de Wit, 2009; Stearns, 2009). Not surprisingly, perhaps, the idea that studying abroad makes you a ‘Global Citizen’ features prominently in much of the promotional rhetoric around international education: (Dolby, 2004; Streitwieser and Wang, 2009; Woolf, 2009; Zemach-Bersin, 2009). This belief hinges on the basic argument that participating in study abroad offers a life changing experience that broadens horizons in unimaginable ways and in the end—whether one studies abroad for a summer or for the full year, in a familiar western context or in a less traditional setting—grants the professional and intellectual credential of Global Citizenship. Indeed, Global Citizenship has often been championed as a guaranteed outcome.

1.3. *Misusing an Inadequately Understood Notion*

The problem with using this rhetoric is that many study abroad programs fail to offer an explanation for how they interpret Global Citizenship. There is often little explanation for how a program develops this competency nor is there data from participating students that documents an actual alignment between the aspiration for Global Citizenship and the acquisition of it (Woolf, 2009; Zemach-Bersin, 2009). This gap
leaves students who are searching for a study abroad program with little choice but to make a leap of faith that is premised on a vague ideal—even if that ideal in itself may intuitively be attractive. This easy promise allows study abroad to be presented as an experience that claims to offer something far grander than may realistically be possible. As Zemach-Bersin has suggested: ‘If nuanced, clear, and analytical articulations of global citizenship replace the current privatized, individualistic, and elite connotations, it is possible that the concept of global citizenship will be able to provide an alternative discourse to the current commercial narrative of study abroad (p. 318).’

In the academic literature, however, Global Citizenship is a highly contested concept that scholars have articulated in multiple and often competing ways. Some scholars have asked whether the concept can serve as anything more than a mere metaphorical flourish (Carter, 2001; Davies, 2006, p. 5), while others have asked whether the idea can be separated from the unflattering image of colonialism and neocolonialism and stand on its own, unbiased and as a representation of a more open expression of democracy (Roman, 2003, p. 270). Still others have questioned whether trying to interpret the concept may not be premature when reaching consensus on the meaning of national citizenship is still elusive (Clarke, 1996).

Within study abroad, moreover, there is no meaningful consensus on the concept. To site it responsibly requires specificity and support from a credible base of literature, and assessing the concept as a type of intercultural competency is only possible if it is also aligned with realistically attainable outcomes (Deardorff, 2009). In addition, while the field’s flagship organization, The Forum on Education Abroad has been seeking input for the development of a glossary the field can use (Forum, 2009) but Global Citizenship has not yet been included, indicating the current difficulty of adequately defining the term. Similarly, Lewin (2009) argues that the field of study abroad is still in a phase of ‘defining terms, justifying positions,’ and de Wit (2009) posits that even among international educators the use of language and terminology often lacks specificity and is inclined toward ‘parochial perspectives’ (p. 212).

Scholars who have observed the (mis)use of Global Citizenship as a promotional tool for the study abroad industry have been highly critical (Zemach-Bersin, 2009). Michael Woolf (2009) notes that the industry benefits by promoting its ‘product’ with a simple idea that helps validate its efforts.

‘The use of the term global citizen needs, therefore, to be nuanced and not used as a glib and hyperbolic marketing claim in study abroad. It is a complex, contested proposition and not a condition to be achieved through the purchase of experience....The problems identified here derive, then, from a combination of over-simplification, obfuscation and exaggeration. They burden the field of education abroad with aspirations that can rarely be met, and with concepts that, at best, lack intellectual coherence and, at worst, create obscure fields of jumbled discourse.’ (p. 15).

If the promise, ‘study abroad=Global Citizenship’ lacks intellectual coherence despite its seductive message and scholarly attention, the critical feature of student understanding of the concept of Global Citizenship is virtually non-existent. Little is known of these understandings and their potential contribution to both the pedagogical and policy debates surrounding study abroad. In the end, debates about particular ideals and the terminology expressing them are immaterial if a robust understanding of the experience that students themselves are having in relation to these terms is essentially missing from the discussion. The study reported here addresses this question: how American university students understand the concept of Global Citizenship.
2. The Study

2.1. Conceptual Frameworks

This study is informed by two related conceptual frameworks: variation theory and phenomenography. The former is a theory of student learning focused on the variation in the different ways people understand a particular phenomenon or concept, while the latter is a dedicated research approach to study that variation. Variation theory claims that there are a finite number of ways of understanding or experiencing a particular phenomenon and that these understandings are hierarchically related such that succeeding understandings are richer and more complex than preceding ones in the hierarchy. These understandings are distinguished from one another by a key dimension or aspect of variation. Learning occurs when a learner becomes aware of the variation that distinguishes a less complex way of understanding a phenomenon or concept from a more complex way (Bowden and Marton, 1998; Marton and Booth, 1997; Marton, Runesson, and Tsui, 2004; Pang and Marton, 2005). The identification of different conceptions and aspects of variation which distinguish them can lead to more informed and targeted educational learning outcomes and assessment (Micari, Light, Calkins and Light, 2007; Reid and Petocz, 2002; Trigwell, 2000).

Phenomenography is a qualitative research paradigm developed in Sweden, Australia and the U.K. in the 1970s and 1980s to investigate different ways that students in higher education learn (Bowden, 2000; Marton, 1981, 1986, 1994; Marton and Booth, 1997; Svensson, 1997). It is primarily based on in-depth interviews that aim to identify the totality of different ways learners experience or understand a phenomenon in a particular context. Marton (1994) describes the approach as “the empirical study of the limited number of qualitatively different ways in which we experience, conceptualize, understand, perceive, [or] apprehend various phenomena (p. 4424).” It is important to note that phenomenography is not concerned with describing individual students so much as it is with mapping out a complete typology of different understandings. The approach is particularly useful in providing in-depth insights into how particular inputs—programs, courses and teaching—can lead to stronger outputs—meaningful experiences, learning and knowledge.

2.2. The Sample

This study draws on analysis of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 29 undergraduates who engaged in international learning experiences through at a mid-sized research-intensive university in the Midwestern United States, as well as a follow up survey of 118 students from 41 different higher education institutions throughout the United States who sought to participate in [university’s name] summer community development [name] Program by spending two months in Uganda, India, Bolivia or Nicaragua. For the interviews, the research team contacted students by email invitation from a variety of academic departments and student life centers throughout campus, including but not limited to those that offer study abroad, while the survey was sent to all students from institutions throughout the United States that had contacted [university name] about the [name] Program. All participants volunteered to be interviewed or surveyed without compensation.

Students in the interview sample represented a range of program types. For the purposes of this paper these programs have been placed into three main categories based on type of exposure to another culture: Island programs (which here include Hybrid programs), Direct-enrollment programs (which here include Internship programs); and Immersion programs (which here include Research and Field Studies programs). Island programs generally offer little cultural immersion and are either led by a study abroad institute (‘third-
party provider’) or by a faculty member from an academic department; students take classes and excursions together (in some cases also taking a local university course) and often also live together. Direct-enrollment programs are those in which students study directly at the local university or higher education institution or engage in a practicum (Internship) at a local school or business but do not do so facilitated through a U.S. institution or program provider. Finally, Immersion programs are built around providing substantive interactions with the local culture through Field Study opportunities and in-depth Research programs or faculty-led community development and civic engagement projects. Within the study sample, ten students had studied on Island programs; five in Direct-enrollment programs; and eleven in Immersion programs; and three students had never studied abroad. Table I displays the variation of the sample by program group and student discipline.
TABLE I. Interview Sample’s Distribution by Program Type and Discipline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Type</th>
<th>Island Direct-enrollment</th>
<th>Immersion</th>
<th>Other International Experience</th>
<th>Total Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural Sciences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Participants</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following two sections detail the new theoretical framework we developed to illustrate students’ conceptions of global citizenship based on the in-depth qualitative interviews we conducted, and the results of the survey we administered to the larger and more institutionally diverse student sample asking them to select a Global Citizenship conception and then explain the reason for their choice.

In order to identify the maximum number of different understandings of Global Citizenship, students invited to interview were purposefully selected with respect to two general kinds of criteria: the criterion of similarity (Light, 2002) with respect to the context of the experience, and the criterion of variation (Patton, 2002). To satisfy the first criteria—similarity—27 of the 29 students interviewed were chosen because they had some form of prior experience in international settings, although not exclusively with participation in structured study abroad programs. These international experiences included living abroad as a child, travelling with family and friends, and going on organized study abroad tours during high school, in college, or through a church or civic organization. The majority of these students had returned from a structured study abroad opportunity within the past two years while a smaller number of students were just preparing to depart for their study abroad period. Just two students had never traveled abroad but expressed an interest in knowing more about international issues and seeking to study abroad in the future. In addition, many of the 29 students had also engaged in ‘international’ activities such as living with international students, participating in campus international events, engaging actively with ethnically, racially and geographically diverse communities within communities in the United States, or simply taking courses with international thematic content. Regardless of their previous experiences, all shared an interest in international issues and sought out having international experiences.

To satisfy the second criterion, variation, the study ensured maximum diversity across the sample by a selection based on five criteria of variation: gender, year of study, discipline, duration of time spent abroad and program type. There were 8 males and 21 females in the study—a proportion similar to current national averages for gender representation in study abroad. The sample also comprised two freshmen, seven
juniors, and 20 seniors. No sophomores volunteered to be interviewed. The distribution of the sample included students majoring in 12 different disciplines across the natural sciences (3), social sciences (18) and humanities (7). One freshman had not yet declared a major. In addition, 8 students studied on a short-term program (8 weeks or less), 17 students on a semester length program (12 to 17 weeks) and 1 on a full year program (25-39 weeks).

2.3. Data Collection

Interviews were semi-structured, following a set list of nine main questions divided into four sub areas with follow up probes asking respondents to elaborate on certain answers in greater detail. The same interview protocol was used for all students, with only minor adaptations according to the idiosyncratic nature of the interviewee’s background and experiences. The interview protocol was structured to encourage interviewees to move from concrete questions about their experiences to deeper reflection on the impact and meaning of the experiences. Subjects moved from basic demographic and background questions to discussing how they came to engage in international experiences to explaining what they did on each experience to finally comparing the experiences in a way that enabled them to reflect on the value and meaning of each experience in turn. The last section was purposefully situated at the end of the interview so that the interviewees’ initial concrete descriptions of their activities could later become the basis for reflecting on them. Some of the reflection-type questions included, ‘What made your experience international? How did you go about drawing meaning from your experience? What do you consider to be the key elements of an international experience? How would you describe the way you went about learning while you were abroad?’ and ‘What does Global Citizenship mean to you and do you see yourself as a Global Citizen?’

2.4. Data Analysis

All interviews were tape-recorded and independently transcribed by a professional transcription service. Interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. The interview process followed a phenomenographic interviewing technique explicated by Åkerlind (2005a; b). The transcriptions were analyzed through a detailed, iterative process that involves both focusing on specific parts of the interview and then also on the totality of each interview on its own and compared against other interviews. The data analysis was conducted by two researchers who worked independently from one another but also meeting regularly to present and discuss their interpretations. A third, more experienced phenomenographic researcher also provided critical feedback on a regular basis and suggested further avenues for the analysis. Given that qualitative analysis of any kind includes the possibility of unintended error, such as subjective misinterpretation and inherent biases, each step of the analysis involved checking and cross-checking statements from different parts of the transcript, as well as discussing findings with the more experienced analyst as a way to ensure consistent interpretation of meaning and categorization of the data. Because interpretation in phenomenographic analysis depends in part on the ability of the analysts to understand through some measure of their own experiences how respondents talk about the meaning of their experiences, it is important to ensure that “the categories provide an accurate description of ‘recognized reality’” (Entwistle and Entwistle, 1992, 5-6).

The data analysis process included six main steps. Step 1; analysts read each of the transcripts on their own, underlining particular utterances and making notes in the margins as a way to generally acclimate themselves to each interview as well as to the totality of the entire sample. Step 2; each analyst conducted another full reading of the transcripts, this time with a focus on specific sections related to questions of
specific interest—in this case how students discuss international experience in light of their particular conception of Global Citizenship. Step 3; each analyst summarized key issues and themes they saw emerging and began to organize them vis-à-vis the other transcripts to develop thematic groupings. Step 4, each analyst again went through their set of key issues and themes to sketch out the ‘dimensions of variation’ and underlying conceptions of understanding differentiating each student in the sample. Step 5; analysts worked together to create a table in the form of a conceptual map or typology to illustrate in graphic form the various dimensions and conceptions of understanding that emerged from the overall sample. Step 6; researchers again collaborated to select student quotes directly out of the transcripts in order to illustrate and support each distinct conception.

3. Findings

The typology of student understanding of Global Citizenship is presented here as a structural hierarchical ‘outcome space.’ The variation in understanding is described in terms of the increasing complexity that differentiates the conceptions from one another as well as the key aspects of variation that constitute the differences between conceptions. However, before proceeding to a description of the structural typology illustrated by student testimonials, we briefly report on two broader findings that emerged: a divergence in how students personally responded to the concept of Global Citizenship, and a convergence in the features they ascribed to it.

3.1. Divergence in Personal Responses

Students diverged appreciably in their initial response to the idea of Global Citizenship. Some students saw the concept as a wholly theoretical concept or even as a ‘philosophical thought.’ Such students often talked about it in terms of theories and approaches within their concentrations of study at the university. Thus, students in Economics often used terms directly related to economic globalization trends; political science students used terminology related to concepts of the ‘nation-state’; anthropology students brought in ‘social policy’ issues framed around the challenges of unequal distribution of resources, and so on. In contrast, many students responded in very concrete terms, seeing Global Citizenship as a personal, idiosyncratic characteristic that applies to some people but not others due primarily to their socio-economic status.

Some students also saw Global Citizenship as either an ‘obnoxious’ label or an ‘unattainable’ ideal that while certainly ‘noble to strive for’ ended up ‘bogus in many cases’ because of its uneven access to some with means but not to others because of their social status or geographic location. In addition to the emotional responses, students also located the concept of Global Citizenship within their own personal family history and life experience, relating it to where they lived as children or how their parents talked about international issues or foreign cultures.

3.2. A Broader Convergence

While most of the students struggled with their emotional responses and how to provide precise meanings for Global Citizenship, their accounts were also remarkably uniform in referring to it as a meaningful, even important idea. This convergence focused on two main features: that Global Citizenship must refer to something that is international, and that it must also imply a significant personal relationship to that international ‘thing.’
The first feature—Global Citizenship as international—meant having the opportunity to be exposed to international experiences and viewpoints apart from one’s own. The majority of students also felt that this international dimension could only be gained through travel outside of one’s own country. For them ‘international’ primarily meant traveling. However, they felt that travel could not simply be focused on tourism (i.e., vacationing in warm places) or be undertaken simply for one’s occupation (i.e., as a business traveler or as an airline pilot), but also had to be meaningful in and of itself. As one student argued, “It’s not just globe hopping….I think that you have to spend at least some period of time contrasting something with your American culture. (Melissa). Another student argued similarly: “If someone traveled the world for a year I wouldn’t call them a Global Citizen. I’d call them a world traveler. (Fiona)”

A smaller number of students, however, also argued that one could, in fact, gain international exposure and the international dimension they attributed to Global Citizenship without physically having to leave one’s national boundaries. For these students, having domestic ‘international’ exposure through reading about other parts of the world, having foreign friends, interacting within international communities, or observing and participating in different lifestyles to gather other points of view—even if within the geographic borders of the United States—was enough to gain the attributes of Global Citizenship. For these students, what was critical was not the travel abroad but the intellectual curiosity to want to learn about others through interacting with them, even if only domestically in diverse communities.

While exposure to international people and issues was a critical feature of Global Citizenship, students did not regard that feature alone as sufficient. All students argued that the relationship with the international also had to be meaningful. While students differed in what they believed was meaningful—indeed, as we shall see, this is critical to their different conceptions of Global Citizenship—they all identified how some international experiences could be characteristic of Global Citizenship while others could not. For example, some students felt that Peace Corps volunteers and people who travel and live abroad primarily to learn about the world and help others truly exemplify Global Citizens, while those who travel purely for occupational purposes or material and personal fulfillment, such as business travelers, pilots, tourists or globe trekking adventurers, do not.

For some interviewees this distinction was even applied to students who study abroad. In those cases, the interviewees at times clearly identified certain types of study abroad experiences as facilitating Global Citizenship but not others. For example, some students felt that study abroad for deeper cultural immersion and intellectual enrichment could lead to a global sensibility, while time abroad to fulfill a desire for fun and escapism could not.

3.3. Conceptions of Global Citizenship

In the section below we present a typology of five hierarchically distinct ways in which students understand Global Citizenship: Global Existence, Global Acquaintance, Global Openness, Global Participation and Global Commitment (see Table II, below). Each conception is distinguished in two closely related ways: 1) what students see as the key characteristics of the conception of Global Citizenship and 2) how they see these conceptions differing from one another. In the first instance, the analysis revealed five distinct ways that students described what Global Citizenship consists of: living on the earth, having a personal connection to other countries, learning through openness to other countries, participating in the cultural practices of other countries, and recognizing the wider interconnectedness between countries. In the second instance, the analysis revealed the structural relationship between these conceptions, describing how they differed from one another. This relationship showed that succeeding understandings are
distinguished from one another by key ‘aspects of variation’ in which the more complex conceptions subsume the earlier ones in a hierarchical fashion. In the section below, we describe each conception in this hierarchy with respect to student statements on Global Citizenship.
TABLE II. Conceptions of Global Citizenship (categories, types and features)

**Type I: Global Citizenship as Global Existence**

The first conception of Global Citizenship—Global Existence—is the least complex interpretation. It simply holds that because we are all born as human beings on this earth we are all by default Global Citizens. This way of seeing Global Citizenship was noted by one student as a precursor to what later in her interview she described as more complex ways of regarding the concept. But initially, she explained, one could in fact regard all ‘humans’ as one’s brethren at the most basic level and as a starting point.

To be a global citizen, you know, if you’re willing to be anywhere a part of Earth, I think that would make, under that definition, you more of a global citizen....By default. (Megan)

This statement reveals that understanding Global Citizenship in its simplest form consists of simply being born anywhere on the globe and that a connection to a particular place is not the decisive element.

**Type II: Global Citizenship as Global Acquaintance**

In the second conception—Global Acquaintance—students view Global Citizenship again in fairly simple terms, either as a status they inherited through their family background tied to one or more countries or through a career choice that involves frequent international travel. Even if this connection may be
tenuous—i.e., the parent grew up elsewhere but the student has always lived in the United States—what matters is that the student can claim a connection with one or more other countries. For example, Dennis sees merely being of ‘international circumstances’—i.e. a parent was a citizen of another country—as sufficient to be a Global Citizen.

A Global Citizen is like the person of Turkish decent that’s grown up in Germany who’s mother is also Brazilian…being born of international circumstances. (Dennis)

Tasha also reveals an acquaintanceship understanding of Global Citizenship, although, in her case, through spending time in other countries. While working for some length of time in another country might raise richer understandings of Global Citizenship, Tasha is primarily concerned here with the simple idea of spending time in multiple countries, although she also believes acquaintanceship is more than just travelling to those places once a year.

There’s people who work now that work in several countries or several continents regularly. So they don’t just travel there once a year but they have to divide their time between these places and so…I think you develop an identity as a Global Citizen because you’re so mobile and you have parts of those locales as your identity. (Tasha)

Global Citizenship for students with this conception, then, seems to consist primarily of meeting a simple set of criteria: that of being ‘global’—i.e. having contact with multiple countries—and that of ‘citizenship’—i.e., being a descendent of someone who has lived elsewhere. While the acquaintanceship may indeed need to be ‘real’ in a tangible sense—i.e., travel by itself is not enough but one has to live there for some time too—what the person actually does in abroad is less important than the mere fact of acquaintanceship with a foreign place. Much like students who may travel to another culture but restrict their engagements to observing rather than participating in it, students with Type II understandings see Global Citizenship as a given attribute that is gained through a parent’s citizenship or frequent travel. Their conception does not involve more complexity of understanding.

Type III: Global Citizenship as Global Openness

In the third conception—Global Openness—students do not only see a connection to one or more countries but also view Global Citizenship as entailing a personal willingness to be open to learning from other countries, cultures and customs. A hallmark of this third conception is that students regard Global Citizenship as being a way of thinking and behaving in ways that they feel are deliberately not American-centric. Avoiding this bias is very important to them.

I guess to be a Global Citizen means you aren’t only focused on your own country as the most important…but you also have to recognize your own bias and cultural perspective that you’ll never be able to shed. (Cathy)

Cathy feels that Global Citizenship especially means not seeing her own country as the centre of the universe. As part of that she also recognizes that her status as an American citizen may compel her to hold certain beliefs and cultural practices that may be hard to shed, whether she likes it or not.

Students with an openness conception want to belong to more than their own country and culture. As Karrie and Yoshi illustrate below, such students view Global Citizenship as including a move away from an
“us-versus-them” dichotomy and instead see themselves with the rest of the world in cooperative terms, as a ‘functioning unit.’

If you have a desire to be a part of the world as a functioning unit versus your nation against the world, then I think you can consider yourself a Global Citizen. (Karrie)

A global citizen should not feel strongly...like they belong in one culture...a global citizen should want or should be open to any other culture that’s around them, around the world. (Yoshi)

In addition to rejecting an exceptionalist posture and instead seeking global cooperation, students with an openness conception also value what they are able to learn from other cultures and viewpoints. These students believe that fundamental, shared human commonalities, rather than more surface national and cultural differences, are what bind. Patrick exemplifies this viewpoint.

The recognition that we all have something in common...When people dwell so much on the differences and don’t...acknowledge that there is something in common, then it’s difficult to make something like a Global Citizenship concept work....I’m a citizen of the globe. (Patrick)

Students with an openness conception regard having an inclusive view of others, searching for common ground on a basic humanitarian level, and seeking mutual understanding, as the essential qualifying features of Global Citizenship.

Type IV: Global Citizenship as Global Participation
Students holding the fourth conception—Global Participation—see Global Citizenship as not gained merely by acquaintance with, or openness to learning from, other countries but through the active engagement with the cultural practices of people in those other countries. To these students, a sense of belonging—‘inclusion and ‘connection’—with the other country or culture is critical to what it means to be a Global Citizen. Mary, for example, regards the feelings of ‘belonging’ that come through participation and forming relations and community belonging as important for Global Citizenship.

I guess it would be the feeling maybe not even like physically I’m a citizen of this country but the feeling of belonging to more than one place in the world or having some sort of connection to that place. (Mary)

To achieve this level of Global Citizenship, students seek to participate in diverse communities wherever they are and to actively engage in the way of life as lived by others. Thus, when these students venture abroad they seek Global Citizenship through participating in the activities of other communities as a way to gain acceptance. Rene exemplifies this viewpoint:

I feel like if I met somebody and they said they were a global citizen I would think they’ve probably been everywhere, they’ve probably lived different places and really interacted with other people everywhere and not just visited or had a look around but actually was a part of different communities. I think that living somewhere for a long period of time and just visiting is so different because you get the perspective of an actual citizen...which is so different because people treat
you differently, too… Tourists just go to the sites, that’s it but to become a part of the community, to actually… learn about the people around you and not just interact in a way that you’re an outsider but that you’re an insider and you know more about the social issues… you can’t really learn a lot about the country if you just come and touch there, you know, you have to actually be a part of it for a while. (Rene)

Students with a Global Participation conception, then, often articulate a sense of purpose to their foreign travel that fuses an openness to and an interest in participation with also an emotional and intellectual engagement that leads to personal transformation as critical for Global Citizenship. They seek, thus, to intensely come to know others and then apply that knowledge to how they will lead their lives.

[Global Citizenship means] learning about the people, sort of almost psychologically. Like how they live their lives, how they go about things and learning about the different ways that humans are raised and react in different situations and sort of taking little bits of that and incorporating it into what applies to you in life. (Alyssa)

**Type V: Global Citizenship as Global Commitment**

Students sharing the fifth conception—Global Commitment—make a critical distinction between being open to and learning about other countries and participating in them, and understanding that Global Citizenship requires a commitment to action in order to make the world a better place. These students, thus, are keenly aware of the globe’s interconnectedness and of how the problems faced by even the remotest communities are in fact interlinked with the issues all humans sharing the planet need to address. Ann articulates this conception in terms of what she sees as the responsibilities of a Global Citizen:

[A global citizen is] someone who’s responsible enough to take on the acquisition of the most intimate knowledge of the places they visit and who can responsibly communicate that and… improve themselves and use that to educate or help other people in their lives. (Ann)

Students with a commitment conception are often concerned with how their consumer choices may impact those in less developed countries. Gabby invokes this through the example of global trade practices, where she makes reference to sweat shop labor abuses reported in the US media.

I’m a Global Citizen in the sense that I’m not only interested in my own, like, what’s going on in America. I care very strongly about what’s going on in other countries and how we relate to other countries…I think that until I’ve had more experiences abroad I won’t consider myself a very good Global Citizen. I think that a Global Citizen is perhaps someone that identifies themselves not only as a member of their country but also as a member of the world as a whole, which I think is something that gets lost often… Our economy interacts with their economy. If you buy something that was made in China you’re interacting with China…. Choices other people make affect us. (Gabby)

Students with a commitment conception have extended the importance they attach to coming to know one other culture (as may happen during study abroad) to a more generalized sensibility of the importance of taking action to improve the world as a whole.
Global Citizenship is first understanding your own citizenship in a global context, and everyone is not the same, and then I think it kind of goes it a little further to understand, like…to me, Global Citizenship really is a Jewish value…We have a phrase called the ‘Tikkun olam’, repairing the world. It is not literally translated as repairing. It’s more translated as obligation to first understand the world, and then to find your place in it. So, for me, in order to repair the world, its really like you’ve got to start with knowing the world.

(Jessica)

Students with this conception regard Global Citizenship, then, as embracing a responsibility and identity that is shaped not only by learning from and active engagement with others but also by taking concrete action to positively impact the planet we all share. This final conception of Global Citizenship is defined essentially by a commitment to civic action.

The typology of student conceptions of Global Citizenship that we have illustrated above is characterized by five distinct aspects of variation. These aspects describe the main differences between the conceptions and the hierarchical structure of the typology. Student conceptions that appear later in the typology recognize more aspects of variation and express deeper, more complex understandings than earlier ones. Gabby, who articulates a type V conception, shows this hierarchy best. She understands that by virtue of birth on the planet we are all Global Citizens (first conception), but she also understands that acquaintance with other cultures is important (second conception), that openness (third conception) and interest in active participation (fourth conception) matters but, ultimately, that Global Citizenship entails a commitment to action (fifth conception).

3.4 Survey Responses by an Outbound Study Abroad Student Sample

In order to test our typology of conceptions of Global Citizenship on a broader sample of students beyond the 29 who were initially interviewed, we were given the opportunity to pilot test a larger survey instrument we created, including the Global Citizenship items, on a large sample of students from throughout the United States who were interested in [university name]’s [name] Program. The [name] Program allows students during two summer months to learn “about community development in a global context” in India, Uganda, Bolivia or Nicaragua. The program includes a seven day pre-departure training and preparation period, two months in-country engagement in “Asset-based Community Development,” and a three day return summit for reflection and how best to “transform the summer experience into a lifestyle of global engagement” (Program website).

For the survey, we converted the five conceptions of global citizenship drawn from the interview data into two items. The first item asked students, “What does the idea of Global Citizenship mean to you? Please select one answer that best defines your understanding. You are a Global Citizen if: 1) you are open to learning about others who live in other countries and cultures; 2) because you are born on this earth, you are a global citizen; 3) you look for ways to foster change in the world through your every day actions; 4) you seek out ways to participate in the lives of those in other countries and cultures; 5) you have a connection with one or more countries and cultures through your parents’ background or dual citizenship.” The order of choices was purposefully structured so as to not follow the hierarchy of less to more complex understandings we outline above. The second item was open-ended and provided a textbox that asked students to “Briefly elaborate on your choice or use this space to explain your understanding of Global Citizenship if it is different from the choices above."
The analysis of the first, multiple choice item asking students to indicate their choice of conception of Global Citizenship found 1 student (1%) identifying with Type II: Global Acquaintance, 16 students (14%) identifying with Type I: Global Existence, 18 students (15%) identifying with Type V: Global Commitment, 35 students (30%) identifying with Type IV: Global Participation, and the largest number, 48 students (41%), identifying with Type III: Global Openness. These finding are illustrated in Figure I, below:

![Pie Chart](chart.png)

**Figure I. Survey Sample's Conceptions of Global Citizenship**

4. Discussion

4.1. An Eagerness to Participate and an Openness Toward Others

Before discussing these data and their implications, it is important to bear in mind that the students in this sample are not necessarily representative of the profile of American study abroad students who select from a wide range of program types and durations of study. The students interested in the [name] Program self-selected an experience promising deep cultural engagement and contact with people living in socio-economic, political and cultural settings very different from their own. Rather than enrolling in a program built around classroom learning, excursions to historical sights and weekends visiting neighboring cultural capitals, these students prepared for a short and intensive field program. It may not be surprising, therefore, that nearly three quarters of the sample (71%) interpreted Global Citizenship as either eagerness to participate in the lives of others (30%) or openness to learning through hands-on experience about the lives and values of those others (41%).

Before even leaving the borders of the United States, then, it is possible and perhaps likely that these students already held an orientation toward global engagement that incorporated enthusiasm for involvement in others' lives and for acquiring new and unfamiliar knowledge. In contrast, only a relatively small portion of the sample conceived of Global Citizenship as being just a right one inherits as a human born on earth (13%) or by growing up in an international household and having a dual passport (1%).
4.2. Committed to Learning But Not Global Action?

Perhaps most noteworthy in the survey results, however, is that only a relatively small percentage of students (15%) saw Global Citizenship as first embodying a global commitment to making the world a better place through their individual, everyday actions. At first glance this seems surprising since these students chose a community development project whose very hallmark is to foster close participation in activities to “advance sustainable, community-driven change.” One could ask then if these students might in fact be more comfortable in the role of guided, perhaps even passive, learners who despite being open to new experiences are not committed to action toward “the pursuit of global social change” as the program site indicates?

A number of explanatory factors may be helpful in examining this student posture more closely. First, as university and college students embarking on a short-term, introductory experience in a developing world setting, they are primed to approach the experience as learners rather than as seasoned development professional or hired consultants. Students in the [name] Program and others geared toward deep cultural immersion (such as those structured by the School for International Training) are repeatedly cautioned to shed any culturally superior ‘West knows best' attitudes. Rather, the benefit of reciprocal learning for themselves and the host community alike through a respectful exchange of ideas and experiences is emphasized (Weinberg, 2007). Second, the academic backgrounds of a majority of the respondents represented fields and disciplines, including Anthropology, Sociology, Religion, Education and International Relations, in which developing international sensibility and learning how to carefully study countries and their national characters and cultures is particularly important. Third, although this survey was administered to students who were interested in the program but had not yet begun, the program literature clearly primes would be participants to engage in the experience appropriately. Through an intensive seven day pre-departure training period that covers historical, political, cultural and linguistic aspects of the country and also includes opportunities to speak with invited international field experts, students are clearly put into the role of novices and learners. Thus, it is not remarkable that when asked to articulate how they understand their roles as global citizens—if they even accept that notion at all—these students approach the concept with humility and understand that the program will confront them with a starkly unfamiliar setting where they are best served entering with an open mind.

4.3. Capturing the Subtlety of Category Labels

While most of the survey data reliably upheld our typology of Global Citizenship conceptions and the labels we created for each category from the original 29 interviews, there were some instances where students’ open-ended explanations help us possibly further refine a category. This may also suggest that when students have specific interests and particular study abroad experiences that they can reflect upon they may be less likely to accept a label than those who have less or no foreign experienced at all—as was indeed the case with some of the 29 students we first interviewed. In the survey data some students explained their conceptions in ways that shed additional light on the category as we defined it. This subtlety of perspective was particularly apparent in one of the two choices least often selected by students, Global Existence (I.), and may in fact account for its infrequent selection.

What we initially characterized as a least complex Type I Global Existence conception, several students explained with more nuance. For example, as one student interested in the Bolivia program explained, “You feel a responsibility to your fellow human beings and despite cultural differences, believe that people have some commonality, even if it is as vague as a ‘shared humanity’…Global citizenship is horizontal, as
opposed to vertical, participation and interaction across country, ethnic, cultural, and political boundaries.” While this student checked the option “because you are born on this earth, you are a global citizen,” her conception of it is much more complex. She touches on the basic element of a “vague” commonality among all human beings, which drove our initial definition, but then also brings in the issue of shared responsibility as well as alluding to various kinds of “horizontal” and “vertical” communication streams and political structures.

Another student, a liberal arts student interested in studying in India, also explained her choice in a more complex way, one that even bears some resemblance to what we termed the highest complexity Global Commitment conception (V.): “In order for the world’s problems to dissolve, we must all take the responsibility for the earth and her people. We are all global citizens and this is our home. Together, we must tend to her needs, foster growth, support success, and amend mistakes. We have but one world to live in.” This student also acknowledges the commonality but not simply because we are all humans but because above all she emphasizes the shared responsibility to safeguard the planet we all inhabit. This conception, putting responsibility at its core, is also one of the three defining hallmarks of Global Citizenship that Schattle (2008) so carefully maps out in his study, along with awareness and participation.

4.1. Limitations

This research is based on a relatively modest sample of students from 41 colleges and universities across the United States. While a robust effort was indeed made to maximize the variation in the interview and survey sample, the students who participated still represent a generally socio-economically privileged, highly educated and keenly internationally focused cohort. The backgrounds and perspectives of the sample have been shaped, whether intentional or not, by their particular status, interests, and opportunities. This fact must be recognized when interpreting the findings.

6. Conclusion

6. 1. Global Citizenship is an Unevenly Understood Concept

While the data above shows that there is clearly considerable variation in the ways students understand the meaning of Global Citizenship, and no common understanding or single accepted definition emerged, all of the students in the sample of 118 found an appropriate articulation somewhere in the five distinct categories we offered to them. While variation in students’ interpretations of something as complex as Global Citizenship is to be welcomed and expected, these data provide a so far missing empirical documentation that there is no universal understanding of the term. Currently, many study abroad programs erroneously assume this to be the case.

Much of the existing theoretical discussion of Global Citizenship, whether within or outside the area of international education, is still at an abstract level that does not adequately account for the wide spectrum of ways that students understand the notion. The way the study abroad industry currently uses Global Citizenship assumes a sophisticated understanding of the concept that our data has shown not all students share. In fact, only the higher-level conceptions articulated in Conceptions IV and V in our typology bear resemblance to most of the current theoretical discussions around Global Citizenship.

While we do not seek to make a judgment about whether or not all five conceptions constitute Global Citizenship, nor if one conception is necessarily a better kind of Global Citizenship than another, we hope
to emphasize that some conceptions exhibit a more complex articulation of what Global Citizenship entails than others do, and for that reason may be regarded as more sophisticated. Of the empirical studies that have been conducted on study abroad populations, most have concerned themselves with exploring student competency development on various levels. However, these competencies are not in and of themselves constructs of student understanding, although they may be associated with certain levels of understanding. Within our typology, students with lower level conceptions may not yet be intellectually at the point of developing higher-level competencies, particularly if their exposure abroad is of a limited duration as is the growing trend in study abroad at the moment.

The development of Global Citizenship competencies also requires the development of higher-order levels of conceptions; the one cannot develop in isolation from the other. If a student only believes that Global Citizenship consists of being born on the face of the earth, then he or she is not likely to see the need to develop higher-level competencies. While students are not necessarily expected to make the kind of deep commitment illustrated by the fifth conception after only a short period, it is important to help students recognize that attaining Global Citizenship involves a developmental process with further experiences over time.

6.2. Using ‘Global Citizenship’ Promises Appropriately in the Promotion of Study Abroad

The fallacy that some of the current study abroad promotion has operated under is the assumption that students completing a study abroad program will possess higher-level conceptions when, as our data show, many do not. Such assumptions undermine the development of these competencies because they sidestep the critical need to prepare students adequately for study abroad and then guide them through it with a focused and serious purpose. When programmers claim to be providing students with experiences that will lead to Global Citizenship, they should be aware that they are raising multiple and different understandings of the concept in the minds of their students. They may, in fact, even be tacitly working with a different understanding of the concept themselves.

While we are not making value judgments about what conceptions of Global Citizenship development a particular study abroad program should focus on—that choice depends on the general goals of the program, the nature of the population it serves, the program’s duration and location, and its slate of offerings and activities, among other things—we urge programmers to give some thought to how the conceptions presented above could help them in their future planning. Seeking closer alignment with student understandings of Global Citizenship are likely to positively affect the levels at which programs a) formulate their goals and learning outcomes; b) design and implement their activities; c) assess their students’ learning outcomes; and d) evaluate their program’s effectiveness.

Finally, we believe that the practical value of our typology is that it offers programmers a set of guideposts that indicate how students think about a core competency that intercultural learning experts have identified as important but are still grappling with to fully understand (Deardorff, 2009; Hovland, 2006; 2009). If programmers accept the complexity of the concept they will be better suited to construct the core competencies they wish to develop in students and thus contextualize what they can offer in line with their outcome goals. For example, a music program in Vienna may seek to offer students exposure to and participation in the musical culture of Austria, while an immersion program in Uganda may seek to develop in students a heightened sense of civic responsibility by involving them in a community development initiative. Both goals are worthy but each is different. Both programs surely offer meaningful engagement
and seek to develop in students valuable learning outcomes, but each is differently focused and cannot possibly claim to be developing the same kind of Global Citizenship.

We do not suggest that study abroad promoters discontinue talking about Global Citizenship. Abandoning the term altogether would be unrealistic given its currency in lay discourse and unfortunate precisely because it is such a worthy ideal for international education. Rather, we urge those involved in creating international learning opportunities to reflect more carefully upon how they use the notion in their enthusiastic promotion of the experience. We are therefore urging study abroad programmers to reflect on the full complexity of a Global Citizenship ideal and, as such, account for how they use it to their ends. The Forum on Education Abroad—arguably one of the flagship organizations promoting study abroad practice and scholarship in the United States today—stated in its 2008 Code of Ethics for Education Abroad that "truthfulness and transparency of marketing, advertising and promotional materials...[that] should clearly set out the program’s limitations, as well as its strengths (p. 6)."

Lewin (2009) argued that it is the educational experts in the field who must be the first to define terms so that marketing firms will not do this work for them. Rather than relying on an ill-defined, contested, and vague term du jour to continue attracting students to study abroad, all of its promoters have the intellectual responsibility to think through a specific and empirically derived terminology to attract students—one that is both informed by scholarly reflection but also and perhaps most importantly guided by the voices of students themselves.

6.3. Future Research

The question of students’ perceptions of Global Citizenship is part of a larger funded study currently ongoing at [University name]. The [name of the study] has been funded by two research centers at [University] that seek to understand more fully how students approach and choose to engage in study abroad opportunity (Streitwieser et al. 2009). Although the [study acronym] data reported in this paper is made up of a relatively small sample of students, currently additional interview and survey data is being collected on a sample of European university students engaging in the Erasmus mobility programme. These additional data are providing a comparative sample that will allow the research team to compare student views at diverse institutions in a different educational environment and show how an even broader sample of students understands and engages in international educational learning opportunities. Further, it is likely that when the survey items are administered to an even broader sample of students beyond Americans and Europeans who are engaging in an even greater diversity of study abroad program types and experiences, the variation we are finding in their identification of global citizenship conceptions will continue to be captured in these five conceptions but also possibly extend beyond them.

Because the focus in this phenomenographic study was on identifying variation within the sample as a whole we have not explored the nature of the exact link between students’ views of Global Citizenship and the specific types of international experience offered by different study abroad programs. Thus, we cannot draw causal inferences from this study and can only suggest that there likely are connections between student conception and the types of study abroad programs they experience. A next stage of this study is constructing a survey based on our categories as a way to highlight more specifically the links that exist between conceptions and specific experiences.

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