

EDUCATION

Evaluating Study Abroad: The Value of Purdue's "Reading London" Summer Program for Pre-service English Teachers

Student researchers: Mitchell Osterday and Melinda Shull, Seniors

Study abroad provides undergraduates the opportunity to participate in programs that offer rich experiences for academic learning and personal development. Hands-on experience can be valuable to students who will be teaching material related to that experience in their future classrooms. Studying in locations like London may strengthen future English teachers' abilities to explain and communicate literature more clearly to their students. Although few Purdue students study abroad each year, those who do typically report having a positive experience that provided them with multiple opportunities for growth, encouraging further examination of the potential effects of studying abroad. This qualitative study examined the learning experience of pre-service English teachers in the "Reading London" program through two research questions: (1) How is studying in London different from studying on Purdue's campus? (2) How

does experiencing British literature in the city of London influence students' learning? To answer these questions, the authors examined three sources of data from the 2008, 2010, and 2011 Reading London program: student interviews (15), student journal entries (645), and pre- and post-program surveys (30). The authors used content analysis to identify significant information in the data, grouped similar information into themes, and coded these themes throughout the data. Findings show that students in the "Reading London" program see study abroad as a positive academic experience that supports professional and personal development. Findings also show that study abroad offers a comfortable educational atmosphere and greater connections with the material through smaller class size and more student/professor interactions.

Research advisor Melanie Shoffner explains, "Study abroad provides participants with a formative opportunity to learn from the world—fun, yes, but also educational, experiential, and enlightening. Mitchell and Melinda's research points to the potential benefits of the study abroad experience for future teachers, encouraging us to better understand how to create and support similar experiences for all students."