How a Study Abroad Program Supports Its Students of Color: A Case Study

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How a Study Abroad Program Supports Its Students of Color: A Case Study

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education of the
University of San Francisco

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Organization and Leadership

By
Hannah Bloom
Fall 2023
How a Study Abroad Program Supports Its Students of Color: A Case Study

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MASTER OF ARTS

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UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

Melissa Ann Canlas
Instructor/Chairperson

Date

12/8/2023
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ABSTRACT

Students of Color study abroad at rates lower than their white peers, thus missing out on the academic, personal, and intercultural benefits one can gain from studying abroad. The purpose of this thesis was to conduct a qualitative case study to examine how a study abroad program supports its Students of Color during the pre-departure phase of study abroad. This case study uses Critical Race Theory as its theoretical lens. Research for this case study included interviews with four study abroad practitioners from one study abroad program, and a review of the study abroad program’s online spaces. This thesis endeavored to answer two research questions: (a) what do study abroad practitioners identify as the specific needs of Students of Color in the pre-departure phase?; (b) in what ways do study abroad practitioners specifically aim to support Students of Color during the pre-departure phase? Results answering research question one can be categorized under the following themes: (a) the needs of Students of Color are varied; (b) Students of Color need access to study abroad; (c) Students of Color need support for navigating their identities, racism, and discrimination. Results in response to research question two can be categorized as follows: (a) representation; (b) partnerships; (c) resources and advising. This thesis concludes with a discussion of the evidence in regards to both research questions.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As a white woman, I am who most people picture when they think of a typical study abroad student. The year I studied abroad (2013-2014), more than 65% of all U.S. study abroad students were women and over 74% were white (Institute of International Education, 2023, Nov. 12). The decision to study abroad was not a difficult one for me to make. I grew up on my mother’s stories from her year abroad and my older sister studied abroad when I was still in high school. By the time I got to college, it was only a question of where in the world I would go (England, ultimately). My year abroad was everything I had imagined it to be: I made new friends, traveled, and experienced history; I gained independence, confidence, and resiliency; I learned to live in another culture. I experienced the benefits of studying abroad as much as one could and I did not question this.

The year after I graduated college, I interned for the study abroad office that ran my program in London, England. It was in this role that I realized how privileged I had been to think studying abroad was such an easy decision, and a positive experience, for everyone. I worked with students for whom studying abroad was a lonely and challenging time that came with academic or financial hardships. Looking back, I recalled that many of the students in my own program, and those who I worked with, were white and I began to wonder how the experiences of Students of Color might have been different from my own. This reflection on my own privilege as a white woman, and my experience as a former study abroad student and practitioner, incited in me a need to examine the field of study abroad through a new lens. I still fundamentally believe that studying abroad can be a powerful and positive experience for
students, but all students must be given the opportunity not just to study abroad, but to study abroad with a program and in a location that supports and welcomes their identities.

**Statement of the Problem**

Studying abroad is often thought of as a life-changing adventure, but an analysis of student demographics reveals that this “adventure” is primarily reserved for white students. Just before the Covid-19 pandemic struck, the number of U.S. undergraduate students studying abroad reached its peak, at almost 350,000 students. These students went around the world, landing on all seven continents and majoring in fields across the disciplines (Institute of International Education, 2023). Soon after the pandemic began, in fall of 2021, nearly half of all students enrolled in undergraduate institutions in the United States were Students of Color, but less than one third of all U.S. study abroad students were Students of Color (Institute of International Education, 2023; National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). This is a problem because when Students of Color are underrepresented in study abroad, they miss out on the benefits that studying abroad provides, such as higher grade point averages, faster rates of degree attainment, career opportunities, personal growth, and increased cultural awareness.

Students of Color may miss out on the benefits of studying abroad because of exclusionary practices they encounter while making the decision about whether to study abroad. Gathogo and Horton (2018) describe the way study abroad programs use white students in their advertisements and market their opportunities as something for wealthy students who want an adventure, rather than an academic experience. This leads Students of Color and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to believe studying abroad is not something open to them. Similarly, Wanger et al. (2020) explain that financial resources are not widely advertised to prospective study abroad students, making studying abroad seem cost-prohibitive. The literature
also shows that for Students of Color, the opinion of family and friends often has an important influence on the decision-making process (Gathogo & Horton, 2018; Perkins, 2020; Wanger et al., 2020). When a student’s family perceives studying abroad as an expensive vacation, because of the way it is advertised and the dearth of financial aid information available, the student may be less likely to choose to study abroad (Gathogo & Horton, 2018; Perkins, 2020; Wanger et al., 2020). Students of Color may also miss out on the advantages of studying abroad because their experiences while abroad involve encounters with racism and discrimination. This includes the detention of Black men¹ by police, stereotyping, racist name-calling, and microaggressions, among other prejudices and discriminatory practices (Goldoni, 2017; Lott & Brundage, 2022; Quan, 2018). Goldoni (2017) and Lott and Brundage (2022) found that when students have these types of experiences abroad, they are more likely to disengage from the local culture. As a result, these students may miss out on language-learning opportunities and other benefits that come from immersing oneself in another culture.

Students of Color do not get to benefit from their study abroad programs if they ultimately decide not to study abroad or have a negative experience abroad due to racism and discrimination. There is an abundance of qualitative data regarding the experiences of Students of Color who study abroad, and much of the literature does provide recommendations for study abroad practitioners to better support their students; however, research examining how study abroad programs and their practitioners uniquely support Students of Color is limited. Study abroad programs should be intentional about the way they recruit and support Students of Color,

¹ It should not go unmentioned that Black women are also the targets of violence by police. However, unfortunately, this is an understudied topic, not only within study abroad but across all fields. Therefore, discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this thesis but should be acknowledged. Please see the African American Policy Forum’s work in this area for more details on this important issue so that it is not only a footnote (aapf.org).
and there is need to better understand this type of programming in order to inform more study abroad program practitioners about how to meet the unique needs of Students of Color.

**Background and Need**

The concept of study abroad emerged as a product of World War I, and a need for better cross-cultural relationships between countries, when it was acknowledged that “the United States could no longer assume an isolationist position in world affairs” (Walton, 2010, p. 65). The first mention of study abroad in the literature is from July 7, 1923, when eight University of Delaware students and their professor sailed to France. There, these undergraduates earned academic credit for taking classes at French universities and living with French families for one year; thus, study abroad was born (Walton, 2010). From its inception, study abroad was seen as a way to prepare students for their future careers through “serious academic work that would provide students with unique skills” (Walton, 2010, p. 68). This is still believed to be the case today. The personal and intercultural skills gained by studying abroad are highly desirable to future employers because many companies look for candidates willing to work abroad or who have the ability to understand people from other cultures (Chang Alexander et al., 2022; Engberg & Jourian, 2015; Gan & Kang, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2018). In 2019, there were more than 31 million job openings that required the skills students gain by studying abroad (NAFSA: Association of International Educators & Esmi, 2020).

Other benefits of studying abroad include improved academic outcomes, personal growth, and increased cultural awareness. For example, students who study abroad are shown to return with better critical thinking skills, more empathy, and the ability to navigate other cultures (Chang Alexander et al., 2022; Engberg & Jourian, 2015; Gan & Kang, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2018). In addition, data from Bell et al. (2020) shows that students who study abroad have grade
point averages 0.12 points higher than students who do not study abroad. Study abroad students are also 6.2 percentage points more likely to graduate college within four years. This number is almost doubled when looking only at Students of Color, who are 11.6 percentage points more likely to graduate in four years than Students of Color who do not study abroad. Therefore, by making study abroad more accessible to Students of Color, universities can make education more equitable in general. When planning study abroad programming to meet the needs of Students of Color in particular, it is important to consider both the potential benefits listed above, as well as the common roadblocks and potential negative experiences discussed in the statement of the problem.

In order to do this, managers of study abroad programs can consult a recent and growing body of literature that outlines recommendations for supporting Students of Color before, during, and after their participation in study abroad programs. For example, both Gathogo and Horton (2018) and Wanger et al. (2020) suggest targeting communication about study abroad programs directly to Students of Color. The authors suggest that programs can do this through images and advertisements that do not market study abroad as something only meant for wealthy white students, but something for students of all backgrounds and identities. Goldoni (2017) and Quan (2018) argue that pre-departure conversations should prepare Students of Color for the discrimination that they may face abroad. Goldoni adds that study abroad programs and home campuses must work to abolish racism through new student curriculum and training for faculty, including those leading study abroad programs, as well as by teaching host families abroad “how to treat U.S. diverse students studying abroad” (p. 338). What remains largely unknown is how study abroad practitioners are actually implementing strategies for supporting Students of Color.
The literature makes clear that there are specific ways study abroad programs can support Students of Color. However, there is little research done on the ways that study abroad practitioners are specifically supporting Students of Color in practice. For example, Goldoni (2017) and Quan (2018) encourage practitioners to prepare Students of Color for the discrimination they may face abroad, by giving them the context of the racial climate in their host country, and by providing them with tools and resources to combat the discrimination they may encounter. This thesis will endeavor to find out in what ways one study abroad program is supporting Students of Color so that they may have a positive study abroad experience.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this thesis was to conduct a case study in order to explore the ways that a study abroad program supports Students of Color using pre-departure advising, programming, social media, and its website. The study was conducted at a large public research university in Northern California. Because the decision to study abroad is cited in the literature as a common barrier for Students of Color, it is imperative to understand how study abroad programs are interacting with Students of Color to support them during the pre-departure phase of studying abroad.

**Research Questions**

The questions that guide this study are:

- What do study abroad practitioners identify as the specific needs of Students of Color in the pre-departure phase?
- In what ways do study abroad practitioners specifically aim to support Students of Color during the pre-departure phase?
Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) will be used as a theoretical framework for this thesis. CRT claims that racism and oppression form how People of Color experience the world and shape societal structures like education; CRT values the experiential knowledge of People of Color (Yosso, 2005). CRT will be used in this thesis because it provides a lens for understanding the way that Students of Color experience studying abroad in a way that is different from the experiences of their white peers. Some of the foundational authors who have contributed to CRT in education include Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Solórzano (1998), and Patton et al. (2007). Ladson-Billings and Tate make the claim that race can be used as a theoretical tool to analyze inequities in the U.S. education system. Solórzano adds to the use of CRT in education by identifying five tenets of CRT. Patton et al. expands this by applying CRT to higher education. Taken together, these authors provide a framework for understanding why it is important for study abroad programs to support their Students of Color in ways that are specific to their experiences as People of Color. CRT will be discussed in further detail in chapter two of this thesis.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations including: the timeframe of the study; the sample size; and researcher subjectivity. The timeframe of the study creates a limitation because the study took place over the course of only a few weeks, so data that may have been collected through a longer study has been missed. The small sample size used for this study also provides a limitation because not all members of the larger population of study abroad program practitioners were given an opportunity to participate in this study. This may have influenced the results because the data is specific to only one study abroad program. Related to this, the small size of
the sample means that the results of this study cannot be used to illustrate how study abroad programs as a whole support their Students of Color. Furthermore, People of Color are not a monolith, but have a broad range of experiences and identities; therefore, the information provided in this thesis cannot be understood to speak for all People of Color. Finally, I, as the researcher, hold a positive bias toward studying abroad, and this may have limited the data collection and interpretation process because I may have been subjective in my analysis of the qualitative data.

**Significance of the Project**

This thesis may be of interest to practitioners of study abroad programs and Students of Color. It may hold significance for practitioners of study abroad programs because it provides insight into ways that they may better support their Students of Color. It may hold significance for Students of Color who are interested in studying abroad, because it examines ways that Students of Color can be supported by study abroad programs, and help them to understand the study abroad experiences of other Students of Color.

Furthermore, this research may contribute to increased equity in higher education in general. As stated, there are numerous advantages of studying abroad, and all students should have the opportunity to benefit from these. This thesis may help study abroad practitioners better understand how to support Students of Color in the pre-departure phase so that they may gain the personal, intercultural, and academic skills that can result from studying abroad.

**Researcher Positionality**

As a white woman from an upper-middle-class background, and as a former study abroad student and practitioner, I have a specific lens through which I view my research. All efforts have been made to be open-minded about my research project and to learn from those interviewed in
this study. My positionality is one of privilege, not only because I had the financial means to study abroad, but also because I had a very positive experience during my year in England. This is likely due, in part, to my identity as a white person. Unlike many Students of Color, I did not experience racism, discrimination, or exclusion during my study abroad program. As stated in the introduction, I believe that studying abroad provides an important opportunity for students, but I am aware that this belief is at least somewhat based on my own positive experience. While I tried to keep this perspective and my identity from influencing my research, I am sure it is impossible to be entirely objective and my study likely reflects my biases and point of view.

**Definition of Terms**

- **Heritage Seeker** - Heritage seekers are students who are studying abroad in places where they have cultural or ancestral ties; not all heritage seekers are Students of Color, but many are.
- **Home country** - The country where the study abroad student is enrolled in a degree-program and where they will return to after the study abroad program.
- **Host country** - The country where the study abroad program takes place.
- **Microaggression** - “Microaggressions are verbal and nonverbal interpersonal exchanges in which a perpetrator causes harm to a target, whether intended or unintended. These brief and commonplace indignities communicate hostile, derogatory, and/or negative slights to the target” (Sue & Spanierman, 2020, p. 8). The target is often part of a minoritized group.
- **Monocultural student** - A student who has internalized the mainstream or American culture (Nguyen et al., 2018).
• Multicultural student - Any student who identifies with more than culture and/or does not identify as white (Nguyen et al., 2018).

• Pre-departure phase - The time before a student leaves for their study abroad program. This can include the time even before a student signs up for a program through orientations that happen in the home country.

• Student of Color - In the context of this thesis, Student of Color refers to any student who does not identify as white. This includes students who may have a white parent but identify as multiracial and/or as a Person of Color.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The claim of worth for this literature review is that study abroad programs must become more inclusive for Students of Color in order for these students to reap the benefits. The body of scholarship that justifies this claim includes three sets of evidence that demonstrate that: many factors influence a Student of Color’s decision to study abroad; Students of Color who study abroad often encounter racism and discrimination while abroad; and studies show that there are many benefits to studying abroad. Critical Race Theory can be used to frame this body of scholarship. Side by Side reasoning is used to connect these pieces of evidence/reasons because the literature includes different authors and studies. A visual representation of the logic equation is as follows: \( R_1, R_2, R_3 \vdash C \) (Machi & McEvoy, 2016, p. 91).

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) claims that racism and other types of oppression form how People of Color experience the world, and that this makes their experience very different than that of white people. In the field of education, CRT is defined as a “theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses… validating and centering the experiences of People of Color” (Yosso, 2005, p. 74). This section includes a brief history of CRT, which includes three seminal works from the field. Discussed first is Ladson-Billings and Tate’s (1995) original scholarship on CRT in the field of education, describing three propositions for using race as a tool to analyze inequality in the U.S. education system. Next, the work of Solórzano (1998) is discussed, which identifies five tenets of CRT as it applies to education. The section ends with a summary of the ideas developed by Patton et al. (2007) that contextualize CRT in higher education specifically. This progression of
thought is important because it demonstrates the way CRT can be used as a lens for understanding the role that race and racism play in U.S. educational systems.

**Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education**

The foundational work that defines CRT in education includes “Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education,” by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate IV, written in 1995. This work utilized the original CRT framework, which emerged from critical legal studies, as a way to examine the racialized experiences of People of Color in education. Ladson-Billings and Tate use a theoretical understanding of race to analyze inequity in U.S. schools, basing their argument on three propositions: (a) that race is and has always been a “significant factor” in creating inequity in the United States; (b) that “U.S. society is based on property rights;” (c) “the intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequity” (p. 48). These three propositions are fundamental to understanding CRT and will be further analyzed throughout this section.

The need for this theory arose from a need to theorize race and its role in “educational inequality,” something that previously went unexplored (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 50). Using CRT in education challenges the idea that class and gender are the only factors that affect a student’s experience and performance in school; Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue that race also has an important influence on the way students experience school. They claim that Students of Color are treated more unjustly than their white counterparts, and that Students of Color often have access to fewer resources because of the United States’ complicated history with property and the way that “those with ‘better’ property are entitled to ‘better’ schools” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 53–54). This original scholarship is important because it
illustrates the way race can and should be used as a theoretical lens to question and critique exclusionary norms in education.

**The Five Tenets of Critical Race Theory**

Building on the foundation of CRT that Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) brought to education, Solórzano (1998) conceptualizes five tenets that should inform “the basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy of a critical race theory in education” (p. 122). These five tenets from Solórzano are:

1. CRT is built on the premise that race and racism are permanent and central fixtures of U.S. society and intersect with other forms of oppression, like gender and class.
2. CRT challenges traditional ideologies touted by the U.S. education system of “objectivity, meritocracy, color and gender blindness, race and gender neutrality, and equal opportunity,” instead arguing that these claims only hide the power and privilege of the people in the majority groups in the United States (p. 122).
3. CRT is committed to eliminating racism and to social justice.
4. CRT sees the strength in the experiences of People of Color, recognizing this form of knowledge as “legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education” (p. 122).
5. CRT is interdisciplinary, using both historical and contemporary contexts to analyze race and racism in education.

Solórzano’s (1998) five tenets are related to the work of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) because they further develop the use of CRT in examining race and racism in education. Both works emphasize the central role race and racism have played in U.S. society, recognize the intersection of race with class and gender, and challenge the traditional notion of race-neutrality
in education. Solórzano differs from Ladson-Billings and Tate by identifying the themes that constitute CRT and expanding on the way CRT can be used in practice as a tool for analyzing U.S. society and education. This addition to the field of CRT is important because it helps to illustrate how scholars can use CRT to inform research that explores and critiques curricula, pedagogy, and the public education model in the United States.

**Critical Race Theory and Higher Education**

Patton et al. (2007) represent further progression of CRT by applying the CRT framework to higher education. Patton et al. argue that most theories used in the student affairs profession do not incorporate race. This is problematic because theory is how scholars make sense of phenomena and therefore, by ignoring race and racism, theories cannot properly “inform and then transform practice” because they do not account for the unique experiences of Students of Color (Patton et al., 2007, p. 41). This is related to the work of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), who similarly claim that race should be theorized to understand inequality in education, but Patton et al. apply CRT to higher education and student affairs specifically, rather than education as a whole.

Patton et al. (2007) conceptualize how the three propositions of CRT offered by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) should be applied to higher education and student affairs. Patton et al. discuss how the first proposition, that race is a significant factor in creating inequity in the United States, should be important to student affairs professionals because these practitioners work with students with identities underrepresented in higher education. Patton et al. urge those working in higher education to consider the isolation, marginalization, discrimination, stereotyping, microaggressions, and exclusion that Students of Color might face in institutions where they are underrepresented or marginalized. Patton et al. also explore the way
Ladson-Billings and Tate’s second proposition about property rights and U.S. society applies to college campuses. As an example, Patton et al. describe how those in positions of leadership at universities “[own]’ the right to make final decisions and move the institution in a particular way;” people in these positions tend to not be women or People of Color (p. 46). This scholarship problematizes the consolidation of power and intellectual ownership in higher education.

Finally, by examining Ladson-Billing and Tate’s (1995) third proposition, which explains the way that race and property intersect, Patton et al. (2007) illustrate the myriad of ways that white people are legitimized and privileged on college campuses. For example, most people in power at universities are white which “translates to the notion that being white carries more status and power than being of color” (Patton et al., 2007, p. 46–47). Patton et al. also reference double-standards for behavioral expectations that exist for People of Color but not for white people; for example Students of Color are seen as “segregating themselves” when they sit with one another whereas white students who do this are seen as socializing with friends (Patton et al., 2007, p. 47). Patton et al. argue that higher education practitioners should be aware of how “the experiences, languages, and cultures of Students of Color are minimized… and seek to transform perceptions, practices, and policies that privilege some students at the expense of others” (p. 47). Patton et al. provide an important addition to the field of CRT because they demonstrate the way it can be applied as a framework to create more inclusive environments for Students of Color on college campuses.

**Summary of Critical Race Theory in Education**

In summary, CRT describes how race should be used as a theoretical lens to understand inequality in education. This description included a short history of the development of CRT,
including the work of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Solórzano (1998), and Patton et al. (2007). This brief history traces the application of CRT as a lens with which to analyze education. This thesis will make use of the lens of CRT to analyze higher education, with a particular focus on study abroad programming. It is important to frame study abroad through the lens of CRT because the experiences of Students of Color who study abroad should be acknowledged and understood as separate from those of their white peers. Knowing this, study abroad practitioners can work to improve the experience of study abroad Students of Color even before they make the choice to study abroad and throughout the study abroad experience. Related to this is a body of research that demonstrates the practical application of CRT to the field of study abroad. The following sections describe this research and justify the claim that Students of Color who study abroad face different obstacles and have different experiences than their white counterparts.

**Influences on the Decision to Study Abroad by Students of Color**

Research demonstrates that as Students of Color consider whether or not to study abroad, there are various factors that can influence their decision. This includes research that illustrates that messaging about studying abroad programs is often not inclusive of Students of Color (Gathogo & Horton, 2018; Wanger et al., 2020; Yeboah, 2019). In addition, research articulates the impact that family and peers can have on the decision-making process of Students of Color who are considering study abroad programs (Gathogo & Horton, 2018; Perkins, 2020; Wanger et al., 2020). Understanding this research is important because study abroad programs can become more inclusive for all students if they recognize what influences Students of Color to choose whether to study abroad.
Inclusive and Exclusive Messaging

Studies have shown that most advertisements for study abroad programs include homogenous groups of study abroad students and often exclude Students of Color. Evidence of this can be found in Gathogo and Horton (2018), who employ CRT to analyze the study abroad websites of two Mid-Western universities and two third-party study abroad providers. The authors found that most of the visuals on the websites depicted study abroad students as white and wealthy and who study abroad for the adventure and cultural experience. Gathogo and Horton explain that Students of Color studying at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) may feel that their home campuses are already providing them with a “sometimes unpleasant ‘cultural’ experience,” and thus have no interest in encountering that abroad as well (p. 66). Furthermore, the authors found that many of the advertisements downplayed the academic virtues of studying abroad and instead highlighted recreational activities and consumerism, and framed studying abroad as tourism. As a result, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and their families, like many Students of Color, are unlikely to see “the rationale for spending money to go abroad for recreation” (Gathogo & Horton, 2018, p. 71). If Students of Color and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds see studying abroad depicted as something for white and wealthy students, they will be less inclined to choose to study abroad themselves because they do not fit that identity.

Similarly, Wanger et al. (2020) discuss the need for study abroad to be marketed specifically for African American undergraduates. The authors conducted a survey of 63 African American students, including both those who had previously studied abroad and those who had not. Survey respondents noted the importance of targeting the promotion of study abroad opportunities at African American students through direct communication and by involving
former African American study abroad students at outreach events. Furthermore, some survey respondents acknowledged that there are scholarships and financial aid available for students to study abroad, but that this information is not widely known and therefore these resources should be advertised. By advertising study abroad as something only for white and wealthy students, as shown by Gathogo and Horton (2018), Black students and other Students of Color are excluded from seeing the opportunity to study abroad as something they can take part in, too.

Related to this research, Yeboah (2019) claims that when the purpose of study abroad is advertised as “for leisure and sightseeing,” or for students to “Become Global Leaders,” among other similar phrases, Black students are turned off because of their ancestors’ forced expatriation and “[enslavement] in the name of western ‘advancement’” (p. 6). Yeboah argues that for study abroad programs to be inclusive of Black students, they should be about heritage and culture. For example, the author started a heritage program at Howard University, a Historically Black University, which takes students on a study abroad trip to multiple African countries. Before departure, students are required to read books about Africa and the African diaspora and attend forums for cultural learning. During the program, in addition to visiting cultural and heritage sites, students have the opportunity to take part in genealogical testing to learn more about their ancestry and feel connected to their pasts. Yeboah demonstrates that when study abroad programs are specific to and inclusive of students’ identities, rather than use “the language of privilege and leisure to characterize their programs,” Students of Color are more likely to be engaged and eager to participate (p. 6).

**Family Influence**

Promotion and marketing are not the only things that influence a student’s decision to study abroad. Evidence of this can be found in Wanger et al. (2020), who describe the impact
“the thoughts, values, and input of family and friends” on the decision-making process of Black students when choosing whether or not to study abroad (p. 10). Similarly, Perkins (2020) claims that the social capital of “having members in the family network who [support] the idea of… studying abroad” is key to Students of Color choosing to study abroad (p. 157). As Gathogo and Horton (2018) describe, families may be turned off by study abroad advertising that highlights recreation over academics. To counter this, Perkins argues that university events and websites already targeted at engaging parents should incorporate information about study abroad and its benefits in order to better facilitate conversations about program opportunities between students and their families.

**Summary of Influences on Study Abroad Decisions**

In summary, research demonstrates that there are multiple factors that can influence a Student of Color’s choice to study abroad. This includes research that illustrates how messaging about study abroad programs can be inclusive or exclusive of Students of Color (Gathogo & Horton, 2018; Wanger et al., 2020; Yeboah, 2019). This section also included a summary of research that articulates the importance of family and friends to the study abroad decision-making process for Students of Color (Gathogo & Horton, 2018; Perkins, 2020; Wanger et al., 2020). Taken together, this body of research justifies the need for study abroad programs to take the identities of Students of Color into consideration when creating and promoting opportunities. Related to this is the experience that Students of Color have while actually studying abroad, where they may encounter further exclusion based on their identities.

**The Experiences of Students of Color While Abroad**

Similar to the exclusion that Students of Color may face when deciding whether to study abroad, research demonstrates that Students of Color may also experience exclusion during their
study abroad programs. Research illustrates that Students of Color encounter racism and microaggressions while abroad, and articulates the ramifications of these encounters on the study abroad experiences of Students of Color (Goldoni, 2017; Lott & Brundage, 2022; Quan, 2018). Studies also suggest that there are ways study abroad programs can improve to better prepare Students of Color for their time abroad (Goldoni, 2017; Lott & Brundage, 2022; Quan, 2018; Yeboah, 2019). This is important because Students of Color who face racism while studying abroad may miss out on having a positive experience abroad relative to their white counterparts.

**Encounters with Racism Abroad**

Research illustrates that when Students of Color study abroad, they often experience racism, discrimination, and microaggressions. Evidence of this can be found in Lott and Brundage (2022) in their study of 14 American Students of Color studying abroad in Rome, Italy. The students in the study learned that anti-Blackness was a global issue, not something that only occurs in the United States. Lott and Brundage explain that the Black students in their study were accustomed to racism at home in the United States but were surprised by it in Italy; for example, one of the students, a Black man, was stopped and detained by police in Rome and “[realized] that unprovoked detention and marginalization of Black people is an international issue” (Lott & Brundage, 2022, p. 9). In addition, the students saw that the media in Italy portrays Black people with similar stereotypes as what is seen in the United States, and that African refugees are treated worse than “people from non-African countries [who] were not being systematically excluded” (Lott & Brundage, 2022, p. 9).

Goldoni (2017) adds to the research on this topic with a case study of a Black male student’s experience studying abroad in Spain. According to Goldoni, “xenophobia and racial stereotypes towards people of African descent [prevail] in Spain” (p. 332). The student in
Goldoni’s study was aware of this negative racial climate during his time studying abroad and encountered discrimination throughout his time in Europe. For instance, like the student in Lott and Brundage (2022), this student in Goldoni’s study was also stopped by local police for no apparent reason. In addition, the student was stared at on the street, called a racist name while traveling, watched films in one of his classes that perpetuated ideas of Black people being poor, and felt judged for his clothing not assimilating to European fashion and culture. Goldoni states that as a result of the racism and discrimination the student faced while studying abroad, he “suffered from racial battle fatigue (RBF),” leaving him mentally, emotionally, and behaviorally exhausted (p. 336). Similarly, Quan (2018) studied how the identities of two Students of Color, also studying abroad in Spain, were challenged.

In a case study of two study abroad Students of Color, Quan (2018) demonstrates that these students faced external obstacles, like discrimination and prejudice, and internal obstacles, such as psychological and emotional challenges. Quan describes how one of the students in the study, an Iranian-American woman, “believed she was positioned as an incompetent Other because of the way she looked;” as a result of this positionality, she encountered external obstacles, like racial incidents and microaggressions, while living her daily life in Spain (Quan, 2018, p. 37). The other student, who identifies as African and Mexican-American, also believed she was being positioned as incompetent and was critical of herself, an internal obstacle, because of her “belief that speaking Spanish well is a requirement for claiming a Mexican ethnic identity” (Quan, 2018, p. 40). The author explains that this student did ultimately understand to see herself “as a legitimate Mexican American Spanish speaker and learner,” but this only happened through the student’s journal entries and interviews used in the study itself, and so may not have been the case had the student not been a participant in the study (Quan, 2018, p. 41).
When taken with Lott and Brundage (2022) and Goldoni (2017), it can be inferred that Students of Color who study abroad may experience racism and discrimination in the form of police detainment, the media, or interactions with others. These incidents can have emotional, psychological, and behavioral ramifications for the students affected; other consequences will be further explored below.

**Consequences of Racism and Discrimination Abroad**

Research investigating the ramifications of racism and discrimination on study abroad Students of Color articulates that these experiences can negatively affect their study abroad experiences. Evidence of this can be found in Lott and Brundage (2022), who found that the discrimination experienced by the Black study abroad students in their study, such as the one detained by the police, led these students to not want to return to Italy. Similarly, the Black study abroad student described by Goldoni (2017) “rejected Spain and the Spanish culture,” and said that he “‘hated Spain’” and “‘would [never] go back’” (p. 336). However, this student did not abandon the idea of travel or study abroad entirely. Instead, he desired to have an immersive experience in the Dominican Republic, where his father was from and therefore, “where he would blend and people would share and embrace his culture” (Goldoni, 2017, p. 336). White students studying abroad in Europe do not confront the same challenges as Students of Color, and therefore may be less likely to become disillusioned with their time abroad.

Negative experiences can also impact a student’s ability to learn the local language. Because the student in Goldoni’s (2017) study was discriminated against, he disengaged from the locals and this limited his ability to practice his Spanish-language skills. The Iranian-American student described by Quan (2018) also eventually withdrew from the Spanish people because she “consistently felt that her Spanish classmates, her roommates, and local strangers positioned her
as *la extranjera* (‘the foreigner’) and the inadequate student” (p. 37). However, the student in Quan’s study took it upon herself to continue to improve her language skills. The student Goldoni studied, on the other hand, was left feeling unsatisfied with his progress. This was especially frustrating for the student because of “his family’s economic investment to support his journey abroad” (Goldoni, 2017, p. 335). As described by Gathogo and Horton (2018) and discussed in a previous section, Students of Color and their families may be less keen to contribute financially to study abroad if they don’t believe there will be academic benefits, and this was felt by the student in Goldoni’s study. In summary, studies show that the racism and discrimination that Students of Color face when studying abroad can have negative consequences, including students becoming dissatisfied with the study abroad program or the host county, and missing out on opportunities to develop their language skills.

**Addressing the Negative Experiences of Study Abroad Students of Color**

Goldoni (2017), Lott and Brundage (2022), and Quan (2018) each use CRT to interpret the findings of their study and draw conclusions based on this framework. The authors recognize the role that race and racism play in the experiences of the Students of Color who study abroad and each employ Solórzano’s (1998) fourth tenet of CRT, centering and validating the experiences of Students of Color. The authors each acknowledge that Students of Color are experiencing study abroad through a racialized lens, a lens very different from that of white study abroad students, and that these students are the target of racism and discrimination. The authors make recommendations for how study abroad programs can better support Students of Color, given the racialized experiences these students have while abroad as understood through the framework of CRT.
Research shows that there are steps study abroad programs can take to make studying abroad a more positive experience for Students of Color. Evidence for this can be found in Quan (2018), who claims programs should provide guidance to support students’ mental and emotional health. Quan describes how classes can be designed to allow students to reflect, on the experiences and challenges they face, with trained allies. Similarly, Goldoni (2017) argues that program staff should include counselors and faculty “who are attuned to critical issues of race and ethnicity,” and that programs should offer “constructive discussions of racism, and resources and infrastructures to support targets of racism” (p. 337). Goldoni suggests that if students are given the tools, they can better understand and articulate their emotions surrounding racist incidents.

Studies illustrate that pre-departure events and advice may also help prepare Students of Color to study abroad. Quan (2018) explains that pre-departure lessons can better orient students for their time abroad, including warning students about the racism they might face “that differs from their at-home experiences” (p. 43). Goldoni (2017) adds that issues of discrimination and inequity should not only be addressed in pre-departure conversations, but also be considered when designing a study abroad program and its associated curriculum. Additionally, Quan claims that when giving Students of Color advice about where to study abroad, the context of the destination should be considered in regards to how the country might view or treat them. This is further supported by Lott and Brundage (2022), who argue that had the detained student, described in their research, studied abroad “in a predominantly Black city and was immersed in a program that emphasized Black voices and Black culture,” his experience would have been very different (p. 11). Yeboah (2019) also illustrates this through the heritage program the author started at Howard University, first described in the previous section. As part of this program,
Black study abroad students travel with other students who share their background, and when these students arrive in Africa they are able to identify as part of the majority rather than minority, quelling fears of racism abroad. In contrast, Goldoni claims that it should not only be up to the student to study abroad somewhere that is inclusive of their identity, but that it is also up to the destination cities, host families, and programs to “to reframe who they expect and how to treat U.S. diverse students studying abroad” (p. 338). It is not the responsibility of Students of Color to avoid situations where they may encounter racism, but is instead the responsibility of the dominant groups to create a culture of inclusivity.

**Summary of the Experiences of Study Abroad Students of Color**

In summary, research using a CRT framework demonstrates that Students of Color have unique experiences studying abroad when compared to their white peers. This includes research that illustrates the racism and discrimination Students of Color face when studying abroad, and research that articulates the negative consequences these interactions can have on the study abroad experience of these students. When taken together, this research suggests that study abroad programs should be designed to support Students of Color in order to make the experience more enjoyable and inclusive for Students of Color. This includes guidance and allyship while abroad, and pre-departure information and advice that prepares Students of Color for what challenges they might face while participating in their programs. It should not only be up to the students to prepare themselves for potential hardships, but host countries, families, and programs should also become more welcoming and inclusive to students of all identities. This is important because there are many positive outcomes of studying abroad which Students of Color should have the opportunity to benefit from, as will be further discussed in the next section.
Outcomes of Studying Abroad

Research demonstrates that there are many benefits to participating in a study abroad program. In the sections that follow, the impact of study abroad on academic progress, personal growth and cultural awareness are discussed. However, it is important to note that while studying abroad can have a positive impact on academic progress, personal growth and cultural awareness, the degree to which students experience these outcomes may be influenced by their ethnic or cultural identity (Bell et al., 2020; Chang Alexander et al., 2022; Engberg & Jourian, 2015; Gan & Kang, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2018). Better understanding the advantages of studying abroad, and how these might be affected by a student’s identity, may help study abroad programs ensure that they are providing all students with a positive experience.

Academic Benefits of Studying Abroad

Bell et al. (2020) summarize important findings from the field and show that studying abroad has positive academic effects for students. A study of the first-time freshman cohorts from fall 2010 and fall 2011 shows that students who studied abroad were 3.8 percentage points more likely to graduate college within six years and 6.2 percentage points more likely to graduate within four years than those who did not study abroad. At the time of degree, study abroad students also earned a grade point average (GPA) 0.12 points higher than their non-study abroad counterparts. Similar results are found when looking only at study abroad students who identify with an underrepresented minority (URM) ethnicity (defined here as American Indian or Alaskan Native, Black or African American, Hispanic, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander2). URM study abroad students were 7.8 percentage points more likely to graduate within six years and 11.6 percentage points more likely to graduate within four years than URM

2 This definition of URM students does not include Asian American students, but throughout the rest of the thesis the term Student of Color does include the category Asian American.
students who did not study abroad. These study abroad students also had GPAs 0.12 points higher than their non-study abroad counterparts at time of degree. This data, provided by Bell et al. (2020), provides clear evidence that students who study abroad see better academic outcomes than those who do not.

**Personal Growth and Cultural Awareness**

In addition to academic benefits, several recent studies suggest that study abroad can have a positive impact on the development of personal growth and cultural awareness. For example, in a longitudinal study of more than 500 study abroad students, Engberg and Jourian (2015), who describe intercultural wonderment as “the underlying curiosity in individuals to seek out new and different experiences while studying abroad” (p. 1), found that intercultural wonderment increased critical thinking skills and empathy for others. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2018) and Chang Alexander et al. (2022) explain that studying abroad can help students develop cultural intelligence, which they define as the ability to navigate different cultures. Nguyen et al. found that the self-efficacy of students improved as a result of their participation in a study abroad program. Chang Alexander et al. found that studying abroad can improve a student’s cultural intelligence in the following domains: motivation, cognitive cultural intelligence (understanding of other cultures), metacognitive cultural intelligence (understanding of oneself within an intercultural context), and behavior. Importantly, the impact of study abroad on personal growth and cultural awareness may be tempered by the amount of time students spend studying abroad (Gan & Kang, 2022). Gan and Kang (2022) found that students who studied abroad for three to six months “reported having a less enhanced cultural experience but a more enhanced personal experience” than those who studied abroad for a shorter amount of time (p. 233).
Research on the topic of personal growth and cultural awareness also suggests ways to improve the outcomes of studying abroad for students. For example, Engberg and Jourian (2015) advise that study abroad programs should be designed to facilitate intercultural wonderment through the curriculum and within the community. This includes opportunities inside and outside the classroom to interact with locals, speaking the native language, and spaces in which students can share and reflect upon their experiences. Chang Alexander et al. (2022) argue that the four domains of cultural intelligence are further advanced when study abroad students participate in a semester-long class on cultural development before they depart for their study abroad programs. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2018) claim that students should receive “pre-departure cross-cultural training,” as well as orientation upon return, language classes, opportunities for interactions with locals, and more time abroad, in order to optimize their study abroad experience (p. 127). This is important because the skills a study abroad student gains are beneficial in other areas of their life beyond personal growth. Students who study abroad have more success in getting a job and reaching their career goals. For instance, many companies are looking for candidates who are comfortable working abroad, which is the cultural intelligence that students gain by studying abroad (Chang Alexander et al., 2022; Gan & Kang, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2018).

Outcomes of Study Abroad and Student Identity

Related to this, research investigating the benefits of studying abroad suggests that outcomes may vary depending on the ethnic or racial identities of student participants. Evidence of this can be found in Nguyen et al. (2018) and Gan and Kang (2022). Nguyen et al. conducted a mixed methods study of participants studying “abroad” for five weeks in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands; despite these being U.S. territories, the authors still considered these “Caribbean nations” study abroad locations due to the cultural differences students from the
mainland United States would experience while studying there (p. 121). Gan and Kang conducted a survey of study abroad students participating in various programs. Both studies examined, in part, how the outcomes of study abroad may differ between monocultural and multicultural students.

Nguyen et al. (2018) define multicultural students as “those who identify with more than one culture” (p. 121). This can include, among other identities, immigrants, multiracial people, and people from racially or ethnically minoritized backgrounds. Nguyen et al. explain that in the United States, “non-white” people are perpetually seen as “other” and not fully American, therefore, according to the authors, any non-white Americans are considered multicultural because of their minority status; monocultural students, on the other hand, are those “who have internalized only the national (i.e., mainstream American) culture” (Nguyen et al., 2018, p. 121).

Nguyen et al. (2018) suggest that for white students, studying abroad in a place where they were in the numerical minority offered an important opportunity “for personal growth and intercultural competence development,” especially as it pertains to a critical understanding of race (p. 125). In this study, the act of navigating a culture different than their own gave white students some insight into the experiences of People of Color in the United States who endure discrimination and microaggressions, and are regularly treated as outsiders. Experiences such as being refused service in a store, or having a handshake rebuffed, allowed some white students to develop a sense of empathy for their non-white peers. However, it is important to note that empathy should not be the only pathway to anti-racist action. For example, Patel (2016) argues that:

Empathy does not require realignment of social relations… in our current context that conveniently confuses dialogue about diversity with material transformation, dialogue for
empathy can all too easily become parking lots for emotionality and white fragility, recentering whiteness and irrationally requiring People of Color to bear witness to these emotions (p. 83).

Therefore, the increased empathy monocultural students may gain by studying abroad is not enough for “social transformation” if compassion is not combined with action (Patel, 2016, p. 83).

While many of the white students described by Nguyen et al. (2018) were feeling like outsiders for the first time, the multicultural students in the study “did not have to adjust to that aspect of studying abroad” because they had ongoing experiences with exclusion as People of Color in the United States, and thus were already accustomed to that feeling (p. 126). Instead, Nguyen et al. suggest that multicultural students may be more accustomed to navigating other cultures, and thus studying abroad in another country may not provide the same culture shock\(^3\) or stress for these students as it might for a monocultural student (p. 126). This is related to Gathogo and Horton’s (2018) argument, described in a previous section, that Students of Color who attend Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) may be less eager to study abroad because they are already navigating another culture on a daily basis. Nguyen et al. found that the multicultural students in their study experienced better intercultural understanding because they “[were] able to move beyond white monocultural students’ shock of being discriminated against” and learn more about the people and cultures they encountered (p. 126). For example, one student mentioned by the authors led her own small study examining how race and ethnicity are constructed in Caribbean countries. This student could make “astute observations about ethnic

\(^3\) Culture shock is the sensation of anxiety that occurs when one experiences an unfamiliar culture because they no longer recognize the cues indicating customs and norms that occur in social interactions (Oberg, 1960).
identity in Puerto Rico” because she had already spent time thinking about her own ethnic identity and was curious about the experiences of others (Nguyen et al., 2018, p. 126).

Nguyen et al. (2018) explain that the monocultural students in their study had increases in their “general self-efficacy and cultural intelligence during the study abroad experience,” while the multicultural students did not (p. 127). Multicultural students start their study abroad experience with more cultural intelligence than do monocultural students, and so, studying abroad would not have as much of an impact on these students in this area, unlike for monocultural students who found themselves challenged in ways related to their race for the first time. However, the authors concluded that multicultural students do benefit from studying abroad but in different ways than white students. For example, like the student who conducted her own study, as described above, multicultural students can gain a deeper understanding of their new surroundings, like the nuances of “cultural practices, ethnic identity, [and] gender roles” (Nguyen et al., 2018, p. 127).

Gan and Kang (2022) expanded on Nguyen et al.’s (2018) work, hypothesizing that multicultural study abroad students would be less likely “to experience an enhanced cultural experience” than their monocultural counterparts (p. 215). Similarly to Nguyen et al., Gan and Kang argue that monocultural students will experience greater culture shock than multicultural students, because the latter group is more used to being minoritized and “[adapting] effectively in cross-cultural settings” (p. 215). Gan and Kang concluded that this hypothesis was correct. The authors concluded that white students “were more likely to accept cultural differences or become less ethnocentric after the trip,” compared to all multicultural participants, who “cited a less enhanced cultural experience,” perhaps because they had less growth to make in this area (Gan & Kang, 2022, p. 234). However, it may be useful to conduct further research in this area and
broaden the definition of “enhanced cultural experience,” as perhaps future studies may show that all students can experience growth and new cultures by studying abroad.

The literature in this section broaches an interesting question about how to understand the differing outcomes of studying abroad for white students and Students of Color. Nguyen et al. (2018) and Gan and Kang (2022) argue that because Students of Color are subject to being minoritized and discriminated against at home in the United States, the experience of studying abroad is not as outside of the norm as it may be for white students. The authors explain that white students may be experiencing race-based exclusion or bias for the first time while studying abroad, and thus may have more to learn about other cultures than their multicultural peers. Gan and Kang argue that this means white students may have more to gain from studying abroad. There is a need to better understand if these outcomes for white students can be understood as a more beneficial experience if white students are only catching up to what Students of Color may already know.

As described in the preceding section, Students of Color may benefit less from studying abroad because they may experience racism, xenophobia, discrimination, and microaggressions in the host country. This may prevent Students of Color from fully engaging with their new surroundings. For instance, Engberg and Jourian (2015) claim that intercultural wonderment happens when students intentionally move beyond their comfort zones, immersing themselves in the culture of their host country and interacting with locals outside the walls of their classrooms. These experiences “stimulate growth and development” and “[challenge] students to develop new ideas and reactive modes of thought” (Engberg & Jourian, 2015, p. 2). Therefore, Students of Color who disengage from the locals because of discrimination, like those discussed by Quan (2018) and Goldoni (2017) in the previous section, may miss out on both opportunities to
cultivate their foreign language skills, and opportunities to develop new ways of thinking. On the other hand, Nguyen et al. (2018) describe multicultural students who become more engaged with their host countries because they are able to gain a deeper understanding of the culture by examining the nuances they see and speaking with the locals.

Nguyen et al. (2018) add that cultural intelligence is associated with the desire to engage in cultural experiences while abroad and to go abroad again later in life; these desires are what the authors describe as “a more successful study abroad experience” (p.120). As previously discussed, the Students of Color chronicled in Lott and Brundage’s (2022) and Goldoni’s (2017) studies ultimately did not want to return to their host countries due to racism they faced while abroad. According to Nguyen et al., this could mean they were not able to expand their cultural intelligence. Therefore, it may be that Students of Color may not receive important benefits from studying abroad because of their experiences with racism and discrimination in other countries.

**Summary of Study Abroad Outcomes**

In summary, research demonstrates that studying abroad can benefit a student academically, personally and in regards to their cultural awareness. This includes research that articulates how studying abroad improves a student’s academic progress, intercultural wonderment, cultural intelligence, and self-efficacy. Research argues that these outcomes may differ for Students of Color when compared to their white counterparts. Taken together, this body of research justifies that study abroad programs need to optimize for positive student outcomes for all study abroad students.

**Summary**

Students of Color are subject to unique challenges that make studying abroad more difficult. This includes the exclusion of Students of Color in the marketing materials and
messaging used by study abroad programs, and the racism and discrimination that Students of Color face while studying abroad. These experiences may stop Students of Color from studying abroad in the first place, or from benefiting from their study abroad programs. Benefits of studying abroad include increased academic success, personal growth, and heightened cultural awareness. It is therefore important for study abroad practitioners to make their programs more inclusive of Students of Color. With this thesis, I examine how a study abroad program is working to specifically support and advise study abroad Students of Color before they depart for their host countries.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Students who study abroad often see positive intercultural, academic, personal, and professional outcomes. However, Students of Color do not study abroad at the same rate as white students, and therefore miss out on the advantages study abroad programs can provide (Institute of International Education, 2023). Research shows that Students of Color are dissuaded from studying abroad early on because of the way it is marketed and the lack of financial aid information available, both of which contribute to the idea that studying abroad is not meant for their participation (Gathogo & Horton, 2018; Perkins, 2020; Wanger et al. 2020). Furthermore, when Students of Color do study abroad, they can face racism and discrimination in their host country, and thus distance themselves from the local culture and miss out on gaining new skills and experiences (Goldoni, 2017; Lott & Brundage, 2022; Quan, 2018). It is up to study abroad programs to support and prepare Students of Color before departure so that they have the same opportunities as white students to benefit from studying abroad.

Methodology Summary and Rationale

This thesis is informed by a brief case study of how a study abroad program at a Northern California university supports and advises Students of Color during the pre-departure phase of study abroad. Creswell (2016) defines case studies as detailed qualitative explorations of a topic (the case) that is bounded in time, using “multiple sources of data” to produce a description of the case (p. 73). The case study methodology has been employed across a variety of disciplines, including psychology, medicine, law, political science, anthropology, and sociology (Creswell, 2016). Case studies are frequently utilized in research in the field of education, and can often be used to study programs so long as the programs being examined are bounded (Yazan, 2015). The
case study approach traces its roots to the beginning of modern social science, until the Second World War when quantitative methods began to dominate. However, case studies never fully disappeared and are valued for the way they allow researchers to gain a better appreciation of their subject matter (Blatter, 2008).

According to Creswell (2016), there are three types of case studies: the single instrumental case study, the collective case study, and the intrinsic case study. The single instrumental case study focuses on one bounded case to illustrate a single issue. In a collective case study, multiple bounded cases are examined to explore one issue from multiple perspectives. Finally, the intrinsic case study is one where the case itself “presents an unusual or unique situation” to be studied (Creswell, 2016, p. 74). I selected a single instrumental case study for this thesis, in part due to limited time to conduct my research. My case study uses the bounded case of a single study abroad program’s pre-departure phase programming and resources to review the issue of how this program supports its Students of Color.

I have conducted a case study of a university’s study abroad program in order to gain a deeper understanding of the way study abroad practitioners support Students of Color. This thesis provides an examination of themes that emerged in studying the study abroad program, resulting in a holistic and detailed analysis to describe the entire case study. In line with the case study methodology, I analyzed multiple sources of information, including interviews with study abroad practitioners and relevant online media. As it is an examination of the pre-departure phase of studying abroad, this case study is bounded in time.
Research Setting and Participants

Setting

The research setting of this thesis is a large public research university in Northern California. The study abroad program for which the research participants work provides over 200 programs in over 40 countries. These include faculty-led summer abroad programs, internship programs, immersion programs at foreign universities, and a program for freshman students. In 2022-2023, there were over 1,650 students who studied abroad as part of one of these 200 programs. Students of Color account for almost two-thirds of study abroad students at this university. Nearly 26.5% identified with an ethnicity or race underrepresented in higher education; this includes students who identify as African American or Black, Chicanx or Latinx, Native American or Alaska Native, or Pacific Islander. It does not include students who identify as Asian or Asian American, who make up close to 37% of the program’s study abroad students.

Within the study abroad office where the research participants work are 15 professional staff and eight peer advisors. The professional staff includes study abroad advisors, program managers, assistant directors, a director, and an assistant dean. Peer advisors are current undergraduate students who previously studied abroad. According to the program’s website, peer advisors are meant for students receiving study abroad advising for the first time and who have general questions or are looking for a student perspective. Professional staff, on the other hand, are intended to answer questions specific to certain countries or programs; they are available to students at any stage of the study abroad process.

Participants: Sampling and Recruitment Plan

The sampling strategies I used for this thesis were purposive sampling and snowball sampling. I began by reaching out to two study abroad practitioners I already had in my network.
One of these practitioners agreed to be interviewed for my thesis and both recommended other study abroad practitioners to whom I should reach out. I reached out to the three study abroad practitioners who had been suggested to me and they each agreed to be interviewed. I also examined the public-facing websites and social media accounts of the study abroad program.

**Participant Description**

The participants included four study abroad program practitioners from one study abroad program. These practitioners are described in the table below, using pseudonyms and other non-identifying information. Participants were asked to self-identify and those identities are listed in the third column of Table 1. Based on the small sample size, the results will not be generalizable, but only speak to the experiences of those interviewed in the study. However, the findings may be useful for helping inform study abroad practitioners about how they may better support Students of Color by providing insight into the program analyzed by this case study.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Self-Identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Janine</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Asian American Woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>Woman of Color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scott</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Man of Color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Margot</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>White Woman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

Case studies call for thorough data collection using multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2016). I used interviews and website analysis to inform my thesis. I collected data via interviews with four study abroad practitioners, and by reviewing the website and social media pages of the study abroad program. Interviews lasted one hour each and were conducted on Zoom within two weeks of one another. The interview questions I used can be found in the appendix at the end of this thesis. Following each interview, I downloaded transcripts from each recording using Zoom’s technology. I labeled and edited each transcript for clarity, and used a spreadsheet to take notes on each interview for information related to my research questions. After reading through the transcripts and organizing my notes in a spreadsheet, I created additional spreadsheets to code the data for themes related to each of my research questions. I used the same process to document data from the websites and social media pages of the study abroad program.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2016) suggests that, for a case study, the researcher should first give a thorough explanation of the case, after the data has been collected; this can include the background and timeline of the case. Then, themes should be identified. Themes, according to Creswell, are helpful “for understanding the complexity of the case” (p. 75). The case study methodology is a qualitative research approach, therefore conducting interviews with participants is a common practice for this type of study. Case studies also call for multiple sources of information, thus, in addition to interviews, I have examined online sources of information. The data I collected for this case study was labeled and organized by interviewee or document-type. In reviewing my data, I paid special attention to important or interesting quotes that spoke to at least one of my
research questions. I moved each piece of relevant information to a spreadsheet organized first by research question and then by theme. To confirm the validity of my research, I engaged in member-checking with my interview subjects. I offered my participants their full transcript to review for accuracy and provide any clarification or additional information. While doing my analysis, I clarified with participants that I understood their responses correctly and asked for additional relevant information when necessary.

**Plan for the Protection of Human Subjects**

The plan for the protection of human subjects included engaging participants in the process of informed consent by providing them with specific information about the study and procedure, and answering their questions, as well as obtaining their agreement to take part in the study, before it began. I discussed confidentiality with the subjects and protected their identities by using pseudonyms and password-protected data. Any potential risks were made known to subjects. This may include breach of confidentiality, but attempts have been made to minimize this risk by storing contact information and raw data separately. Potential benefits were also discussed with participants, which includes adding to the field of knowledge about study abroad.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Studying abroad can benefit students academically, professionally, and personally. This includes higher grades, more career opportunities, and personal and intercultural growth. However, white students participate in study abroad programs at higher rates than Students of Color, meaning that Students of Color can miss out on these advantages (Institute of International Education, 2023). According to the literature, Students of Color may not study abroad because of a lack of information or representation in marketing, resulting in the idea that studying abroad is not available to them (Gathogo & Horton, 2018; Wanger et al. 2020). Those who do study abroad may encounter racism and discrimination during their program, and therefore may disengage from the local people and culture, missing out on the benefits from immersion that studying abroad can provide (Goldoni, 2017; Lott & Brundage, 2022; Quan, 2018). Study abroad programs must be intentional about the way that they consider and support Students of Color, so that all students have the opportunity to experience the positive outcomes that studying abroad can provide.

A brief summary of the case study, which is described in greater detail in chapter three, is provided here. This case study focuses on a study abroad program at a public research university in Northern California. The study abroad office is composed of 15 professional staff members as well as eight peer advisors, who are current undergraduates and former study abroad students themselves. In 2022-2023 there were over 1,650 total participants who studied abroad through this study abroad program. Of this number, 26.48% were underrepresented minorities in higher education and 36.88% identified as Asian, thus almost two-thirds of all study abroad participants were Students of Color. The following research questions guided this case study:
1. What do study abroad practitioners identify as the specific needs of Students of Color in the pre-departure phase?

2. In what ways do study abroad practitioners specifically aim to support Students of Color during the pre-departure phase?

I collected data for this case study by interviewing four of the study abroad program’s practitioners, who will be referred to using the pseudonyms Eva, Janine, Margot, and Scott; and by examining the program’s website and social media accounts. Each participant was interviewed once for one hour over Zoom. All interviews were conducted within two weeks of each other. The data collected during this process were organized according to research question, and then by theme. The following sections present the results of this study, organized by research question, and according to theme.

**Research Question One**

The data gathered in response to the first research question, “What do study abroad practitioners identify as the specific needs of students of color in the pre-departure phase?” can be organized according to the following themes: (a) the needs of Students of Color are varied; (b) Students of Color need access to study abroad; (c) Students of Color need support for navigating their identities, racism, and discrimination. Theme one articulates findings related to the diverse needs that Students of Color have during the pre-departure phase of studying abroad. This includes academic concerns of transfer students and concerns students may have regarding their family or community. The second theme describes issues of access to study abroad for Students of Color. This includes both a need for information, as well as financial barriers that students may face. Finally, the findings presented in theme three illustrate the need for study abroad practitioners to provide support for the identities of Students of Color. This section will describe
the needs of Students of Color, while the ways the study abroad program works to support these needs will be illustrated in a later section of this chapter when providing data in regards to research question two.

**The Needs of Students of Color are Varied**

Nearly every study abroad practitioner interviewed for this study spoke to the fact that Students of Color are not a monolith and, therefore, have varied needs. When asked what she thought the specific needs are of Students of Color who want to study abroad, Janine said, “I think they are varied, of course, depending on the student and depending on, oftentimes, also where they are going.” Later in our interview, Janine added, “I wouldn’t necessarily say that just because there is a Student of Color sitting in front of me, I would assume what their questions are.” Similarly, Scott responded to this question with, “I think they are so varied,” and Margo answered:

I think that within Students of Color, there’s a diverse set of needs, first and foremost. There’s so many different pathways that Students of Color take to just get to [the University], let alone the [pathways] that they want to take abroad. So I think first and foremost, it’s not assuming there’s one set of needs for Students of Color.

When asked what advice she had for other study abroad practitioners regarding how to support Students of Color, Janine responded, “treating all students alike, but understanding their differences.” Janine elaborated:

It's really important to group together a lot of these very general concerns that students have… about academics, articulation of those academics, about finances, about adjustment. And some of the things that are fairly uniform across students who are entering this space. But then very specific in that… [for example] if a student who is of
Asian American descent or Latin American descent [is] going to a country where they have family, [it’s understanding] what was their history, their family's history, with that, and just recognizing that. That goes to the very specific part… We won't know that until we talk to a student and that becomes a part of the conversation. But it's treating all students the same in terms of understanding what some of the main concerns are, but then also in terms of advising as you get to know the student, having an ear and empathy for why somebody might be choosing something in particular.

This understanding that the needs of Students of Color are diverse is also expressed on the program’s website, as illustrated by a page dedicated to support for students who identify as Black. The page speaks to the diverse and intersecting identities that students who identify as Black or African American can hold, and recognizes that a student’s identity, study abroad destination, and other facets of one’s personhood, result in unique study abroad experiences. Within the varied needs of Students of Color, the interview participants identified two common issues: academic concerns of transfer students and concerns about family and community. Financial needs, which were also acknowledged, will be discussed in the following section.

**Academic Concerns of Transfer Students**

Some of the study abroad practitioners interviewed mentioned the unique academic situation of transfer students who want to study abroad. While not all transfer students are Students of Color, many of them are; according to statistics published by the University, just over 30% of entering transfer students in fall 2023 were white, the rest being Students of Color. Most transfer students to the University transfer after two years at a community college, and therefore have less time at their degree-granting institution. As a result, there is less time for transfer students to study abroad. The University’s study abroad program website states that 20% of their
study abroad participants are transfer students but that they are constantly working to increase that percentage. Janine explained that “oftentimes, transfer students just feel like they have a limited amount of time, so it’s about stressing [that] early planning is necessary.” Eva, who was a transfer student herself as an undergrad, described her own experience of planning out her study abroad timeline so that she would still be able to graduate in four years, and that many of her own friends who had transferred did not know that studying abroad was possible.

**Family and Community Concerns**

The study abroad practitioners identified commitments to family and community as another concern of Students of Color who want to study abroad. For instance, Janine and Margot acknowledged students who provide financial support to their families, and how studying abroad may make this more difficult if they are not able to be employed while abroad. Janine remarked that students may feel, “if I [study abroad], then I lose out on earning an income to support my family.” Margot, additionally, explained the need for the support of a student’s community:

> Not every Student of Color has to convince their family more than others, but there are some students where the family themselves is really hesitant to let the student go abroad, or has a lot of questions, and so coaching students through those conversations can also be helpful… often the student has many folks - friends, mentors, parents, etc. - on their team, and everybody needs to be supportive of that student in order to make them have a positive experience abroad. So that's also something to consider when we're working with the students; it’s not just them, it’s them and their community.

Eva discussed her own experience with this when she was a study abroad student. Her family was concerned about safety in the country where she had chosen to study abroad, and so they traveled with her to her host country, where they stayed for five days: “My whole family came,
my aunt came, two of my cousins came… And they all took me to the dorms, met the people that were going to be supervising me, looked around…” As the evidence shows, for many Students of Color, the decision to study abroad is not an individual decision but one made within the context of the student’s community.

**Summary**

As illustrated in this section, the needs of Students of Color, during the pre-departure phase of study abroad, are varied and may include academic or family concerns. The research participants were clear that you cannot assume the needs of Students of Color because each student is unique; however, they noted that many students may share concerns. They pointed to transfer students as having certain academic concerns because of their limited time at their degree-granting university. They study abroad practitioners also named the need for the involvement of a student’s community in the decision to study abroad. Financial concerns and information were also recognized as needs of Students of Color before departure. The next section will describe these barriers to access that Students of Color may face, as understood by those interviewed.

**Students of Color and Access to Study Abroad**

In addition to academic and familial needs, issues of access were a recurring theme of the needs of Students of Color, identified by the study abroad practitioners interviewed for this case study. This includes lack of information and financial constraints that Students of Color face on their journey to studying abroad. When asked what she thought the needs are of Students of Color who want to study abroad, without hesitating, Eva answered, “information.” She continued, “I think information is everything, and I think that there's so much lack of information within different communities.” Eva believes this is because study abroad is “very advertised
within sororities and very advertised within white spaces, but you don’t find those same flyers in other spaces where Students of Color are typically hanging out.” Eva said that, as a result of only marketing study abroad in certain spaces, “a lot of students don’t know about the different financial opportunities that are available,” and that “there’s a lot of misconception [because] some trips are actually even cheaper than studying at [the University]. But a lot of students wouldn’t know that unless they asked.” Eva related a story about visiting the Black resource center on campus, and asking the students there if they were interested in studying abroad, but she was met with confused responses of, “What? What are you talking about?” According to Eva, some students are not even made aware that studying abroad is something that exists for them.

**Financial Barriers to Access**

Although there are perceived misconceptions surrounding the cost of studying abroad, financial concerns can prove to be a very real barrier to many prospective study abroad Students of Color. For instance, Janine explained:

[Some study abroad programs can be] so cost prohibitive where a student feels like, ‘if I do this, then I lose out on earning an income to support my family or earning an income to support the rest of my academic year’... these are key issues that can be a barrier to students who study abroad.

Similarly, Scott and Margo recognized the need to eliminate financial barriers for students. Scott described an expensive deposit that students needed to pay if they wanted to study abroad:

When I started in this role, we had a deposit policy, where there was a sizable non-refundable deposit that was due at the time of application. This deposit was due so early, that while it was “technically” factored into a students financial aid budget as the
first payment towards a program fee, in practice this policy excluded many low income students who would not be able to front a sizable sum of money to apply.

Margot expressed similar sentiments:

I think, without trying to assume all Students of Color need financial support, but finances are the big piece. If we could eliminate the need to take out loans, that would go a long way in terms of equity, not just for Students of Color, but for all students with financial need. So that's a really big one.

According to these study abroad practitioners, students may not be aware of financial resources available to them, or may face real financial constraints when trying to access study abroad. Ways that the study abroad program is working to increase access to study abroad will be addressed in a later section of this chapter.

**Support for Navigating Identity Exploration, Discrimination, and Racism**

Another need of Students of Color, that was commonly expressed during interviews, is the need for support for Students of Color to navigate their identities, and for support when encountering prejudice. While abroad, students may be confronted with new ways to understand their identities, or with racism and discrimination directed towards their identities. This need, as understood by the study abroad practitioners, will be articulated here.

**Space to Explore One’s Identity**

When a student first starts considering studying abroad, the first place they may go is the program’s website. The website includes pages dedicated to specific identities, which will be referred to as Identity Pages throughout this thesis. These pages provide, in addition to information and resources, questions for students to consider. Some of the questions are identity-based and the website does not provide answers to these questions; rather, it provides a
space where students, who may be navigating issues of identity and study abroad, can reflect. For example, students who identify as Black, African, or African American are asked to consider: do they want to better understand their identities or heritage by studying abroad? Do they know about, and feel prepared to navigate, certain experiences that people who share their identity might encounter in their study abroad location? Is community important to them? And will they be able to find a community of those with similar backgrounds to them while abroad? How will some of their other intersectional identities be received in their host country? Do they know about resources they can access to support their identity while abroad? Another group of students with an Identity Page are heritage seekers. Heritage seekers are students who are studying abroad in places where they have cultural or ancestral ties; not all heritage seekers are Students of Color, but many are. Heritage Seekers are encouraged to think about how they might be accepted or perceived in their ancestral land, and what it may feel like to be in the majority group in the host country.

While the website can provide an opportunity to contemplate one’s identity in relationship with studying abroad, the study abroad experience itself can also be a space for navigating identity. For instance, Janine previously worked with many heritage seekers and said that programs are often not structured or built with heritage seekers in mind. She went on to say, “I think there's such a high level value when it comes to acknowledging these types of experiences that students have, and that need that they have for that area of identity exploration.”

While studying abroad can provide an opportunity for thinking about one’s identity, it can also provide challenges that students holding certain minoritized identities may need to navigate, like racism and discrimination. The following section will outline how racism and discrimination
may affect students’ identities. A later section of this chapter will discuss how study abroad programs can and should support Students of Color to navigate these issues.

**Effects of Racism and Discrimination on Identity**

The study abroad practitioners spoke to the ways that racism and discrimination abroad can lead to new understandings of identity or bring up concerns. They expressed that these types of conversations are happening, or should happen, before students depart for their study abroad experiences. Margot shared:

I think we need to let students know about the fact that colorism exists all over the world, but in different cultural contexts. And so, giving students a heads up that they might be labeled differently than they are used to abroad, for better or for worse. And that people might not see them as the way they see themselves, which I think most Students of Color are used to in the US. It's not something new they've experienced necessarily, but the way in which they're looked at might be new. The way in which they are labeled may not be what they’re used to.

Janine provided an example of these concerns being on students’ minds when she relayed a conversation she had with a Black student planning to go to Italy, and the anxiety about what she might be faced with while abroad:

She said, ‘I'm going to Italy, and I heard that Italians weren’t very friendly to Black people because of a lot of the migration that was happening from Northern Africa, and everybody was treated as an outsider.’

Scott explained that this is a common occurrence for Students of Color studying abroad:

We did some research within our own students asking for students to share their own
experience, and unequivocally across the board, pretty much every single Student of Color that we talked to experienced some sort of racial microaggression or macroaggression while they were studying abroad, or race and identity was at the forefront in some way at some point during their experience. So folks are navigating this.

Janine, Scott, and Margot agreed that these conversations with students, about the realities of racism and discrimination Students of Color may experience while abroad, should be spoken about explicitly. This will be further articulated later in this chapter, as will other ways the study abroad program supports Students of Color who may encounter racism while abroad.

**Summary**

The study abroad program being reviewed for this case study understands that Students of Color need support to navigate their identities before and while abroad. This is evident in the questions provided on the website that offer space for Students of Color to reflect how their identities may interact with studying abroad. One practitioner also expressed the need for programs that allow students, in particular heritage seekers, to explore their identities while abroad. In addition, the study abroad practitioners acknowledged that Students of Color may encounter racism abroad. They agreed that this was not a rare occurrence and that it is something on the minds of Students of Color before departure. Ways that the study abroad program supports this need of Students of Color will be further discussed in a later section of this chapter.

**Summary of First Research Question Themes**

In conclusion, the first research question, “What do study abroad practitioners identify as the specific needs of Students of Color in the pre-departure phase?,” elicited responses that can be organized according to three themes, including: (a) the diverse needs of Students of Color, such as academic and familial concerns; (b) issues of access, like information and financial
obstacles; and (c) the need to support identity navigation of Students of Color before departure and while abroad. The next section presents findings that address research question number two.

**Research Question Two**

The data gathered in response to the second research question, “In what ways do study abroad practitioners specifically aim to support students of color during the pre-departure phase?” can be organized according to the following themes: (a) representation; (b) partnerships; (c) resources and advising. Theme one presents findings related to how the study abroad program strives to have representation of People of Color in study abroad program spaces. Theme two describes partnerships between the study abroad program and various campus offices. Finally, theme three presents findings related to the resources and advising support the study abroad program provides to address the needs of Students of Color. Each of these themes illustrate how this study abroad program works with Students of Color during the pre-departure phase.

**Representation**

The research revealed ways that the study abroad program aims to be representative of the identities and experiences of the Students of Color they serve. This is evident in various program spaces in three specific ways which include: people they hire, online messaging, and within the program participants and programs themselves. Each of these avenues for representation will be addressed here.

**Representation in Study Abroad Staff**

Most of the practitioners interviewed for this case study addressed the importance of having people Students of Color could relate to when pursuing their study abroad experience. For example, in the study abroad office, Eva’s job is to manage the peer advisors and she makes an effort to hire peer advisors who “are representative of different communities” so that
“[Students of Color] do think that [studying abroad] is feasible. It is something that can happen.”

Among the peer advisors, there is also someone designated specifically for students who identify as first-generation, low-income, or underrepresented in academia.

Eva recognized the benefit of students having someone to talk to who understands them, using an example of the only Black peer advisor in their office:

I've noticed that during our fairs, and if we're tabling, or even students coming to the office, a lot of students will book appointments with her. Specifically Black students will book appointments with her, because it's easier to talk to someone who understands you than someone who might not get where you're coming from, and I totally understand that.

So representation within all communities [is important].

Similarly, when asked how study abroad could be made more equitable for Students of Color, one of Margot’s answers was:

Making sure that staffing in our offices, in organizations, represents the students that we're trying to serve, so that students see staff, when they walk into our office, that they can relate to; that when they're talking with the staff, they feel they're being seen and they're being heard by people who have commonalities with them. I think that would also go a long way.

Janine described how her own experience studying abroad helps her advising, despite having done studied abroad two decades ago:

Whatever my experience was will be very very different from whatever [their] experience will be. But I think they find that comfort in knowing that somebody else has gone
through something similar, and feel like that adds to the level of trust that they can have in advising…They find connection through that question itself ['have you studied abroad?']. But it does inform my advising, because I think I’m aware.

She added that her experience as an immigrant to the United States and “navigating through different systems” also helps her to understand the experience the students she advises are going through.

It is not only office staff who should be representative of the identities of Students of Color in study abroad. Scott addressed the need for program facilitators to be representative of their students, and for students to have alumni, with whom they can relate, available to them. He stated: “The ideal…is to make sure that there is diversity and representation in terms of who's able to provide these programs… and making sure there are Staff of Color and Faculty of Color that are also leading programs…” In addition, the study abroad program hosts a workshop specifically for Black study abroad students. According to Scott, this workshop shares available study abroad opportunities, and holds a “panel of Black student alumni from the study abroad programs” where they share “challenges, as well as positive experiences, and have [a component] for students to be able to ask questions to alumni who have shared identities [with them]...” The panel is not made up of only former students, but “the last two years [has] also had a faculty alumni… who is Black African identified, who also co-leads those workshops and is there to answer questions or talk through things as well.” By involving, in pre-departure programming and advising, staff, faculty, and alumni who reflect the various identities of students who may want to study abroad, Students of Color have people to talk to who can better understand their experiences and concerns, creating a more welcoming environment for studying abroad.
Representation in Online Spaces

The study abroad program’s website hosts spaces of representation for Students of Color as well. This includes the Identity Pages, that were described above, and which Margot says the program encourages students to read through to find “the ones that resonate with [them] the most.” One example of representation on the website are the resources on the Identity Page for Black students, such as links to travel blogs written by other Black people, a list of campus offices like the Black Student Union, and a link to a travel guide with advice for traveling with natural hair. The website is also home to various stories of former study abroad students, which prospective students visiting the website can filter through based on various demographics. There are over 50 profiles of Students of Color who have studied abroad around the world, so Students of Color still in the pre-departure phase can read about the experiences of students to whom they can relate. These student profiles address many of the concerns prospective students may have by chronicling their answers to various questions. While there are questions about what a typical day abroad is like, or why a student chose to study abroad, there are also questions related to student identity, such as: how was the way you prepared for study abroad, or the destination you chose, impacted by your identity? In what ways did your study abroad experience change how you understand your identity? Do you have advice for students, with a similar identity to you, who are considering studying abroad in the same place as you? The social media pages of the study abroad program also highlight the Students of Color featured on their website. Additionally, they share photos and videos of students of various ethnicities enjoying their experience abroad. The answers supplied by former study abroad Students of Color, as well as what is presented on social media, may help future study abroad Students of Color better envision what their own experience could be like.
Representation in Student Populations and Study Abroad Programs

Some of the study abroad advisors spoke about representation within the students who study abroad. For instance, Margot explained that the study abroad office looked at 10 years worth of data of who studied abroad through their program. The data was broken down into various demographics, such as ethnicity or students with first-generation status, and these demographics were compared to the larger campus population to see where there might be gaps. For example, they looked at how many first-generation students studied abroad and if that number was representative of the larger first-generation population at the University. Margot said that this data analysis helped the program see that, although the University has a large population of Asian-identifying students, these students were underrepresented in their study abroad program. Eva noted that representation within a study abroad cohort is important for feelings of belonging: “it’s also important to make sure that, when we’re planning for pre-departure, that people don’t feel excluded, or feel like they may not belong to the group of students that they’re going [abroad with].” She went on to explain, “I think it’s important because you… want to get to know who you’re going with… Just in case you have any reservations, you can reach out beforehand, rather than after.”

Finally, Scott discussed the need for study abroad programs themselves to be representative of students’ identities:

Thinking about the program design, who are programs envisioned for? And are they meeting the needs and the desires? And is programming culturally relevant to Students of Color? Is it providing opportunities for folks…to learn from perspectives of the communities they come from?… I think in the study abroad field, there's… a lack of resources in terms of programs that are built by and for Communities of Color, and from
those perspectives. So oftentimes, in terms of creating access or creating more diversity and access to programs, it's not just about saying ‘how do we make programs that are [already] existing more accessible and expect folks to apply?’ I think a big part of it is also going back to the drawing board, looking at program development, and saying, 'how do we build programs that are actually relevant to students and are meeting the needs and expectations?'

The study abroad practitioners agreed that study abroad programs should be representative of the students participating and students at large.

**Summary**

The data articulated here shows that the study abroad program strives to have representation for their Students of Color throughout the pre-departure experience. This includes: peer and staff advisors who have shared identities with the students they serve; a workshop before departure that specifically supports Black students by connecting them with Black alumni of their programs; pages on the website dedicated to sharing resources and experiences that are representative of what a Student of Color may face while abroad; analysis of the data to explore where the program should improve to welcome members of underrepresented communities; and an examination of ways to make study abroad programs themselves more culturally relevant to the identities of students.

**Partnerships Between the Study Abroad Office and Campus Communities**

In order to support Students of Color during the pre-departure phase of study abroad, the study abroad program cultivates partnerships with various campus offices, as well as some non-campus programs and communities. Every study abroad practitioner interviewed for this case study mentioned at least one partnership between the study abroad office and another
campus program. According to the interviewees, these relationships are important for serving students. Partnerships between the study abroad office and other campus offices, that were mentioned during interviews, were those with the transfer student center, the undocumented students program, the Native American center, and other equity-minded spaces on campus. The study abroad program works with these offices to recruit students to study abroad. Janine explained that this is to “target some of the populations that, oftentimes, may not be aware of study abroad, or… feel like there's something that's preventing them from studying abroad, or… feel like there's something that's preventing them from accessing study abroad.” Margot expounded on what these types of relationships look like:

When doing partnerships, we're always asking a partner, ‘[We want to] make these opportunities available for the students, tell us, what are you hearing from students? Is study abroad coming up? Do they have questions about it? If we did partner, what do you think would be effective? What would be supportive to you?’ A lot of times our staff in those offices are really overworked and over-passionate, and they could be burned out at some point in the near future. So we [want to] make sure that we're supporting them and we're leveraging our resources to support them. So also being really mindful about partnerships and making sure that they’re responsive to what our partners’ needs are and what the students’ needs are that we're trying to support.

Another partnership that was mentioned repeatedly throughout the interviews was that between the study abroad office and the African American student development office on campus. The study abroad practitioners explained that this office helped them to create the Identity Page on their website for Black, African American, and African-identifying students, as well as the workshop for Black students that was discussed in the previous section. A new study abroad
program in Ghana was started in partnership with the African American student development office as well. Scott described how this happened:

We met [with the African American student development office] and said that we want to promote more access for study abroad programs to students in the Black, African, African American, and diaspora communities. And we know that there are a lot of barriers to access. And through that partnership, one of the things that developed organically, was to create a program that was hosted out of that office, that was going to be led by staff from that office, as well as other other faculty on campus. And so the program was actually created as a partnership from one of the community centers and it's turned into a really successful program.

Similarly, the study abroad office worked with the Filipinx student organizations on campus “to develop a program to the Philippines that would be designed to meet the needs of the Filipino community [at the University], and what folks were hoping for.” Scott explained that “Asian American students in general, are underrepresented in study abroad, and Filipinx students are one of the communities within that are underrepresented, at least on [this university’s campus],” but that the cohort on the study abroad program to the Philippines was 80% Filipino or Filipinx-identifying.

Scott’s perspective on the need for representative programming was described in the previous section of this chapter. He elaborated on the importance of collaborating with communities that represent the students they are hoping to attract to study abroad: “Working with direct partnerships with Communities of Color on campus to ask those questions: What do folks want from a study abroad program? Where do folks want to go? And what kind of programming would be most relevant?” According to Scott, relationship building with programs that support
Students of Color is key to recruiting these students: “I think having those relationships there and being present, so that we can provide resources or workshops, I think that's the most important thing.” However, he made sure to note that this is not enough for supporting Students of Color:

I think one of the things that it's important to avoid is tokenized outreach... So saying, “oh, we need X students, so we're just gonna go there and tell them that they should join our program or whatnot.” Because that actually can also do more harm, if there aren't resources in place for those students in programs to help folks navigate the experiences that they might have abroad, for example. And I think that is true in terms of supporting Students of Color... So I think that relationship building is important, and then also building relevant programming that is embedded with the resources that folks would need and want.

As is evidenced here, it is not enough to recruit Students of Color to study abroad if study abroad programs are not designed with them in mind, and if they are not given the tools to help them navigate study abroad. Resources for helping Students of Color to navigate their experiences will be described in the next section.

Summary

Partnerships were a common refrain throughout each interview. The study abroad practitioners each mentioned the many campus offices with which they partner that are already doing work to support Students of Color. Through building these relationships, the study abroad program is better able to understand the needs and desires of Students of Color in relation to studying abroad. With this knowledge, they can create programs that are supportive of the identities of Students of Color and recruit these students to study abroad. However, recruitment is not enough. Students must also be supported and provided with relevant resources during their
study abroad experience. The specific advising and support the study abroad program provides to Students of Color will be depicted in the next section.

**Advising and Resources**

According to those interviewed for this case study, representation and partnerships are imperative for recruiting Students of Color to study abroad, but are not enough to support Students of Color if study abroad programs do not provide the necessary resources and care to their students. In the first half of this chapter, the needs of Students of Color during the pre-departure phase of study abroad were articulated. These can be summarized as: academic concerns, family concerns, financial concerns, and need for identity support. The following section will demonstrate how the study abroad program is addressing each of these areas for support.

**Resources for Students of Color**

The online platforms and orientation materials of the study abroad program provide resources to students to help them address academic, familial, and financial concerns. These resources are not necessarily directed only towards Students of Color, but may be useful to all students. Ways the program tries to support students in navigating issues of identity will be described in the next section.

**Academic Resources and Support.** The study abroad program website has multiple pages dedicated to academic resources, available from the website's homepage. Among other advice, it recommends students determine what programs are most suitable for them in order to graduate within their expected timeline, and gives information on how to make this decision. As previously illustrated, transfer students are given the advice to start planning soon after transferring if they are hoping to study abroad. There is a page on the study abroad website
dedicated to transfer students, and which supports the emphasis on planning early. It encourages studying abroad through a faculty-led summer program in order to gain university credit, since most transfer students are no longer able to transfer units from other universities. The study abroad program’s social media pages also share advice from transfer students. Beyond transfer students, the social media accounts emphasize the ability for students to earn credits while abroad, and highlight the unique learning experiences and teaching styles students can encounter while abroad. Before studying abroad, students are also given orientation documents with information about academic planning, such as how to enroll in courses abroad or request credit so that classes taken abroad count towards the student’s degree.

**Family and Community Resources.** To involve the families of students studying abroad, the program’s website includes an Identity Page for parents and family members. It provides information about why a student might choose to study abroad, financial resources, health and safety, parent testimonials, and how family can support a study abroad student, among other resources. In line with the theme of representation, this page has been translated into Spanish and Chinese so that students with family members who may not speak English are also represented and are able to include their families in the study abroad process. In addition, one of the reflective questions asked on the Identity Page for Black students acknowledges the need for students to think about the support systems they have at home and how they will keep in touch with their networks from abroad. The page for first-generation students asks students to consider how they might involve their family and friends in their study abroad experience and explain study abroad to those in their community who are unfamiliar.

**Financial Resources.** From the homepage of the study abroad program’s website, students can navigate to the “finances” menu, which offers advice on total program costs, tips for
lowering the cost of studying abroad, and information on scholarships and financial aid. Other financial resources are scattered throughout the website, such as on the Identity Pages for first-generation students and transfer students. The program's social media accounts also advertise workshops on how to apply for scholarships and reminders of scholarship deadlines. In addition to resources available online, Scott mentioned ways the study abroad program works with students to navigate the financial burden of studying abroad. He said that depending on a student’s financial aid package, studying abroad during a semester or the summer may be more accessible, and therefore students are advised individually about funding their study abroad experience. The program also has financial aid counselors on its staff, that the study abroad practitioners refer their students to during the pre-departure phase, to talk about budgeting and the student’s specific funding scenario. Janine also noted that the program is sure to include that financial aid is even available, when promoting study abroad at large events like freshman orientations. Finally, as discussed previously, there was an expensive deposit required of students when they applied to study abroad. Scott said of this deposit:

I raised this as an equity issue, and a barrier to access for low income [first-generation] students, and we were able to work to change the mechanics of the deposit so that it was due after financial aid funds disbursed. This change enabled low income students to not have to pay out of pocket to apply. This was a first step, and we're now in conversations to explore whether a deposit is necessary for these programs.

Not only does the program provide resources to help students pay for study abroad, it is also endeavoring to remove financial barriers in the first place.
Support for Identities of Students of Color

As mentioned previously, recruiting Students of Color to study abroad is not enough if there are not resources in place to support their experiences and identities. Margot described this when talking about the importance of training program staff and faculty to support the needs of Students of Color:

We don't [want to] just do all this outreach and be like, ‘study abroad is for everyone. Come, you are welcome here,’ and then send people abroad and then have them have negative experiences that they feel like it was a setup, right?

This was a common notion expressed by interviewees: that study abroad practitioners, including faculty who lead programs abroad, should be trained to provide advice and assistance to Students of Color who may have fear of encountering racism or prejudice while abroad. In addition to preparing practitioners to advise their Students of Color, the interviewees spoke to the need for open and honest conversations, and for spaces for learning and reflection for students.

Practitioner Training. Some of the study abroad practitioners interviewed discussed the importance of training the people leading study abroad programs. Margot summarized this sentiment:

In general, as a field, we're pretty white… in terms of staff, historically speaking. And there's a dominant culture within international education as a field, even across the world; it’s a pretty Eurocenric field. So I do think we could do a little bit better at making sure that we are skilled and trained to support Students of Color while they're in their program, especially if they're going through any sort of ‘isms’ while they're abroad.

Similarly, when asked how the field of study abroad could be made more equitable for Students of Color, Scott responded:
I think really focusing on the development of the folks that are staffing programs. Making sure that program staff are really equipped to support Students of Color is really important, across all programs – that folks feel that they have the resources, the training, to be able to support Students of Color.

Margot described some of the preparation that goes into training study abroad practitioners to work with students to navigate issues of identity. For instance, she explained that when faculty apply to lead a summer program abroad, they are asked scenario-based questions, such as, how they would respond if a student experienced a microaggression. She expanded that they try to determine if faculty “are somewhat capable of supporting students that are going through identity-related experiences [or challenges] abroad.”

Margot also discussed training that study abroad practitioners go through. Faculty who are leading programs are trained on various topics, and new study abroad advisors “go through what [they] call ‘special advising topics;’” this is when they meet with staff who work closely with students with specific identities, such as transfer students or undocumented students. The office also partners with an outside organization which provides resources and training to their staff for supporting students from diverse backgrounds. After our interview, in a follow-up email, Margot shared that all program staff recently completed a campus-run equity training series, and that the program “provides support so that staff can pursue their own training opportunities [like certain online certificate programs]… attend conferences, and more.” She added, “staff also bring a rich history of their own academic and cultural practices and interweave them into our collective fabric and student services offerings.” The program works hard to train their practitioners to support their Students of Color.
**Open and Honest Conversations.** When describing his thoughts for how the field of study abroad could be made more equitable, Scott expounded:

Racism is real. It happens within cohorts. It happens between. It can happen in a power dynamic from a staff to a student. It can happen the other way around. It can happen in-country - folks can experience racism in-country as well. I think having open and honest conversations around those things are really important and making sure that the staff are trained and have the resources and skills to be able to facilitate and support Students of Color when those things happen.

Scott was not the only one to think “open and honest conversations” about racism are an important part of supporting Students of Color. In Janine’s example of the Black student who was hesitant about studying abroad in Italy, discussed in a previous section of this chapter, Janine acknowledged the student’s concerns as a possible reality and connected the student to resources that could help provide guidance:

In terms of an advising conversation... it was just acknowledging that 'I'm sorry that this could be the potential reality that you're facing,' but also connecting that student with the study center coordinator [in the host country], who possibly could provide additional resources for that student to consider. And also acknowledging other students who have gone on the program, if they were open to share some of their thoughts and feedback. And this student had already had some initial conversations with other students, and just acknowledging that all of that is important in their consideration of whether or not to move forward with the program.

Janine said she “really [appreciates] any effort in that direction of ‘here’s a preview of what potentially might happen.’” In her work with heritage seeking students, Janine would often see
students who had certain expectations for how they would be received in the country to which they had some sort of ancestral connection, “but then realizing that [the] host country no longer sees them as one of them.” She added:

So it's also dealing with some of these feelings, that I think is important for students themselves, of course, but also for practitioners to be aware of. I think there's definitely so much more work, on both of these areas, that can really be improved upon, and I think really the awareness of that is one of the first steps to make.

The study abroad program’s website also recognizes the need for honesty in what Students of Color might face while abroad. For example, the Identity Page for Black, African, and African American shares a link to an article on advice for how to respond to microaggressions. It also recommends that when students are picking a program, they consider how race and racism may operate in the host country, and how this may differ from the way they operate in the United States because of different historical contexts. It elaborates that people in the host country may have different perceptions of race than the student is used to. It also suggests that students research the potential study abroad destination and what life is like for Black people who live there. The program wants students to have an honest and realistic understanding of what they may be faced with when studying abroad.

**Learning and Reflection for Students.** Spaces for learning and reflection with students is another place where the study abroad program aims to support Students of Color. In discussing the need for practitioner training, Margot mentioned:

I would say a need we need to fulfill is making sure the staff on the ground are savvy when it comes to the local cultural context and how that's [going to] influence Students of Color on the ground. And really be able to open up spaces for learning and reflection
with them, whether that's group reflections or one-on-one conversations, and give them that one-on-one support. So through staff training, faculty trainings, providing resources, et cetera.

An example of a space for learning was a workshop described by Scott on power and privilege; this workshop has previously been an optional learning opportunity for students and they are hoping to incorporate it into mandatory orientation trainings:

What we're hoping to do is bridge both Critical Race Theory and thinking through how to be aware of your privilege as a traveler, as well as understanding how to navigate things like microaggressions or racism if it occurs abroad. And [so we’re trying to] integrate those [conversations] with some of the intercultural conversations around navigating cross-cultural communication differences and being able to not make assumptions about a host culture, and work to understand the broader context of the places that you are, working against snap judgments… it’s relatively new, in terms of trying to bridge those two approaches from a racial justice or social justice perspective, and also those intercultural tools, to really prepare a student for all the potential experiences that they might have. And then also how to navigate an experience in being mindful of the impact on local communities, especially for programs that might be going into indigenous contexts, or other contexts where it's really important for folks to be mindful of their impact as well. So it's twofold: It’s thinking about students and what the impact to them might be; and then also, what's their impact going to be to the local space. And also, within the cohort, being mindful of power and privilege and how that plays out within a cohort setting.
This is a pre-departure resource that may help all students understand their identities within the context of their study abroad experience.

**Summary.** This study abroad program recognizes the need to support their Students of Color navigate their study abroad experiences. They strive to do this by training staff and faculty who advise students and lead programs, by encouraging open and honest conversations about what Students of Color may face abroad, and by offering opportunities for students to learn and reflect on their identities within the context of studying abroad.

**Summary of Second Research Question Themes**

In summary, the second research question, “in what ways do study abroad practitioners specifically aim to support Students of Color during the pre-departure phase?,” elicited responses that can be organized according to three themes: representation, partnerships, and advising and resources. The first theme, representation, illustrates ways that the study abroad program strives to represent the students they are serving in various spaces, in staff make-up, online, and within the study abroad student population. Theme two, partnerships, describes the relationships the study abroad program has worked to build with other campus offices and communities to create programming relevant to Students of Color. Finally, theme three, advising and resources, articulates the resources available to Students of Color to help make studying abroad more accessible, as well as the ways study abroad practitioners can support students’ identities.

**Conclusion**

The data gathered for this case study are presented in the sections above. These findings are presented by theme and according to the research question. The results of the first research question, “What do study abroad practitioners identify as the specific needs of Students of Color in the pre-departure phase?” are organized by three themes. The first theme articulates the view
of the study abroad practitioners that the needs of Students of Color are varied, but often are academic or familial in nature. The second theme describes needs of access for Students of Color, including the need for information and the need to remove financial barriers. The third theme that addresses the first research question illustrates the need Students of Color have for support of their identities. The results of the second research question, “In what ways do study abroad practitioners specifically aim to support Students of Color during the pre-departure phase?” are also organized by three themes. Representation, the first theme, describes how the study abroad program works to represent the Students of Color they serve in multiple areas. The second theme, partnerships, illustrates the relationships the study abroad program has with Communities of Color on campus to create relevant programming for Students of Color. Finally, the third theme to address research question two, speaks to the way the study abroad program advises and supports Students of Color to address their needs. The next chapter presents a discussion of these results, as well as recommendations based on the findings presented in this chapter.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Many students who study abroad find they gain personal, academic, professional, and intercultural benefits from their experience. However, Students of Color study abroad at rates much lower than the population of Students of Color in institutions of higher education, and far fewer Students of Color study abroad when compared to white students (Institute of International Education, 2023; National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Therefore, Students of Color miss out disproportionately on the positive outcomes studying abroad provides. The literature reveals that Students of Color may be discouraged from studying abroad because of a lack of financial information available to them, and because of the way study abroad programs market themselves as something for wealthy and white students going on an adventure, rather than highlighting Students of Color and the academic features of studying abroad (Gathogo & Horton, 2018; Wanger et al. 2020). When Students of Color do study abroad, they may face racism and discrimination, and as a result, disengage from the local culture and miss out on opportunities that studying abroad can offer (Goldoni, 2017; Lott & Brundage, 2022; Quan, 2018). It is up to study abroad practitioners to create welcoming and inclusive programming for Students of Color, and to support Students of Color to navigate issues of racism they may face abroad.

This chapter includes sections titled (a) discussion; (b) recommendations; (c) conclusion. In the discussion section, the evidence presented in chapter four is explored further. Because of the interconnectedness of the two research questions, this discussion is organized by overarching themes, some of which answer both research questions. The discussion will also examine how the literature, presented in chapter two, interacts with the data introduced in chapter four. The recommendations section of this chapter includes evidence-based recommendations related to educational practices and actions that may be taken based on the study results and the literature
and recommendations for future research studies that may be carried out to advance the work begun in this investigation. The chapter ends with some concluding remarks on the thesis as a whole.

**Discussion**

In this section, the evidence presented in chapter four is discussed further. The discussion is organized by overarching themes that emerged when conducting this case study. These themes help to answer the research questions that guided this study:

- What do study abroad practitioners identify as the specific needs of Students of Color in the pre-departure phase?
- In what ways do study abroad practitioners specifically aim to support Students of Color during the pre-departure phase?

Because the first research question asks what study abroad practitioners understand to be the needs of Students of Color, and the second research question asks how they support Students of Color due to those needs, I see these research questions in conversation with each other.

Therefore, the discussion section will be organized not by research question, but by the following overarching themes that address these research questions:

- Critical Race Theory and the varied needs of Students of Color
- resources and areas for support
- creating inclusivity
- supporting students to navigate racism and discrimination

Each subheading of this discussion corresponds to one of the above themes. These sections analyze data provided in response to either or both research questions, articulated in chapter four,
and how the literature, reviewed in chapter two, is supported or complicated by the information and perspectives shared by my research participants. The section ends with a brief conclusion.

**Critical Race Theory and The Varied Needs of Students of Color**

The first overarching theme that emerged from the data was the way that my research participants apply Critical Race Theory (CRT) in their understanding of the varied needs of Students of Color. Although my research participants did not name CRT specifically in our interviews, this theory is woven throughout their responses. As described in chapter four, most of the study abroad practitioners interviewed for this case study expressed the understanding that the needs of Students of Color are varied; this idea was also evident on the program’s website. This sentiment is supported by CRT, which honors and validates the many and varied experiences of People of Color (Yosso, 2005). The study abroad practitioners aim to get to know their students as individuals and understand their individual needs and experiences, rather than try to assume the needs of the Students of Color with whom they work. Solórzano’s (1998) fourth tenet of CRT, expanded on in chapter two, names the knowledge of People of Color as “legitimate” and “critical” (p. 122). By not assuming all Students of Color are the same, but instead listening to their individual stories, the study abroad practitioners in my study recognize the knowledge of their students and use this knowledge to guide their practice. And, like Solórzano’s third tenet of CRT, my research participants are committed to eliminating racism and centering social justice in their work, by considering the unique and varied needs of their Students of Color.

According to Solórzano’s (1998) first tenet of CRT, race and racism are permanent and central parts of society. Patton et al. (2007), who conceptualize how CRT can be applied to higher education, advocate for higher education professionals to consider how the unique
experiences of racism and marginalization that Students of Color face, contribute to and create inequities. Therefore, while my research participants acknowledged that the needs of Students of Color are varied, they were still able to identify common concerns among Students of Color that may arise. My research participants not only acknowledged a variety of needs Students of Color may encounter during the pre-departure phase of studying abroad, but also recognized that Students of Color are likely to encounter instances of marginalization and racism during their study abroad experience, and may have needs that white students do not. These will be explored throughout the rest of my discussion.

**Resources and Areas for Support**

The next overarching idea that was apparent in the answers of my research participants, and on the study abroad program’s website, was the various resources the study abroad program and its practitioners provide to support Students of Color. Resources to support Students of Color can be sorted into three categories: resources to address familial concerns; academic resources, mostly in regards to transfer students; and financial resources. Some of these resources were also suggested by the authors cited in my literature review. The following sections will articulate how the study abroad program provides resources to support the needs of Students of Color, and what the literature may or may not say about resources for Students of Color.

**Family and Community: Needs and Resources**

One area for support the study abroad practitioners named was providing information for students’ families and communities. In our interview, Margot expressed that study abroad programs should not only think about students, but also about their communities. She explained that support from a student’s family is important for the student to have a positive study abroad experience. Eva provided an account of her own experience in support of this notion, describing
when her family traveled with her to her study abroad location. This idea is supported by much of the literature. As described in chapter two, Wanger et al. (2020) explain that Black students may be influenced by family and friends. Perkins (2020) articulates that support from the family is important to Students of Color when making the decision whether to study abroad. Gathogo and Horton (2018) similarly describe how families may be disinclined to support their students studying abroad because of the way study abroad programs are often marketed - with little emphasis on academics. This last point will be further explored later in this chapter. What is made clear, by both the study abroad practitioners and the literature, is that many Students of Color need their study abroad program to recognize that their community is involved in the decision-making process. This is important for study abroad practitioners to understand as Students of Color may be dissuaded from studying abroad, and thus may miss out on the opportunities for growth studying abroad provides, if family concerns are not addressed.

The study abroad program in this case study is not naive to these needs for family support. As illustrated in chapter four, the program's website provides information for families of students considering studying abroad. This is directly in agreement with Perkins (2020), who suggests that study abroad programs should target families of prospective study abroad students, to engage them in the decision-making process. The program examined for this case study further works to include families by offering the information in three languages: English, Spanish, and Chinese. Perkins also recommends engaging parents through university events, which my research participants did not mention, but the program’s inclusion of families on its website shows a commitment to involving parents in the study abroad process.
Academics

When discussing academic areas of support for Students of Color, my research participants frequently brought up the needs of transfer students, many of whom are Students of Color, at the study abroad program’s university. In particular, they mentioned the need these students have to plan early in order to make studying abroad a possibility. The study abroad program responds to the academic needs of students by providing resources on its website, including a page dedicated to transfer students. Transfer students and non-transfer students alike are advised to choose programs best suited for their timeline to graduation, and are provided with information about how they can receive course credit for classes taken abroad.

In terms of academics, the literature pointed to the positive academic outcomes that studying abroad provides, such as higher grades at the home university (Bell et al., 2020). This was not brought up by my research participants, perhaps because a need for increased academic success is not a pre-departure concern they encounter when advising students. Additionally, they may not be tracking students’ academic progress when they are no longer considered study abroad students, so study abroad practitioners may not be aware of their academic progress upon return to the home university. Nevertheless, the study abroad program does use its online spaces to highlight unique learning experiences that may be available to students who study abroad. Gathogo and Horton (2018) suggest that focusing on the academic advantages of studying abroad makes study abroad more appealing to students’ families, as mentioned in the previous section. If families see the academic benefits to studying abroad, rather than study abroad as something only for recreation, they may be more inclined to support their students.
Financial Resources

Another area for support identified by my research participants is the need to provide students with financial information and the need to remove financial barriers. The study abroad practitioners acknowledged that financial obstacles do not necessarily affect only Students of Color, and that not all Students of Color have financial needs, but that students within this demographic were often impacted by financial hardships. This can be understood through the lens of CRT, which acknowledges and critiques the way racism overlaps with and exacerbates other structural inequities. To help combat the financial burden that studying abroad can pose, the study abroad program in this study provides various resources on their website, like scholarships and financial aid information, and advertises funding advice workshops on its social media. In addition to what is on the website, financial aid advisors are available to students so that they may receive advice on their unique funding situation. The program also shares information on study abroad financial aid at freshman orientation. In addition to offering financial aid and scholarship resources, the program changed the due date of a large deposit required for study abroad, so that it better aligns with financial aid disbursements. The program is now evaluating whether this deposit is even necessary.

It should be noted, however, that the high cost of some study abroad programs is not the only financial burden that students studying abroad might incur. Studying abroad can also mean a loss of income for working students who support themselves and/or their families; the financial aid available for study abroad does not necessarily address this issue. Still, lessening financial obstacles, and empowering students with the knowledge that financial aid for studying abroad is available, are important steps to providing access to study abroad for Students of Color. This idea is affirmed by the literature. When the literature mentioned the financial aspects of studying
abroad, it was in relation to the need to better advertise to students funding opportunities that already exist (Wanger et al., 2020). Students of Color must be made aware that options exist to make studying abroad financially feasible. Efforts by the study abroad program to share information will be explored in the following section.

Creating Inclusivity

When exploring areas of support for Students of Color during the pre-departure phase of study abroad, four sub-themes emerged that, when taken together, illustrate how the study abroad program strives to be inclusive of Students of Color. These themes include: information sharing; representation; culturally relevant programming; and partnerships. Students of Color should be provided with information about how studying abroad can be financially accessible, and about study abroad in general. Students of Color should also see themselves reflected in study abroad program staff, as well as in the programs themselves through culturally relevant programming. And Students of Color should have access to resources that have been created with their specific needs in mind. This section will discuss how the study abroad practitioners employ these four areas to create a more inclusive study abroad program for Students of Color, and the way these themes interact with one another. This section will also examine what the literature says, or does not say, about these themes.

Information Sharing

The first theme that emerged in this study, related to making a more inclusive study abroad program, is the importance of information sharing. As was shown in chapter four, for Students of Color to have access to study abroad, they need information. Although financial resources are available, like financial aid and scholarships, as was discussed in the previous section, Eva explained that Students of Color may still have misconceptions about studying
abroad, such as not realizing that there are some programs that may be cheaper than staying at the home university. She attributed this lack of information to study abroad programs being advertised only in white spaces. As a result, Students of Color can be excluded from the conversation and think that studying abroad is not something available to them. If students are not told about study abroad as an option, they will not seek out information available online or the guidance of study abroad advisors. Eva’s perspective, that study abroad is not marketed to Students of Color, is supported by the literature. As mentioned above, and further analyzed in chapter two, Gathogo and Horton (2018) discuss the way that study abroad programs market themselves as an adventure for wealthy and white students. Additionally, participants in a study conducted by Wanger et al. (2020) noted the need for study abroad programming to be marketed towards African American undergraduates, and the need to better advertise scholarships and financial aid. The data collected from Eva confirms the findings of these authors and demonstrates that study abroad should be marketed in a way that is inclusive to Students of Color.

From my interviews with the other study abroad practitioners, it does seem that the study abroad program is endeavoring to share information about studying abroad in spaces where Students of Color are. For instance, as mentioned, the program shares information at freshman orientation that financial aid is available for study abroad. Orientation is open to all students, therefore students do not need to seek this information out but are given the information at the beginning of their undergraduate career, so that they may begin considering studying abroad immediately. That said, freshman orientation is not specific to Students of Color, and so this means of sharing information is not specifically targeted towards Students of Color, as suggested by Wanger et al. (2020). However, as discussed in chapter four, the study abroad program
Partners with various campus offices to more directly involve Students of Color in study abroad. Partnerships will be further discussed in a later section.

**Representation**

The way that study abroad is often marketed does not just exclude Students of Color by gatekeeping information; it also means that Students of Color do not see themselves reflected in the field of study abroad. Therefore, in addition to considering the way information about study abroad is shared, it is also important to consider representation within study abroad offices and promotional materials. As previously described, Gathogo and Horton (2018) analyzed the websites of four study abroad programs and found that most of the visuals on their websites depicted study abroad students as white and wealthy. During my interviews, when I asked about the ways that the study abroad program strives to recruit Students of Color to study abroad, Eva was the only one to mention visual advertising, such as fliers. However, unlike the programs reviewed by Gathogo and Horton, it is clear that representation is important to the study abroad program in my case study, as illustrated both in its online spaces and in the program staff. For example, as discussed in chapter four, the website has multiple pages for students with specific identities, as well as numerous stories from former study abroad Students of Color. Therefore, it is evident that the study abroad practitioners understand, and have acted upon, the need for representation for their Students of Color.

In fact, representation was stated repeatedly in my interviews with my research participants. Eva articulated the importance of representation when explaining her hiring practices for peer advisors. Margot noted that the study abroad office staff should reflect the students who are walking into the office, and Janine spoke about the ways students are able to relate to her experiences. Scott described the significance of having study abroad program
leaders, such as faculty, be People of Color. Finally, Eva also remarked that it is important for all students to feel like they belong when studying abroad. Each study abroad practitioner underscored that representation in the makeup of office staff is needed for students to feel that they have someone who understands them and who can relate to their life experiences. Notably, the need for representation in staff was not mentioned in the literature, only that staff should be trained for how to support Students of Color, which will be further discussed in a later section of this chapter. This finding on the importance of representation among study abroad staff represents an important contribution to the existing literature.

_Culturally Relevant Programming_

The study abroad program featured in this study has the noble intention for the demographics of its study abroad students to reflect the demographics of the University as a whole. This was described in detail by Margot and discussed in chapter four. However, Scott emphasized that merely increasing the number of Students of Color who study abroad is not enough. He remarked that the programs themselves must be designed to be culturally relevant for Students of Color. Scott specified that this could be done through partnerships with Communities of Color on campus, in order to determine what students in these communities want from a study abroad program. He added that this means providing resources and systems of support for Students of Color navigating studying abroad. This builds on the findings of Goldoni (2017) who claims that study abroad program design should incorporate ways to address discrimination and inequity, so that Students of Color are given tools to navigate racist events ahead of departure. Support for navigating these encounters will be further explored in the next section.

The data collected from Scott also confirms the findings of Yeboah (2019) who argues for the need for culturally relevant study abroad programming. Yeboah describes a program at a
Historically Black University that brings students to various African countries. As part of this program, participants get to travel with other students who share a similar background to them. According to Yeboah, this helps relieve fears of racism abroad; this point is also in line with Eva’s hope that all students feel included while studying abroad. Additionally, Goldoni (2017) discusses a Black student who, having faced racism while studying abroad in Spain, is hoping for an opportunity to travel to the Dominican Republic instead, because of familial ties to the country and the feeling that he will blend in and his culture will be embraced. When students get to participate in a program that is specifically designed with their identities in mind, this may help them to feel like they belong there. This is, of course, in contrast to the marketing that portrays study abroad as something only for white and wealthy students, as articulated above.

The program to Africa, as described by Yeboah (2019), is a heritage program because it brings students to a continent with which they have an ancestral tie. The program teaches students about African history and culture through formal curriculum and by taking students to cultural sites in various African countries. Yeboah explains that taking students to Africa helps them “connect to the history, culture, language, and community” and makes studying abroad appealing to Black students who are often missing from study abroad programs that do not appear to be inclusive to their identities (p. 10). Janine similarly has worked with heritage seeking students and mentioned that opportunities for students to explore their culture or history are important for exploring their identity. She reflected that rarely are study abroad programs designed with heritage seekers in mind. Thus, it is evident that programs like the one Yeboah reported on are crucial for supporting students who want to better understand themselves.
Partnerships

Designing culturally relevant programming is not the only benefit of partnering with campus communities and offices. My participants each mentioned partnerships with other campus offices, like the African American student development office, in order to engage and recruit students who may not otherwise be familiar with study abroad. This is important because, as Eva described above, students may not know that studying abroad is an option for them if they are not told that it is. Furthermore, like Scott mentioned, these campus partners can help to design resources to support Students of Color. Again, this does not seem to be mentioned widely in the literature, although these types of relationships seem imperative not only to recruiting, but also to supporting Students of Color in study abroad. Further research is needed in this area.

Supporting Students to Navigate Racism and Discrimination

The final overarching theme, evident in the responses given by my research participants, describes the ways that the study abroad program supports Students of Color in navigating racism and discrimination while abroad. Both the literature and my research participants were forthright about experiences with racism and discrimination that Students of Color may have while abroad. For instance, Janine mentioned the concerns a Black student had when considering studying abroad in a country that may not be welcoming to People of Color. Scott explained the frequency with which Students of Color encountered microaggressions, or more outright forms of racism while abroad, stating that this was the case for almost every Student of Color they asked. This confirms the findings of Goldoni (2017), Lott and Brundage (2022), and Quan (2018) who all describe the racism experienced by Students of Color while studying abroad.

Perhaps because my case study focuses on the pre-departure phase of studying abroad, my research participants did not delve into details on the experiences their students had, nor into
the ramifications that these experiences may have caused. But Goldoni (2017), Lott and Brundage (2022), and Quan (2018) describe interactions the students in their studies had, as well as stereotypes and assumptions to which they were subjected. The authors also explain the consequences of these experiences. For example, students may reject the local culture and disengage, thus missing out on benefits of studying abroad, like developing one’s language skills and opportunities for enhanced intercultural wonderment (Engberg & Jourian, 2015; Goldoni, 2017; Quan, 2018). Although the study abroad practitioners in my case study did not go into more specifics on the types of discriminatory experiences their students may have abroad, they still articulated the need to support Students of Color with this during the pre-departure phase of studying abroad.

One such way to support Students of Color, that my research participants offered, was practitioner training. Margot provided evidence of practitioner training strategies, such as asking faculty who are applying to lead a summer program how they might respond to a student who experienced a microaggression, or connecting new office staff to resources and training. The importance of training program practitioners is also reflected in the existing literature. Goldoni (2017), for instance, asserts that counselors and faculty, who are knowledgeable about issues surrounding race and ethnicity, should be part of the staff for study abroad programs. Quan (2018) agrees, arguing for the inclusion of trained allies, who can help students to reflect on experiences and challenges they may face. Space for reflection was also something noted by my research participants. In our interview, Margot noted that an area for growth is to ensure that program staff, who are abroad with students, are able to create opportunities for students to learn and reflect, either in groups or in one-on-one spaces. Spaces for reflection before departure are
also provided on the study abroad program’s website in the types of identity-based questions they ask prospective students to consider.

Both the literature and my research participants argue for pre-departure conversations that provide Students of Color with an honest depiction of what they may encounter while studying abroad. For instance, Quan (2018) suggests that when a Student of Color is considering studying abroad in a certain location, they should be given information about the context of the country, in terms of the racial climate there and how the student may be perceived or treated. The study abroad practitioners in my case study agreed that Students of Color should be able to make informed decisions on their study abroad destination by having open and honest conversations during the pre-departure phase. For example, Janine acknowledged the reality of the concerns of the Black student with whom she spoke, who was worried about studying abroad in a country unwelcoming to People of Color. The literature and my research participants both acknowledged the need to connect students to resources to support them if they should encounter racism during their study abroad experience.

As mentioned in my literature review, Goldoni (2017) argues that it should not have to be the responsibility of the student to study abroad somewhere inclusive of their identity, but that host countries, host families, and study abroad programs must improve the way that Students of Color are treated. Although this exact sentiment regarding study abroad hosts was not said by my research participants, they made it clear that study abroad programs should be welcoming and inclusive of Students of Color, and should provide Students of Color with necessary systems of support prior to departure. Scott also pointed to the importance of study abroad students understanding their own privilege and role in creating positive environments while abroad. He described a pre-departure workshop on power and privilege that provides students both with the
tools to navigate racism and to think about one’s privilege while abroad. Scott elaborated that the workshop intends to teach students not to make quick judgments about the culture or people with which they interact, and to be aware of the impact they may have on the place. Just as people in the study abroad destination should be understanding and welcoming toward Students of Color, students should also be understanding and welcoming toward the local culture where they are studying abroad.

**Conclusion**

The research questions guiding this case study asked what study abroad practitioners identify as the needs of Students of Color, and how they aim to support those needs. Because of the interconnectedness of the questions, I identified four overarching themes emerge from the data: (a) the varied needs of Students of Color and CRT; (b) resources and areas for support for Students of Color; (c) ways that the program strives to create inclusivity through information sharing, representation, culturally relevant programming, and partnerships; (d) supporting students to navigate racism and discrimination. Although only the first theme explicitly employs CRT, the way that race and racism infiltrate all aspects of society, and the study abroad program’s commitment to social justice, are woven throughout the responses of my research participants. The study abroad practitioners I interviewed are guided by the unique experiences and knowledge of their Students of Color, and provide resources and support to help counteract inequities and racism and to create an inclusive program for all students.

**Recommendations**

In this section, I make evidence-based recommendations for educational practices and actions related to supporting Students of Color during the pre-departure phase of study abroad, as well as recommendations for future research on this topic. Recommendations for educational
practices and actions include: (a) marketing for study abroad programs should be inclusive of Students of Color; (b) opportunities for former study abroad Students of Color to give advice to future study abroad Students of Color; (c) more culturally relevant programming and programs specifically for heritage seekers. Recommendations for future research include (a) larger-scale studies on the way study abroad program practitioners are supporting Students of Color during pre-departure; (b) large-scale studies on supporting Students of Color who return from study abroad; (c) how to train study abroad program practitioners to help students navigate racism abroad. Following this, the chapter ends with a brief conclusion of this thesis as a whole.

**Recommendations Based on the Findings of This Study**

When considering the ways to support Students of Color who want to study abroad, recommendations for educational practices and actions can be extracted directly from my research participants and the corresponding literature. These recommendations include: (a) marketing for study abroad programs should be inclusive of Students of Color; (b) opportunities for former study abroad students to give advice; (c) more culturally relevant programming and programs specifically created for heritage seekers. First, and related to the marketing of study abroad programs, I recommend programs intentionally consider how to best market themselves so that they are considerate and inclusive of Students of Color. This includes widely advertising financial resources, not only on program websites, but also through avenues that will reach demographic groups that may not traditionally consider study abroad. This means sharing study abroad programs and resources in spaces for the student population as a whole, such as at campus wide orientations, as well as in spaces intended for Students of Color, like Black Student Unions, affinity spaces, and resource centers designed for Students of Color. Students should not have to first seek out study abroad to learn that it is an option financially; instead, they should be
able to consider studying abroad because they already know there are financial resources available to them. In addition, financial resources should be available in multiple languages so students and their families can be engaged in the study abroad experience.

Another way to advertise study abroad programs, so that families are involved and supportive, is by sharing the academic benefits of studying abroad. To do this, advertisements for study abroad programs could share unique learning experiences that students may experience while abroad, as well as data regarding higher grades and faster degree attainment. Finally, when advertising study abroad programs, photos of study abroad students should include Students of Color, so that Students of Color may visualize themselves as study abroad students and feel that study abroad programs are inclusive of their identities. By marketing study abroad as financially possible and something that is not only for white and wealthy students, study abroad programs can be more inclusive and supportive of Students of Color.

As has been discussed throughout this thesis, once Students of Color make the decision to study abroad, they may encounter racism and discrimination while abroad. This can be a pre-departure concern of Students of Color who are not sure what to expect while abroad. I recommend providing opportunities for Students of Color to connect with former study abroad Students of Color who participated in the same or a similar program. For instance, the study abroad program I examined for this case study held a panel with Black alumni for current Black study abroad students. Janine also connected the Black student with whom she spoke, who had concerns about her study abroad destination, with other students who had previously studied abroad there. Depending on the structure of these partnerships - panels, formal mentorship, or one-time interactions, for instance - alumni should be appropriately compensated for their time. In addition, it is important to mention that it should not be the responsibility of People of Color
to solve issues of racism or bear the burden of navigating racism on their own. Study abroad programs must still offer resources and support to Students of Color, and host universities, families, and cities must consider their own role in creating an inclusive environment for People of Color. The intention of connecting Students of Color to alumni during the pre-departure phase is to provide them with additional resources and forms of support and advice, but cannot be the only means of this.

Finally, study abroad programs should create more culturally relevant programming and specific programming for heritage seekers. By offering programs that are more relevant to students’ identities, students will have the opportunity to explore their identities. Moreover, students will be among other students and study abroad practitioners of similar backgrounds and thus not feel tokenized, like they might in a program where they are the only person with their identity. Students of Color may also feel safer studying abroad in locations where they are part of the majority identity group. In addition, culturally relevant programming may be more appealing to Students of Color than more traditional programs, and therefore may be a productive way of engaging more Students of Color who might not otherwise be interested in studying abroad. However, Students of Color should not be expected to participate only in these types of programs at the exclusion of other types of study abroad programs; they should be welcomed and included in any study abroad program they choose. Instead, by offering more of this type of programming, created with Students of Color specifically in mind, study abroad programs are able to provide options for Students of Color that are uniquely designed for them and offer specific learning opportunities.

Each of these recommendations above are ways that study abroad programs can be more inclusive of Students of Color, from the way they are advertised to the way they are designed.
The study abroad program in my case study has already implemented some of these ideas and should be thought of as an example for practices other study abroad programs can adopt. Importantly, these cannot be the only strategies study abroad programs employ for supporting Students of Color. It is the responsibility of programs and their practitioners to ensure that Students of Color are welcomed and supported in all aspects of study abroad. In addition to these recommendations, the following section described an additional set of recommendations, for future research.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Recommendations for future research include: (a) larger-scale studies on the way study abroad program practitioners are supporting Students of Color during pre-departure; (b) large-scale studies on supporting Students of Color who return from study abroad; (c) how to train study abroad program practitioners to help students navigate racism abroad. Related to the first recommendation, there should be more studies and larger-scale studies on the way that study abroad program practitioners support Students of Color. The findings of this thesis are limited by the fact that the study only examined one study abroad program and only included interviews with four practitioners. The field would benefit from future larger-scale studies that include more programs and practitioners. In addition, many studies do not focus on study abroad program staff and thus future research in this area would be optimal to better understand the impacts that study abroad practitioners may have on students.

Related to the first recommendation, the second recommendation is for larger-scale studies on how programs support Students of Color upon return from their study abroad program. This thesis focused only on the pre-departure phase, but the way that programs support students transitioning back to their home university after time abroad would be interesting to
explore. For example, Nguyen et al. (2018) suggest holding orientation for students upon returning to the home university. Finally, much of the literature, as well as my research participants, spoke to the importance of training study abroad practitioners in how to be allies and support Students of Color navigate racism abroad. More research should be done about what this training looks like and what best practices might be for study abroad practitioners and program leaders working with Students of Color studying abroad. Further research in this area should also include how study abroad programs may partner with other campus offices and communities to better understand the type of support that Students of Color may need. These types of research may extend the existing literature by focusing on study abroad leaders rather than students.

**Conclusion**

When describing the study abroad office in which he works, Scott said:

> One of the things I really love about this office, and in particular this team, is everybody really has a desire to make impact and to use our programming to either [make] issue-based impact in terms of social justice in some kind of way, or create more access for those who traditionally haven't had access to study abroad opportunities.

This sentiment concisely summarizes the study abroad program I explored for this case study. The study abroad practitioners I interviewed, as well as the program’s online presence, demonstrated a clear commitment to creating access for students and making an impact. As has been discussed throughout this thesis, there are many advantages to studying abroad. These include personal, academic, professional, and intercultural benefits. By increasing equity in study abroad, programs can increase equity in higher education in general because more students will have the opportunity to reap these advantages. The study abroad program in this case study
seems to be committed to helping as many students as possible benefit from the study abroad experience. This means supporting Students of Color with resources and information specific to their needs, with navigating racism abroad, with space to explore their identities, with culturally relevant programming, with staff who understand their experiences, and with programs and online spaces that reflect Students of Color studying abroad. It is important that students are not only given the financial means to study abroad, but that they feel included in the study abroad space.
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APPENDIX

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about what attracted you to working with a study abroad program?
   a. How long have you been working in this position /office? Did you work in study abroad before this role? If so, in what capacity and where?

2. Tell me about the study abroad program you work with?
   a. How many students do you serve each year?
   b. How many partner universities and in how many countries?
   c. How many people work in your office?
   d. How many Students of Color do you estimate you serve each year?

3. What type of programming do you do for students during the pre-departure phase of study abroad?
   a. Can you share any documents and resources that you provide to students during the pre-departure phase?

The following questions will focus specifically on Students of Color:

4. What do you see as the specific needs of Students of Color who are interested in studying abroad?
   a. Do the needs you’ve identified influence the way that you advise Students of Color during the pre-departure phase? If yes, how so?

5. How does your program seek to recruit Students of Color to study abroad?

6. Do you have ways to evaluate the work you do?
   a. What about the work you do specifically with Students of Color?

7. In what ways can study abroad be made more equitable for Students of Color?

8. What do you view as the most important part of your job?

9. What advice do you have for other study abroad practitioners regarding how to support Students of Color or how to make studying abroad more equitable?