

Going International With FLI: The Experiences of Black Women Abroad

Thaïs Bass-Moore, Master of Arts Candidate
Human Dimensions of Organizations, The University of Texas at Austin

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of African American women who studied abroad at the **University of Texas at Austin**. Numerous studies show that Black women do not study abroad. However, at UT Austin something is happening—a movement! Black women are increasingly going abroad. I believe this is largely due to the impact of the **Fearless Leadership Institute (FLI)**. FLI is a program that operates within the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (DDCE) at UT. DDCE global initiatives aim to increase the number of African American and Latino students who study abroad. This study will examine the unique experiences of African American women who have studied abroad at UT since 2013, the summer of DDCE’s inaugural program.

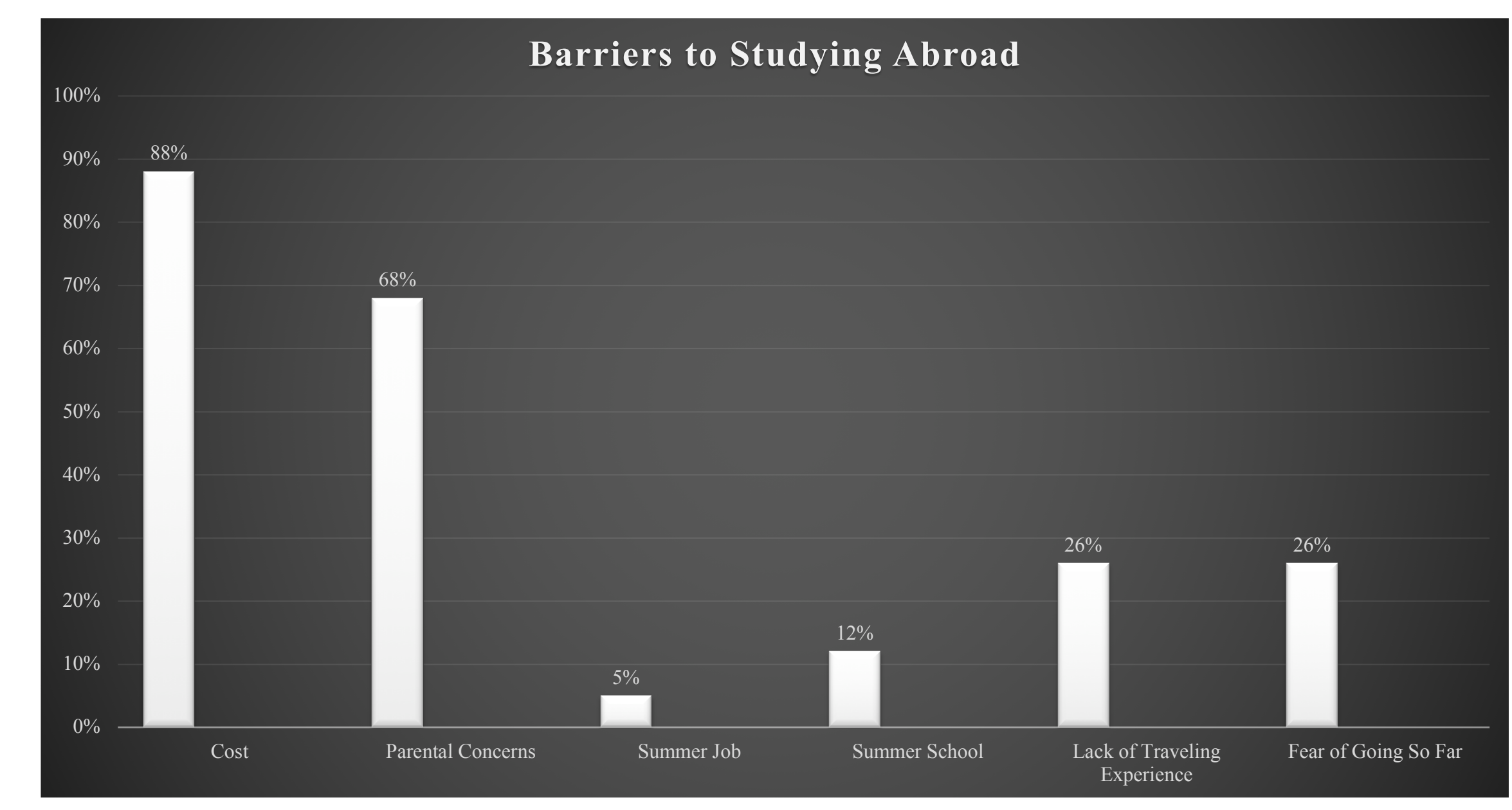
Methods



The current study includes both a qualitative and quantitative analysis. Focus groups were conducted to acquire case studies and a supplemental survey was used for demographic information on participants.

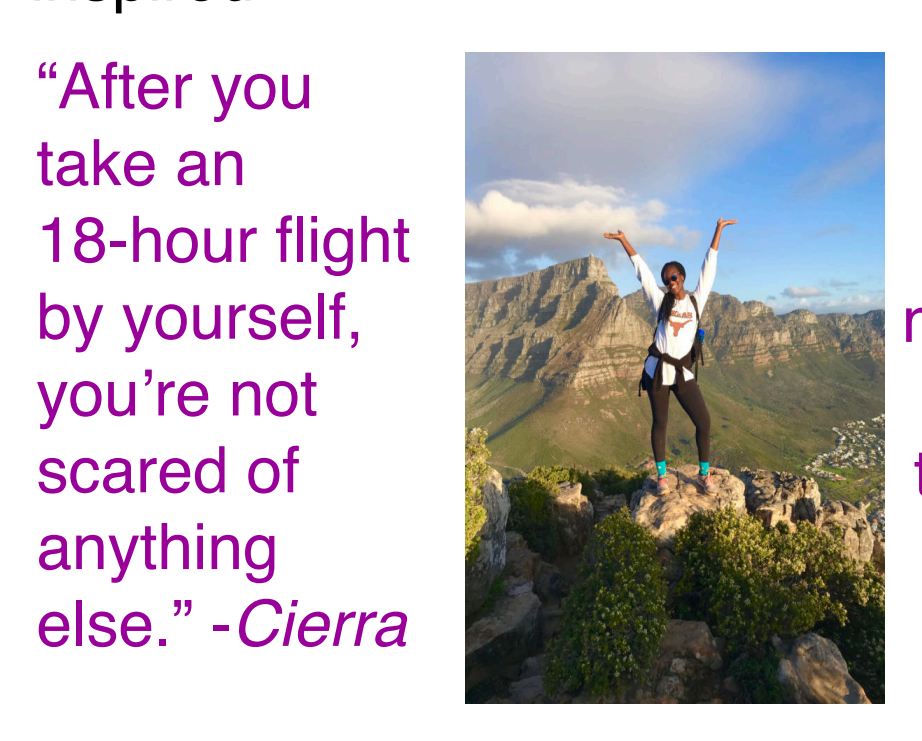
Results

This study validates that Black women are more likely to study abroad if it has been marketed to them by a Black faculty member, staff or peer. Marketing materials that include Black women studying abroad are very influential as well. Additionally, study abroad departments across universities must realize that if they desire for Black women’s participation to increase, it is necessary to have Black faculty and staff in leadership roles for the program. The implication is that Black women will go where other Black women (or men) are. They will also go where other Black women have been; peer to peer influence was a strong force in the increase of Black women at UT going abroad. All these factors help to push against the traditional barriers (see graph below) that keep Black women from gaining global experience.



The **Fearless Leadership Institute** was formed in 2013 to ensure that Black women at the University of Texas at Austin are equipped to thrive in an often-unwelcoming environment. FLI offers love, support, and guidance and creates a much-needed sense of belonging for Black women at UT.

This study demonstrated that it's more likely for Black women who participate in FLI to study abroad than for Black women who do not. FLI's family environment is a place where ideas are shared and action is inspired.



"After you take an 18-hour flight by yourself, you're not scared of anything else." -Cierra

Barriers

Many of the students stressed that **affordability was a barrier to studying abroad**. In addition to applying for financial aid, scholarships, taking out loans, and setting up a GoFundMe, one student became an over-night entrepreneur. With her earnings, coupled with a FLI & DDCE scholarship, she was on her way!

Parental and familial concerns were the second largest barrier to participants studying abroad. Many parents tried to apprehend their daughter by instilling fear in them based on misconceptions and a lack of travel experience. One mother feared that her daughter would be kidnapped in China and they would never be able to see her again.

Impact

"I realized I **was beautiful**." That's what Ogu said about the impact being in South Africa had on her. She explained that all her life she was considered the "nice girl" in the group. It wasn't until she went to South Africa and was surrounded by people who looked like her, that she felt beautiful. -Ogu

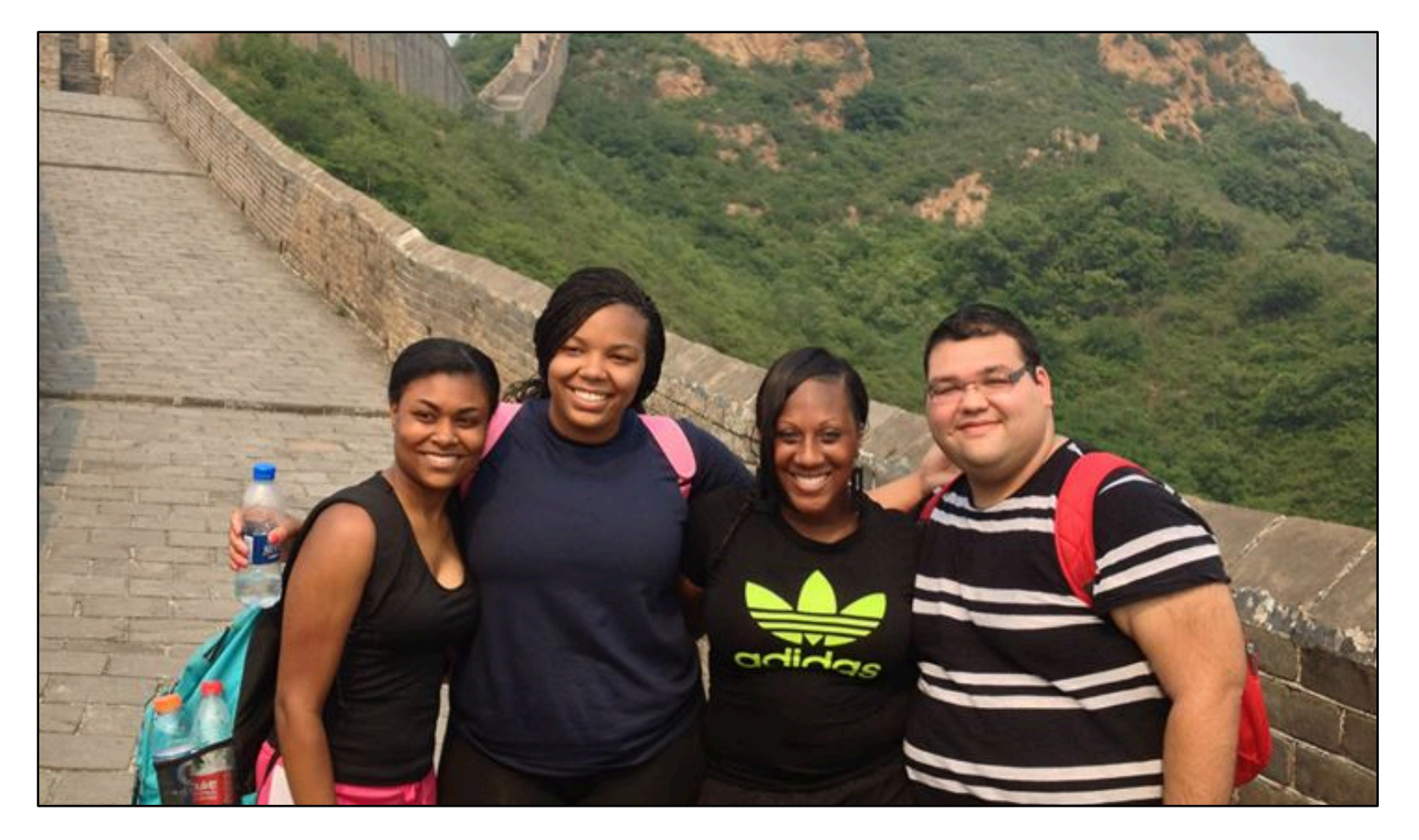
This study supported the longstanding notion that studying abroad has a holistic impact on students who participate. All participants returned inspired, transformed and ready for the future. Many found what they were passionate about in life and therefore changed their academic pursuits.

"I couldn't believe a Black girl like me from Texas was sitting on the Great Wall of China." -Amber

Conclusions



The **Fearless Leadership Institute** under the auspices of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement at UT Austin is positively impacting the number of Black women who study abroad. We are exposing a generation of African American women to global experiences and we are helping them to push past barriers that have excluded them in the past. There is a movement going on at the **University of Texas at Austin**, and I encourage other universities across the nation to take notice because *what starts here changes the world*.



Literature Cited

Gebre, Azab, and Ronald D. Tamika. "Association of poor kin relations, college adjustment and psychological well-being among African American undergraduates." *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 26.1 (2017): 217-224.

Grier-Reed, Tabitha. "The African American student network: An informal networking group as a therapeutic intervention for Black college students on a predominantly White campus." *Journal of Black Psychology* 39.2 (2013): 169-184.

Hannon, Christine R. "Stress, Coping, and Well Being of African American College Women: A Grounded Theory Study." (2016).

Hannon, Christine R., et al. "The Meaning of African American College Women's Experiences Attending a Predominantly White Institution: A Phenomenological Study." *Journal of College Student Development* 57.6 (2016): 652-666.

Johnson-Ahoru, Robin Nicole. "The academic opportunity gap: How racism and stereotypes disrupt the education of African American undergraduates." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 15.5 (2012): 633-652.

Kasravi, Jinous. "Factors influencing the decision to study abroad for students of color: moving beyond the barriers." (2009).

Morales, Erica M. "Intersectional impact: Black students and race, gender and class microaggressions in higher education." *Race, Gender &*

Class (2014): 48-66.

Pittman, Delishia M., and Paramjit Kaur. "Examining the role of racism in the risky alcohol use behaviors of black female college students." *Journal of American college health* 66.4 (2018): 310-316.

Raczowski, Brandon M., et al. "Forecasting College Students' Motivations to Study Abroad: A Pilot Study." *Journal of Agricultural Education* 59.2 (2018).

Salisbury, Mark H., et al. "Going global: Understanding the choice process of the intent to study abroad." *Research in higher education* 50.2 (2009): 119-143.

Salisbury, Mark H., Michael B. Paulsen, and Ernest T. Pascarella. "Why do all the study abroad students look alike? Applying an integrated student choice model to explore differences in the factors that influence white and minority students' intent to study abroad." *Research in Higher Education* 52.2 (2011): 123-150.

Shahid, Naysha N., Tamara Nelson, and Esteban V. Cardemil. "Lift Every Voice: Exploring the Stressors and Coping Mechanisms of Black College Women Attending Predominantly White Institutions." *Journal of Black Psychology* 44.1 (2018): 3-24.

Tinn, Kathryn. "Towards a Critical Race Approach to Increasing Access and Inclusion for African Americans in Study Abroad: A Training Workshop for Faculty, Staff, and Administrators." (2018).

Acknowledgments

First giving honor to Jesus who makes all things possible and who carried me through this program—thank you Lord! To the HDO staff, thank you for such an amazing opportunity. Thank you, Jessica Crawford, for sharing such a unique program with me! To my advisor, Dr. Davida Charney, thank you for your enthusiasm and expertise. To my HDO cohort, y'all are a fun bunch to grow with. Thanks to all the participants of this research who made it possible. To FLI students, thank you for loving and encouraging me. To DDCE staff, thank you for the constant inspiration. To friends and family, thank you for the support and encouragement. 1-4, what a blessing you are! Thank you, mom, for your prayers. I miss you dad! Jaaucklyn, Laurn, & Len—my babies, thank you for being patient and keeping me going with your laughter and hugs. Finally, to my boo, my best friend & forever hubby, Leonard, who inspires and encourages me everyday—thank you for the sacrifices you made to make this dream come true. I love you.

Further Information

What percentage of Black women who study abroad go on to become managers, executives, and senior-level officials in the workplace? Yes, we know studying abroad impacts their professional development, but how many of these women are moving up the professional ladder?