**Department of Marketing**

# Coursework Submission




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**Abstract**

The tourism market brings large amounts of revenue to locations around the world every year and international and study abroad students do just the same. Study abroad students not only visit a destination, they live there and become members of the community for short periods of time and often even bring friends and relatives to that location to visit. But because study abroad students spend greater amounts of time in a destination than regular tourists do, a lot more though goes into their destination choice. As well, they have the added complication of having to consider the academic aspect of a destination and its universities and programs as well. For this reason, the decision-making process of study abroad students is more complicated and more requires more involvement.

This study seeks to gain insights into some of the factors that pull a student to a destination, based on the push-pull model. This research aims to fill the current research gap of focusing on specifically the country of Scotland and determining what factors attracted students to it, rather than to the whole of the United Kingdom. The research objectives of this are as follows: to explore when choosing a study abroad destination, what elements about the different locations were most important to the students; to explore what students look for in their "ideal" study abroad destination; to explore what factors attract students to, or prompt students to choose, Scotland, as their study abroad destination; to identify what prior information the students had about Scotland before they came that helped persuade them to study in Scotland; and to identify what prior information students had that might have dissuaded them or might have negatively influenced their decision to study in Scotland. Qualitative research, by way of 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted, transcribed, then analyzed looking for key themes, and then compared to each other student's responses and then to the existing literature and conclusions were made.

In the end, it was discovered that many of the same factors that exist in the current literature are relevant for Scotland – safety, cost, language, unique cultural experience, family heritage ties, specific programming, and prestigious universities. But that also the idea of choosing a study abroad location that their friends and relatives have no visited or studied at can be attractive to some students, contrary to the literature. And finally, that specifically for Scotland, one of the biggest negative factors that could potentially dissuade students from visiting and studying is the gloomy weather.

## DECLARATION

This Dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Tourism Marketing Management in the University of Strathclyde, and accords with the University Regulations for the programme as detailed in the University Calendar.

I declare that this document embodies the results of my own work and that it has been composed by myself. Following normal academic conventions, I have made due acknowledgement of the work of others.

I declare that this piece of work, in whole or in part, has not been submitted to two institutions simultaneously or submitted previously to another institution or institutions.

**Signed**: ..... Jamie Lyn Hall .....

**Date**: ..... July 29, 2017 .....




# MSc Tourism Marketing Management

# Dissertation

**Name: Jami Hall**

**Title of Project:**
**Exploring Themes Influencing Study Abroad Students' Decision to Study Abroad in Scotland**

**Session: 2016/2017**

**Supervisor: Dr. Samantha Murdy**

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# 1 | Introduction

## 1.1 | Introduction

This chapter contains an introduction to the background research and the research gap and the importance of this type of study, as well as outlines the research objectives of this paper and then outlines the overall structure.

## 1.2 | Research Background

Tourism is an incredibly lucrative industry and study abroad students are a major part of that industry. The number of study abroad students is constantly on the rise as the world becomes more and more within reach. Because of this ever-increasing number of students going abroad for their education, competition for these students' enrollment is more competitive than ever. With study abroad and international students comes a wider array of benefits to both the universities they enroll in and the local communities that they live, shop, and travel around in. Since competition for these unique students is so high, it is crucial for both universities and the destinations they reside in to understand the complex decision-making process that these students undergo and how to best tap into this massive market by best placing themselves positively into the minds of the potential students. Study abroad students undergo a more complicated decision-making process than many other travelers and therefore more factors need to be considered.

This research attempts to fill the gap in the research that exists by investigating some of the pull factors that attract students to study abroad in a particular destination – Scotland, United Kingdom. The gap exists because the literature until now has primarily considered Scotland to be a part of the United Kingdom in relation to this topic, and considering the ever-changing climate of the world, it is important to have specific data that would be useful for Scotland alone. This paper attempts to fill the gap by interviewing current or past study abroad students who chose to spend their terms abroad in Scotland to better understand what attracted them to the country and what factors might have dissuaded them from going. A better understanding of these kinds of factors can help Scottish universities and their programs know what to highlight, what to explain, and what to avoid when it comes to attracting international students to their classrooms.

Research such as this has plenty of practical applications and thus why it is so important to complete. In addition to the applications that have been previously mentioned throughout, a better understanding of the factors that attract study abroad students to destinations can help institutions design better curriculums, programs, pedagogy, language proficiency programs, and cultural activities to better suit and attract incoming students

(Zheng, 2014). This information can also benefit travel marketers by helping them design more suitable travel offerings for the international student market, which as mentioned before, is an ever-growing and important market to capitalize on (Babin & Kim, 2001). Equally as important, this research will help countries and universities develop their unique selling points within the market so they can perfectly position themselves within the minds of their target consumers. Finally, this research can help destinations become aware of the weak areas in their reputations that might be less-favorable, and work towards improving their destination image for not only international students, but also for travelers in general.

### 1.3 | Research Objectives

In order to fill the gap in the literature, this paper aims to gain insights as to what factors are important to students when they are making the decision as to what country they want to do their study abroad excursion in, and what factors attract students to Scotland specifically and that might be less attractive for students relating to Scotland. Specifically, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To explore when choosing a study abroad destination, what elements about the different locations were most important to the students.
2. To explore what students look for in their "ideal" study abroad destination.
3. To explore what factors attract students to, or prompt students to choose, Scotland, as their study abroad destination.
4. To identify what prior information the students had about Scotland before they came that helped persuade them to study in Scotland.
5. To identify what prior information students had that might have dissuaded them or might have negatively influenced their decision to study in Scotland.

### 1.4 | Structure of the Paper

This paper will be split into 5 chapters.

Chapter 1 | Introduction:

This chapter introduces a bit of background information on the topic of study abroad students. Then, it continues to discuss the research gap of study abroad students in Scotland and discusses the importance of this topic on the larger scale. Then it outlines the research objectives and structure of the rest of the paper.

Chapter 2 | Literature Review:

This chapter goes into depth about study abroad research as a whole. Then it talks about the general impact of study abroad and international students on the universities they study at and the destinations they visit. Then it explains the different factors that are currently

understood to be important to study abroad students when making their final destination choices as well as the factors that are important to general travelers when making their choices. Finally, it outlines study abroad students in the United Kingdom higher education system and then further explains the research gap to be filled with this paper.

Chapter 3 | Methodology:

This chapter explains the basic research methodology undergone in this study. It goes into detail about the research methods used, the interview design, the sampling, the ethical implications of the study and any limitations this study might have.

Chapter 4 | Findings & Discussion:

This chapter outlines the findings for each research objective one by one. It gives a detailed look at the 10 respondents of the study and the shows their responses to the questions that were answered in order to answer every research objective. Then, it synthesizes the data and gives explanations and discussions of the findings after each objective in relation to other respondents and to the literature.

Chapter 5 | Conclusions & Recommendations:

This chapter gives the final conclusions for each objective as well as provides any further recommendations for study abroad program creators and Scotland's tourism boards. As well, this chapter gives recommendations as to any further research on this topic that could prove to be useful and beneficial.

## 2 | Literature Review

### 2.1 | An Overview of Study Abroad Research

Globalization has established itself not only through trade and investment, but also through an increase in international student mobility (Zheng, 2014). The number of students studying outside their countries of origin has been rapidly growing for years, with a massive 130% jump over the period of 1990 to 2007, which rounded out at 3 million students total (Mpinganjira, 2011). Trends globally within the higher education world have brought many new competitors into the game (Ivy, 2001). Because of this increase in competition, the battle to attract new students is more important than ever and higher education institutions need to ensure their competitive advantage within the market by developing a distinctive image and positioning (Ivy, 2001; Välimaa, 2004). The best way for a country or a university to do this is to favorably position itself in the minds of the consumers (Mpinganjira, 2011). This requires a very good understanding of the influencing factors that make a university or a location attractive to new and diverse students (Mpinganjira, 2011). Due to the increasing demand for unique educational services and experiences, marketers need to be very aware of

the factors that students consider when deciding to purchase their abroad experience (Cubillo, Sánchez, Cerviño and Olcese, 2005). Additionally, the growing number of international students looking for international higher education institutions, and the adding of new destinations, has increased the need for an understanding of these consumers from a cross-national perspective (Cubillo, Sanchez & Cervino, 2006).

Responsibility for attracting new international students has expanded beyond just higher education institutions into the destination's regional and national governments (Maria Cubillo, Sanchez & Cervino, 2006). Examples of this can be seen with the U.S. and Australian governments, which have taken actions to market their educational institutions internationally (Michael, 1990; Mazzarol & Hosie, 1996), as well as the U.K., which has attempted to position itself as a world-leading nation for international higher education (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003). National bodies from various countries – like the International Education Association of South Africa and the British Council for the UK – are often highly involved in organizing and running educational trade fairs, operating information centers, and producing national guides to display their country's academic offerings (Mpinganjira, 2011; Bourke, 2000). And, according to the Institute of International Education, the nations of the U.K., Australia, and South Africa consistently rank among the most common places for undergraduate study abroad students to travel to, especially as of recently – making their efforts a success (Selbe, 2017).

### 2.2 | Impacts of International Students

With so many international students traveling from country to country to study each year, it is important to understand the impacts those students have on their destination. International students bring many benefits to the universities they attend and the destinations they choose. As a growing and unique segment of the tourism market, international students and undergraduate study abroad students are very important and should, therefore, be well understood (Nyaupane, Paris & Teye, 2011). Economic incentives are playing a great role in driving host countries and their higher education institutions to actively recruit international students (UNESCO, 2008) because there are many benefits from hosting, them including opportunities to forge personal, institutional, and national relationships that benefit business in the future (Alam & Khalifa, 2009). More generally, international education as a whole has become a multibillion Dollar global industry (Mpinganjira, 2011). Using Australia as an example, The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs 2005 report Education without Borders: International Trade in Education reports that undergraduate international students contributed nearly AU$5.9 billion to the Australian economy, and at that time was Australia's

fourth largest export. In addition to the benefits that students themselves bring to destinations, their visiting friends and relatives (VFRs) bring added revenue to the locations when they come to visit their children and travel. According to one study done in Australia, 55% of students surveyed stated that their friends and relatives came to visit them while they were studying abroad (Michael, Armstrong & King, 2004). Overall, the income generated by undergraduate study abroad students and their families can help ease the financial pressures that the host country's governments often place on the higher education institutions due to budget cuts or other funding shortages (Zheng, 2014). Spillover effects also can be seen in sectors like the tourism, retail, and property sectors as international students shop and travel, therefore bringing in more income and even creating more employment opportunities for certain areas (Zheng, 2014).

Financial incentives are not the only ones that destinations see because of international students. For places like Singapore and Hong Kong, scientific and technological competitiveness increased, as well as things like socio-cultural advancement and development, and institutional research and innovation in their education systems (Bodycott, 2009). Strategic alliances, institutional consortiums, regional co-operational agreements, enhanced university reputations, and socially and culturally enriched campuses and programs are all benefits that can be seen with the addition of international students to universities (Middlehurst, 2003). In general, a more internationalized higher education system can promote a country's cultural diversity, political democracy, and international trade and cooperation (Marginson, 2010). Additionally, for countries that are actively seeking skilled migrants, offering high quality and attractive international education programs is a simple and effective way to recruit students with the desired skills (Mpinganjira, 2011).

### 2.3 | Factors Influencing General Destination Choice

Since international students can bring such positive consequences to their chosen destination, it can be understood that the competition of attracting these students is an important one for destinations to understand and to be strategic about. Choosing a study abroad destination is a difficult choice to make because it requires the traveler to go through the initial travel destination choice process, combined with the additional process of choosing an education establishment and living area, too. Choosing a destination just simply for travel and not for study is a complicated enough process, with many different influencing factors (Karl, Reintinger & Schmude, 2015). One theory suggests that choice sets are a central component of destination selection – this suggests that tourists develop a set of all possible alternatives early on and reduce this number during consideration until they have made their

choice (Crompton & Ankomah, 1993). This theory is most applicable when two conditions are present: when the choice is new or requires individuals to seek information, and when the purchase requires so degree of risk – which destination choice is considered to contain a relatively high level of for many consumers (Crompton & Ankomah, 1993). Early consideration is defined as all of the possible destination options, and late consideration is known as all of the probable destination options (Crompton & Ankomah, 1993). This concept is particularly applicable for study abroad students as they tend to make lists of study abroad locations and their universities and weigh their options before settling on the best option for them – just as the theory suggests.

It is also generally accepted within the tourism literature that a tourist's choice of destination is influenced by a variety of psychological and functional factors like motivation and self-concept (Sirakaya, Sonmez & Choi, 2001). Sirgy & Su (2000) add that the concept of self-congruence comes into play with this theory, too. Self-congruence being the idea that the destination's image should match up nicely with the tourist's self-image in order for it to be chosen as the ideal destination (Sirakaya, Sonmez & Choi, 2001). This means that a destination's perceived image is very important to be aware of, maintain, and market properly in order to attract the desired tourist segment – in this case, international students.

Another factor that is necessary to consider when choosing a tourism option is price. Price is one of the most influential factors that affect tourist decision-making (Nicolau, 2011). Tourists have a desire, like most consumers, to get the best value for money possible with their purchase. Value for money has been linked with competitiveness and overall satisfaction with destinations (Nicolau, 2011). Prices and quality are two basic elements that are used to gain a competitive advantage over other destinations (Nicolau, 2011), and these two factors are particularly important for undergraduate study abroad students who have short-term living costs and tuition costs to consider, as well as the quality of the study abroad experience, as well as the quality of the education to consider before making their final destination decision.

### 2.4 | Factors Influencing Study Abroad Decision Making

As previously mentioned, on one hand, authors like Maringe and Carter (2007) and Mazzarol (1998) note that the decision to study in a different country is one of the most substantial and expensive decisions a student has the opportunity to make while in school. But on the other hand, the motivations for a student to do so are quite straightforward. Motivations for international students to take part in study abroad programs can broadly be grouped into a few different categories including academics, future career prospects, cross-

cultural experiences, and family heritage (Nyaupane, Paris & Teye, 2011). A study was conducted on undergraduate short-term study abroad students traveling in Australia that found that most participated in their chosen programs to have social interactions and meet new people, experience new cultures, gain a broadened global awareness, and feel a sense of escapism from normal life (Jarvis & Peel, 2008).

However, unlike the relative simplicity of the motivations to initially participate in the program, the factors that influence a student's chosen program, university, or destination are complicated and include many different facets. First and foremost, education of any kid is much more of a service than a tangible good. Services have four distinct qualities, the two most important in this respect are the fact that they are intangible and that they are inseparable – meaning they are consumed at the same time as they are sold. Therefore, most attributes related to quality when it comes to higher education selection – and by association study abroad location and program – cannot be tested in advance, which makes any prior knowledge particularly important, especially for international or study abroad students who cannot easily go and visit the countries or universities in question (Cubillo et al., 2005). Because most aspects of education are intangible, it makes it difficult for consumers to evaluate the services being offered, so they are forced to focus on the factors they can easily evaluate, like the previously established perceptions international students have about the country they are considering studying in (Cubillo, et al, 2005).

Within the literature, there exists three main models that that analyze the antecedents of student mobility: the gravity model, the push-pull model, and the three-category model (Zheng, 2014). For this research's purposes, the push-pull model will be used. This model classifies all factors into either "push" or "pull" factors – push referring to home country factors that motivate students to go abroad and pull referring to host country characteristics that encourage students to come (Zheng, 2014). Push factors typically include things like home country economic wealth and population, and pull factors include things like common language and cultural proximity (Zheng, 2014).

Some specific and important factors that were identified in a study done by Hung, Chung, and Ho (2000) were awareness of the institution and country, tuition fees and expenses, future immigration prospects after graduation, and environmental considerations including climate and crime. Additional factors that are important for students to consider when choosing their ideal study abroad location is the host country's proximity to their home location, the local language spoken and used for courses, the lifestyle of the host country, and the support services available to students (Bodycott, 2009). In previous studies, students have

also rated factors like onsite accommodation, range of programs available, and friends and relatives studying in the area as important to their decision-making process (Bodycott, 2009). One study done by Michael, Amstrong and King (2004 determined that word-of-mouth, like recommendations from friends and relatives, was also an important factor in the selection of an educational destination.

Generally, tourist motivation and attitude have been found to be influential in destination selection, however very little research has been done to determine how specific attitudes towards specific locations are formed, and therefore is potentially problematic with respect to understanding study abroad destination choice (Nyaupane, Teye & Paris, 2008). However, the media do play a significant role in attitude formation for travel destinations, and by extension study destinations (Daruwalla & Darcy, 2005). One particular example of this is how New Zealand is portrayed as a rich cultural and adventure destination in the Lord of the Rings movies (Nyaupane, Paris & Teye, 2011). Therefore, it can be easily assumed that students may expect to be greeted to those characteristics when they choose to study in New Zealand.

How students learn the necessary information about their chosen study abroad location is also important. One study concluded that students learned about the educational offerings and their country of choice from advertisements and places like consulates (Michael, Armstrong & King, 2004). Interestingly, however, involvement from destination marketing organizations like tourism boards and their home education centers and exhibitions was very minimal (Michael, Armstrong & King, 2004). As Michael, Armstrong and King (2004) posit, this could be a sign that the potential collaborations between tourism organizations and higher education institutions are not yet being realized.

Despite the recent success, the market for international education does fluctuate (Bodycott, 2009). As the social, economic, and political climate of the world changes, students can be deterred from studying abroad. Some factors that could discourage students from spending time abroad are tightened visa policies or immigration requirements, the rise in living and study costs, or a drastic change in the exchange rate from their home to their host country's currency (Bodycott, 2009). Additionally, perceived risk is also a very important factor that underlies decision making in relation to travel (Babin & Kim, 2001). This kind of risk could potentially be amplified for international students as living in a different country for longer periods of time than an average vacation presents more time for risks, especially if the students are generally uncomfortable asking strangers for help or information (Babin & Kim, 2001). Also, destination, city, and university image hold a lot of

weight in the minds of international students and all influence one another. Therefore, if any of them have a less-than-favorable reputation, one or all of them can all become a red flag for the students.

### 2.5 | International Students & U.K. Higher Education

For decades, the U.K. has maintained a reputation as a top-notch higher education destination, attracting students from around the world, and currently is the second-largest host country behind, only the U.S. (Zheng, 2014). Higher education in the U.K. has become one of the country's major exporting industries (Zheng, 2014). However, with the bar set high, comes the high potential to fall. The U.K. is now facing more and more challenges maintaining and increasing their numbers (Zheng, 2014). Overall, the U.K. faces steep competition for the attention of international students, especially from countries like the U.S. and Australia, which also have the benefit of being English-speaking environments (Zheng, 2014), which is desirable for many students for various reasons. The market fell considerably from the late 90's to the late 2000's and because of this, it is important for the U.K. government and higher education system to understand their international students' motivations well in order to develop appropriate marketing strategies and policies to keep their numbers high (Zheng, 2014).

The U.K.'s education system has especially benefitted from their high levels of international students. Because international students in the U.K. often pay high tuition fees, in some cases significantly more than the local students do, they often contribute to the bulk of the schools' incomes (Zheng, 2014). Also, U.K. universities can call themselves "more global" and receive special accreditations and levels of status, which is a core strategy for some of the more elite schools (Zheng, 2014). While not specifically relevant to studying abroad, but similarly as important, when universities are highly successful at recruiting high levels of international postgraduate students, such as many in the U.K. are, this adds to their world-class reputations, which will have a ripple effect on international students of all levels in the future (Zheng, 2014).

When considering the decision factors of the international students within the U.K. higher education system, Zheng (2014) determined that factors like the historic and linguistic link to the U.K., home country demographics and economic wealth and U.K. governmental preferential policies were three of the most important factors for students around the world. However, economic, political, and social factors are more important to students from developing countries and home country economic wealth and population and bilateral trade are more important to students from developed countries (Zheng, 2014). In relation to the

pull factors that we previously mentioned, the U.K. has many including common (English) language, geographic proximity to Europe, and historical and colonial links with many countries both developing and developed around the world (Zheng, 2014). Zheng (2014) suggests that while the U.K. successfully attracts an abundance of international students as a whole, policies and procedures should be worked on to better trade and cooperation with developing countries, so as to better target students from these countries for the future. That said, further efforts should be made to target excellent students from colonial countries and countries that are geographically close to the U.K. as well (Zheng, 2014).

In U.K. universities, the majority of international students attend the various business schools that are scattered around the country, and the top two sources of U.K. international students come from China and India (Zheng, 2014). Also, holistically, patterns exist within U.K. universities as to what specific programs are most attractive to students from different countries. Chinese students are most likely to study business, law, finance, or accounting, while Japanese students usually study psychology, media, and art (Zheng, 2014). And students from western Europe and North America are most often on short courses like exchange and ERASMUS (Zheng, 2014). This information is particularly important for the proposed research of this study as it gives foresight into the home locations that are most likely going to be represented.

### 2.6 | Research Gap

Overall, there is an obvious gap in the research that this paper intended to fill. Important research needed to be done on the push and pull factors that draw undergraduate study abroad students to the U.K. because study abroad students have a lot of freedom in their choice thanks to affiliations with their home universities, and other special factors that make spending 1 or 2 terms abroad simpler than spending their entire 4 years abroad. Additionally, study abroad students spend a lot of their time exploring and spending money in their host countries and around the surrounding areas, since terms abroad can be less rigorous and are sometimes graded on a simple pass/fail basis they have more of an incentive to be adventurous. Finally, undergraduate students who are not spending their entire 4 years abroad often have a “you only study abroad once” mentality, so their time spent in another country is important to them, making what they do abroad and especially where they choose to go abroad very important to them.

More specifically, when considering the political context within the U.K. at the moment, and when considering that much research has been done that combines all of the U.K. together as one entity rather than considering them as different study abroad countries,

it was particularly important to do some research into the factors that inspire students to study in Scotland separately. Which is why this paper attempted to define some key patterns and themes in the thinking and consideration process of undergraduate study abroad students who have chosen to spend their time abroad in Scotland.

## 3 | Research Methodology

### 3.1 | Research Design

This research was intended to fill a current gap in the literature and therefore was highly exploratory in nature. Because of this, the research was based on qualitative methods in order to gain as much in-depth information about the factors influencing students to study abroad in Scotland as possible (Bellenger, Bernhardt & Goldsucker, 2011). Qualitative research involves finding out about how people think, feel, and behave, making it the appropriate form of research for a study such as this (Bellenger, Bernhardt & Goldsucker, 2011). Bellenger, Bernhardt and Goldsucker (2011) explain that the purpose of qualitative research is to answer "why" type questions, which further reinforces the idea that a qualitative approach was best for this project. The major benefits to using qualitative research is that it is much more flexible than using quantitative (Saunders and Lewis, 2012) and it can provide a richness in information that quantitative cannot.

For research such as this, an interpretivist approach is best suited because interpretivist research is based on a naturalistic approach to collecting data, like conducting interviews ("Interpretivism (Interpretivist) Research"). This is because interpretivist research suggests that the best way to understand reality is to look at it through a subject lens, and that is what is being done with in-depth interviews – attempting to understand the realities of different situations through the subject lenses of the people being interviewed. Interpretivist research aims to gain an understanding, rather than be fully able to explain and predict and explores to find out more about specific and sometimes unique situations, rather than more general information (Pizam and Mansfield, 2009). And that is exactly what my research attempted to do – explore and gain an understanding as to what factors inspired students to choose Scotland as their study abroad destination of choice.

The initial research consisted of an extensive review of the existing literature involving study abroad and international student motivations and factors affecting their destination choice and the effects and benefits of study abroad programs from the perspective of the destination. This helped lay the ground the work for the research gap that this research attempts to fill. It was comprised of journals, books, trade publications, and internet materials. However secondary research is not typically specific, and therefore, in order to

answer specific research questions, it is key for researchers to conduct primary research as well.

For the primary research present in this project, while according to Saunders and Lewis (2012) there are a few commonly used qualitative methods including focus groups and observations, for this particular research only focus groups and interviews were considered. Ultimately, however, focus groups were eliminated from consideration and interviews were decided upon because focus groups are very similar to interviews, but interviews require less planning and less participants, so doing interviews for this project makes the most sense simply due to the overall time constraints of the project.

### 3.2 | Research Objectives

As previously stated, the overall aim of this research is to investigate the factors that encourage students to choose Scotland as their destination for their study abroad program. To fulfill this research aim, the following research questions are explored:

6. To explore when choosing a study abroad destination, what elements about the different locations were most important to the students.
7. To explore what students look for in their "ideal" study abroad destination.
8. To explore what factors attract students to, or prompt students to choose, Scotland, as their study abroad destination.
9. To identify what prior information the students had about Scotland before they came that helped persuade them to study in Scotland.
10. To identify what prior information students had that might have dissuaded them or might have negatively influenced their decision to study in Scotland.

### 3.3 | Interview Design & Data Collection

For this research, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with current undergraduate students studying abroad in Scotland, or students who were previously undergraduate students at the time they were abroad in Scotland. Semi-structured rather than structured interviews were chosen because of the qualitative nature of this research, but also because every student was asked nearly the same questions, but semi-structured interviews provided more freedom to adopt each interview where necessary for every interview (Wilson, 2012). Approximately 15 questions were asked to each participant to ensure that all necessary information was gathered, but avoiding questions becoming too repetitive. The demographic questions were asked at the end of the interview and follow-up questions were asked throughout the interview to get a clearer picture of information that the students were providing and to clarify any unclear information (Turner III, 2010). The interviews were

designed to flow from question to question simply and in a logical order and the interview was conducted at a casual speaking pace. Overall, the questions were designed to be as standardized and as open-ended as possible and to avoid as much interview bias as possible (Turner III, 2010). This was done by creating questions that could be applicable to every student within the study and that did not contain any assuming or leading information. Many of the questions were written out beforehand to aid the conversation, however additional questions were asked where needed to explore interesting and unforeseen topics further.

Beck and Manuel (2008) explain that the process of interviewing has 8 distinctive steps, many of which were followed for this study. First, the type of participants that was desired was determined and the specific participants that were needed for this study were approached via social media or in person by the researcher. Then, the type of interview was decided upon – primarily in person, but some were conducted over social media in order to ensure the number of necessary participants (10) was met. This is because many of the participants are currently located in other countries and online contact proved to be the most convenient for the respondents and easy to schedule. Next, the facilities that were used to conduct the in-person interviews were established and it was decided that for ease for the participants, the researcher would meet the students on the Edinburgh University campus. All participants were asked to confirm their consent for the project and given a detailed explanation of project and the interview that they would be taking part in and then their signature was collected on the necessary ethics documentation. This pre-interview conversation also helped aid in building rapport with the respondents so that they felt more comfortable during the interview (Turner III, 2010). For the in-person interviews, brief versions of answers to the questions were typed and recordings were made on recording software on an iPad and then transcribed later. The interviews lasted around 20 minutes each and took place at a pre-arranged date and time over the course of a month. For the online interviews, rapport was built via chat software on the social media platform being used and digital signatures were gathered. Then, the questions were sent to the respondents and they returned them with their answers filled in. Follow up questions were asked after reading their responses, if necessary.

A pilot test was conducted on a current undergraduate student enrolled in a Scottish University who would not be a part of the research project to ensure that each question was easy enough to understand, to make sure that the order of the questions had a sensible flow, and to make sure that all topics were covered thoroughly enough within the interview. The

results of the pilot test showed that no further questions were needed nor any major structural changes were needed for the interview and they could be conducted as originally planned.

### 3.4 | Sampling

Non-probability sampling was used for this research as there is no way to know of and speak to every person within the chosen population that exists and therefore everyone who was selected for this research had an unknown chance of being chosen (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Students selected for this study were sampled by a convenience sampling method. They were recruited through friends of the researcher or on social media. The requirements for participation are as follows:

1. Students must be 18 years or older
2. They must be a full-time undergraduate student or have been at the time of their abroad experience
3. The student must be enrolled in a home university in any country other than the U.K. or have been at the time of their study abroad trip
4. They must currently be participating in or have previously participated in some form of an exchange, study abroad, Erasmus, or some other program that allows them to study in Scotland for any period of time – both short-term or long-term program used.

This specific criterion was established for a few different reasons. First, the age of 18 was established for ethical reasons, as well as the fact that undergraduate students who have spent time abroad or previous study abroad students will most likely be over the age of 18 regardless. Also, as previously mentioned, there lies a gap within the research to explore the factors that make Scotland attractive to study abroad students, which is why the criteria of respondents being required to be currently enrolled in or have been previously enrolled in a study abroad program in Scotland exists. Finally, because study abroad students were the focus of this research, the respondents needed to be undergraduates since postgraduates do not usually embark on study abroad programs. And that is also the reasoning behind the requirement for students to be enrolled at a home university somewhere other than U.K. as the student must be studying abroad not simply enrolled in a Scottish university full-time.

### 3.5 | Data Analysis

As previously mentioned, interviews were typed as well as recorded for accuracy and then transcribed at a later time before the analysis took place. One complete interview can be found in Appendix I. Each interview question was paired with the research objective that it related to and the subsequent answers to the questions were analyzed. The content of the

interviews was studied looking for similarities, differences, and key themes not only between respondents, but also in relation to the literature. Similar answers were paired with one another and answers were also analyzed in search of information that might have been relevant for more than one research objective or, perhaps, might have been more useful for a different research objective than where it had originally been grouped.

### 3.6 | Ethics

For all face-to-face and online interviews, the respondents were informed of the purpose and context of this research and then asked to ensure they were comfortable being recorded. To ensure that there was no risk to any of the respondents, their anonymity remained completely confidential at all times and they were assigned pseudonyms to mask their identity. Each participant was asked to sign a participant information sheet, all information was kept confidential on a locked computer, and all other ethical guidelines set forth by the ethics committee were followed.

### 3.7 | Limitations

Some limitations exist for this research that needs to be mentioned. First, there are obvious time restraints on this project. The entire project was conducted over the course of a few months, leaving little time to obtain and speak to a wide variety of different respondents. So, for that reason, a very small number (10) of interviews were conducted, making the information gathered less-generalizable on the grander scheme. Also because of this time restraint, there exists little diversity within the interviewees. Many respondents were all from the same country – the United States of America – and many of them were also in Scotland on the same Scottish Parliamentary Program. Additionally, since most of the students were studying at the same Scottish university (Edinburgh), in future it would be beneficial to get perspectives from students at other universities throughout Scotland. So, much of the information gathered from these interviews will not be completely relevant for all types of students from different locations. However, while in-depth interviews are less generalizable than other forms of research, this study was more interested in getting deep insights into the themes and factors relating to the decision-making processes of students that can be used to improve study abroad programs and the universities that host them.

Additionally, while unintentional, the researcher is aware that the nature of exploratory qualitative research lends itself to biases in tone and wording of questions that could have potentially influenced the way the interviewees answered the questions. Even despite the constant awareness of such concerns and constants acts to avoid this problem.

### 3.8 | Chapter Summary

This chapter gave an explanation and justification for the chosen research type of qualitative research with an interpretivist approach, and also for the research method of semi-structured interviews that was be used to collect data, as well as any limitations that might exist within it. It discussed in detail the format of the interviews and the types of questions that were asked to each respondent. It also discussed the length of each interview, how many were conducted, and gave insights as to how they were conducted and what considerations were made in creating the questions and documenting the responses. Finally, this chapter explained the requirement that each respondent needed to meet in order to be a part of the study and gave an explanation as to why those requirements were chosen. The next chapter will report on and discuss the results of the interviews that took place and give insight into any common themes and differences between the opinions of the respondents and the literature.

## 4 | Findings & Discussion

In this chapter, the data collected from the primary research is discussed and analyzed regarding the research questions. Table 1, which can be found in Appendix II, outlines each interview question and its corresponding research objective. All research objectives were explored through 10 in-depth social media and in-person interviews with current or previous undergraduate study abroad students in Scottish universities who met the profile:

1. Students, 18 years or older
2. full-time undergraduate students or were at the time of their abroad experience
3. must be enrolled in a home university in any country other than the U.K. or have been at the time of their study abroad trip
4. must currently be participating in or have previously participated in some form of an exchange, study abroad, Erasmus, or some other program that allows them to study in Scotland for any period of time

### 4.1 | Table 2 – Sample Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of each respondent are listed in the table below:

Table 2

| Resp. # | Nationality | Program | Scottish Uni., City | Subjects Studied | Home Uni., Year (Based On Four Year Degree) | Age When Abroad | Gender |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Resp. 1 | American | Scottish Parliamentary – Arcadia University | The University Edinburgh, Edinburgh | Government, Political Science, Economics | Roger Williams University, Fourth | 20-21* | Male |
| Resp. 2 | American | Arcadia University | The University Edinburgh, Edinburgh | Political Science, Environmental Science | Roger Williams University, Third | 20-21* | Male |
| Resp. 3 | American | Arcadia University | The University Edinburgh, Edinburgh | Public Relations, Electives | Quinnipiac University, Third | 20 | Female |
| Resp. 4 | Nigerian | Painting & Printmaking | Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow | Visual Arts, Creative Writing | Roger Williams University, Fourth | 21 | Female |
| Resp. 5 | American | Arcadia University | The University of Glasgow, Glasgow | Medieval History | Seattle University, Third | 20-21* | Female |
| Resp. 6 | American | Scottish Parliamentary – Arcadia University | The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh | Communications, Legal Institutions, Economics, Government | American University, Fourth | 21 | Female |
| Resp. 7 | American | Scottish Parliamentary – Arcadia University | The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh | International Relations, Economics | Occidental College, Graduate++ | 21 | Male |
| Resp. 8 | Italian | Erasmus | The University of Glasgow, Glasgow | Electronics Engineering | Politecnico di Bari, Third/Final*** | 22 | Male |
| Resp. 9 | Canadian | Undergraduate Social Science | The University of | Law, History | Université du Québec à | 20-21* | Female |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Glasgow, Glasgow | | Montréal, Third/Final*** | | |
| Resp. 10 | German | Scottish Parliamentary – Arcadia University | The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh | Politics, International Relations | Aberdeen University, Fourth++++ | 21 | Female |

*These students had birthdays while abroad.

++This student went abroad during the summer for credits as a part of his senior year, but just after his senior year concluded.

***These students completed a three-year undergraduate degree, instead of four.

++++This student had a unique situation where she was an international student in Scotland already, but also chose to do another study abroad term in a different university in Scotland, so she was still included in the research, despite her "home" university residing in the U.K.

Within the respondents, there was a relatively even (6:4) ratio of females to males. Also, a very wide array of academic subjects was present within the respondents, especially when you consider that nearly every student studied more than one subject. While the majority of the nationalities were American (6 out of 10), the other 4 respondents were from different countries, providing some depth and variety in the responses. Out of all 10 of the respondents, 6 students studied at The University of Edinburgh, 3 at the University of Glasgow, and 1 at The Glasgow School of Art.

**4.2 | Research Objective 1:**

*To explore when choosing a study abroad destination, what elements about the different locations were most important to the students.*

In order to explore this objective, interviewees were asked one main question:

- What were some of the critical factors that you were concerned with in a study abroad destination? And what factors did you consider that eliminated other countries from your list? What were those countries?

For this objective, respondents were asked about what they considered to be the most critical factors for them when choosing their study abroad destination. For this question, every student seemed to have their own concerns and critical factors. Each student expressed unique factors that they considered to be paramount for them including things like the quality of the university that they would be studying at, the location of the campus, general expenses, and the culture of students on the campus that they would be interacting with. However, the one factor that did come up frequently for this question was language. Students stating:

*"Really, I think the only thing was the idea of being not fluent" – Respondent 7*

*"I was extremely conscious of the language barriers. I wanted to be able to understand what I was being taught. The language piece made it easy to narrow down destinations because the only languages I speak are English and French." – Respondent 5*

*"Language barrier. I go to a predominantly international school, but I don't take any languages. [In Scotland,] it is English, but it has its own culture and flavor and getting to learn words is awesome." – Respondent 6*

*"My biggest thing was I wanted to go somewhere where everyone spoke English. Language is not my strong suit." – Respondent 3*

These key factors mentioned by students during interviews coincides with previously established literature that placed factors like local language spoken and the language spoken in the classroom, as well as the culture of the host country at the top of the list of critical factors that students considered (Bodycott, 2009). In total, 9 out of the 10 students who were interviewed highlighted language as a key decision-making factor in one way or another, with 7 out of those 9 saying that they were highly concerned with studying in a country that specifically spoke English and that that was one of the draws that brought them to Scotland to study. This suggests that one of the key factors on the pull side of the aforementioned push-pull model for students to attend university in Scotland is the fact that they are a natively English-speaking country (Zheng, 2014). This is an important concept that could prove to be very helpful for Scotland in the future with their marketing efforts of their universities and their programs. Especially important to note because of all the students who are interviewed many of them spoke more than one language or English was not their first language, so learning in an English-speaking environment is clearly attractive to students of many different language backgrounds and not just students whose first and only language is English. One student even going so far as to say:

"*So, in my opinion, the perfect study abroad location is the place where they speak the language you want to improve [or] learn." – Respondent 8*

One interesting contradiction to the literature that was found within the interviews was that according to Bodycott (2009), friends and relatives studying in an area is an important factor in the decision-making process of a study abroad student. But what was determined by speaking to the respondents in this study was that some students will actively seek out destinations that are more "off the grid" and that are places that none of their friends and relatives have studied. Students stating:

*"I did not what to go somewhere too many students from my University went. Indeed, I did not want to go on an exchange to be around Montrealers all the time." – Respondent 9*

*"I didn't want to pick England or Ireland because those are places I felt I would have a reason to go to someday, and a lot of people from my school went there. I wanted something totally different…" – Respondent 3*

It is an important difference to make note of – that some students will actively choose a location based on where they know other students and friends *have not* gone. There will always be those students that seek a unique and different experience from the people around them and that will choose the road less traveled, and in this case, the study abroad country less visited.

A complete list of the central factors, both specific to Scotland and not, that were mentioned throughout the interviews were:

- Program and course offerings
- Language and understanding the accents
- Rich, multicultural, immersive culture and history
- The ability to expand worldview and be challenged
- City – how metropolitan, size, and walkability
- Family heritage
- Helpfulness and welcoming nature of the university
- The weather and darkness
- The prestige of the university
- Facilities for international students – including accommodation
- Workload and teaching style
- Cost – tuition, general living, and travel
- Number of study abroad students already there
- Friendliness of the people
- Ability to travel around the destination and to others near
- Safety
- Campus culture and location

**4.3 | Research Objective 2:**

*To explore what students look for in their "ideal" study abroad destination.*

When dealing with this objective, respondents were asked directly to describe their "perfect" study abroad destination. When answering this question, students had a wide variety of answers suggesting that despite the fact that the question was asked exactly the same way to each and every student, they all comprehended and conceptualized the definition of "perfect" and their idea of a perfect study abroad destination completely differently. One student further demonstrated this within his answer stating:

*"I don't know, it is whatever suits the person's interest." – Respondent 7*

Some of the other responses to this question were as follows:

*"The perfect study abroad location would be somewhere that has a rich and unique culture that could fulfill my academic needs and expand my worldview." – Respondent 5*

*"A large metropolitan city that was young and had history, one with a culture different from that in the U.S. and one where I could interact with the local people." – Respondent 2*

*"Walkable city, nice weather, nice people, cute accents, lots to see and travel too. Ideally, I like to see cool different bodies of water." – Respondent 3*

All three of these responses touched on completely different aspects of the study abroad experience. Two students who did mention similar themes spoke about their desire for a diversity within the student population:

*"For me, would be somewhere where there is a lot of diversity – if I could have anywhere, it wouldn't have Scotland regardless of the beauty because it isn't very diverse." – Respondent 6*

*"A place where there are a lot of young adults. A place full of culture and traditions. Somewhere with great food and drinks. Somewhere with a diverse group of people, if not by race or ethnicity then by style and perspective. Somewhere that has a night life as well as a quiet day life." – Respondent 4*

While all different, every one of these responses discusses something relating to the concept of difference. Whether it be in culture, perspective, or in diversity of people – all of these students spoke in some way about going abroad and desiring to experience a different environment than one that they might have otherwise been used to or experience new and different perspectives between people and experiences while in the country. Desiring new and different cultures and perspectives is not a new concept within the world of destination marketing or study abroad marketing, for that matter. But, it is an important concept that should be well understood and can obviously be emphasized greatly for all study abroad destinations. This can be an important for destinations who are targeting a specific demographic to their schools and programs – focus their marketing efforts on the aspects of the country's culture, campuses, and people which are different and unique.

Also, this specific focus on diversity is not a factor that was often mentioned within the literature, which could suggest that perhaps this is a desire that is new to the world of studying abroad. Perhaps as today's students become increasingly aware of how much diversity and difference exists around the world, the students who are used to communities that share many things in common are developing a desire to step out of their comfort zone

more and experience people and cultures that are totally different to their own. Again, suggesting that since Scotland is a country so rich with its own historic and unique culture, it could focus on highlighting the cultural differences that it has to international students. Especially considering that Scotland, as far as races and ethnicities go, is not one of the more traditionally diverse countries in Europe. As well, because more than once it was mentioned in an interview that the differences between England and Scotland are often lesser-known. With one student stating:

*"I knew very little about Scotland before arriving, mostly just assumed it was an extension of England and that it would be substantially the same." – Respondent 2*

And another explaining:

"*Since I was not aware of the differences between Scotland and England, I mainly associated my future experience in Scotland as my previous one in Canterbury [England]." – Respondent 8*

This demonstrating that if Scotland wants to create a name for itself as an international student hub in the future, one thing it needs to do is better is differentiate itself from its fellow United Kingdom members.

**4.4 | Research Objective 3:**

*To explore what factors attract students to, or prompt students to choose, Scotland, as their study abroad destination.*

To help gather information for this objective, students were asked two different questions about Scotland specifically:

- What information did you gain about Scotland during your research process/what information did you learn about Scotland after making your decision, but before you arrived in the country that made you feel like Scotland was a good choice for you?
- What factors did Scotland possess that you found attractive as a study abroad location?

For this objective, it was important to determine what factors drew students to Scotland as a destination that were specific only to Scotland, rather than things like the language preference which can fulfilled by studying at a variety of other substitute countries. The responses to these two questions were also extremely varied.

The first Scotland-specific aspect of note is that more than one student mentioned is having either extended family still living in the country or mentioned having ancestral ties to

Scotland and that that was an attractive factor for them. One respondent even speaking briefly about his ancestral ties to a specific highland clan and of his desire to go and visit the places where his family is from. Others stating:

*"I have heritage here." – Respondent 7*

*"Extended family [is a factor]…" – Respondent 9*

This is important because according to Visit Scotland's 2013 report, over 200,000 trips are made to Scotland every year to retrace ancestral footsteps (Visit Scotland, 2013). And since study abroad students are just as much tourists as they are students, it makes sense that many of them would be attracted to a location because they want to learn more about their family and its history. This could be a demographic of study abroad students that Scotland could has real success with since 3 out of the 10 students interviewed mentioned this being a pull factor for them. Future research should be done to determine just how many students come to study in Scotland every year because of ancestral ties. Determining a high attendance in study abroad programs because of ancestral ties could be a key pull factor for Scotland worth advertising, and creating study abroad programs around, to attract Americans, Common Wealth students and other students from various countries across the globe. Overall, this finding of ancestral ties being important for students mimics those found by Nyaupane, Paris and Teye, who determined that family heritage was one of the key pull factors for students when choosing a study abroad location, (2011).

The next Scotland specific pull factor that was mentioned repeatedly throughout the interviews is academics. These responses can be split into two different categories; being attracted to the old, historic, and highly-ranked universities, and being drawn to a specific study abroad program or program of study. The responses relating to Scotland's academics were:

*"Um, what decided Scotland for me was the fact that I was able to do the Parliamentary Program here and in South Africa I was not." – Respondent 1*

*"Really old University…" – Respondent 9*

*"I applied for this Scottish [Parliamentary] program – this was a pretty specific thing." – Respondent 7*

*"[Number] 1, prestigious university… I was told by my professors and other researchers from my home university that my choice was a good one since they knew that the University of Glasgow was really prestigious and well-known, especially in my field…" – Respondent 8*

*"The universities are highly rated; they're so old and they're really appealing." –*

*Respondent 10*

*"Some critical factors that I was concerned with in a study abroad destination were the type of classes and students I will be surrounded by. I wanted something challenging that would push me not only as an artist but as a person in whole to another level. Another was also the type of school, I wanted an actual art school and not just a regular private institution with art classes." – Respondent 4*

Factually, Scotland has some of the oldest and most prestigious universities in the Western world. It is no surprise that students would be attracted to studying in universities of this caliber. These findings resemble those of Bodycott (2009) and Hung, Chung, and Ho (2000) who all determined, in some form, that awareness and prestige of the host country's universities and the range of programs offered were both important factors that students consider when choosing a destination to go abroad. This giving Scotland a clear key selling-point for its abroad programs that other countries will most likely not be able to compete with.

The final responses that were gathered about specifically Scotland as a study abroad destination were things relating to its history, culture, and people. It was often mentioned that students found learning about Scotland's culture or interacting with its friendly and helpful locals was an attractive selling point for prospective study abroad students.

**4.5 | Research Objective 4:**

*To identify what prior information the students had about Scotland before they came that helped persuade them to study in Scotland.*

Research objective four focuses on the prior information that students had before they chose to study abroad in Scotland. This information is important because prior knowledge of a destination gives further insight into the important factors and decision-making process that students go through when choosing a study abroad destination. It is also important to understand prior knowledge of a destination because it is helpful to know what information is being passed on to potential study abroad students through the many means of information passing like media and word of mouth and if that information is positive, negative and what kind of effect it might have on a student's perception of the country and whether or not it seems like a desirable place to study.

Interestingly, around half of respondents either stated that they knew very little to nothing about Scotland before they applied or arrived or they had misconceptions of the country. One student stated that he based all of his prior knowledge of Scotland off of his experiences in England and Ireland – explain that he was unaware of any of the cultural

differences between the three nations. Four others explaining:

*"Honestly, I knew almost nothing… I wanted something totally different, somewhere I did not know a lot about. So, I randomly thought of Scotland." – Respondent 3*

*"I knew very little about Scotland before arriving, mostly just assumed it was an extension of England and that it would be substantially the same. As for Edinburgh, I knew it was part of the English Enlightenment but other than that, again, nothing in particular." – Respondent 2*

*"I knew nothing about Scotland, absolutely nothing. My only resource in learning about Scotland at the time was the google search engine, and it was mainly through images." – Respondent 4*

*"I really didn't think anything of it… and you don't really hear about Scotland in the media… I knew it was a part of the UK, though." – Respondent 6*

While many of the respondents stated that they did not have much prior knowledge about Scotland before they arrived, some of the students mentioned having at least some information about the country before they arrived including information on the culture and heritage that they had gathered from previous research they had conducted on the location, associations that they had made when they visited the rest of the U.K. or Scotland specifically, or simply just being aware of many of the Country's more stereotypical identifiers that can be seen in places like Google Images – like the coble streets of Edinburgh or the rainy weather. One respondent explaining her only prior knowledge of Scotland was purely based on stereotypes, continuing:

*"I suppose it was a lot of the stereotypes, kilts and alcohol, they're known to be a bit gruffy and not the most welcoming bunch, so those are my expectations. – Respondent 10*

This general lack of information about Scotland poses an issue for the country if it should wish to continue to grow its numbers of study abroad students in coming years. Not many students are daring enough to throw a dart at a map and pack their bags for whatever destination they land on. Since choosing a study abroad location is one of the most complicated decisions a student will make during their undergraduate career, having all the information on a destination is critical. This poses an important note for Scotland as a nation that it might potentially need to improve its ability to get the message out to potential students about the what Scotland is and what unique things it can offer the potential study abroad students during their time abroad.

**4.6 | Research Objective 5:**

*To identify what prior information students had that might have dissuaded them or might have negatively influenced their decision to study in Scotland.*

When researching this objective, two specific questions were asked to the respondents:

- What information did you gain in your research that you felt was cause for concern before you arrived?
- What factors did Scotland possess that might have dissuaded you from choosing Scotland as your study abroad location?

First off, it is worth mentioning that a few of the students revealed that even after they did further research on Scotland, no causes for concern or red alarms came up for them, meaning that not all students have fears going into studying abroad and that for some students, Scotland is doing a suitable job branding themselves as an "ideal" study abroad location. However, for those students who did voice concerns, only 5 major concerns were mentioned during any of the interviews, two of which were cost and the structure of the classes and teaching techniques used at Scottish universities. This matches up with previous research which suggested that cost and class structure would be two highly considered factors for study abroad students (Nyaupane, Paris & Teye, 2011) and (Hung, Chung, and Ho, 2000) and (Nicolau, 2011).

Another factor that to one student was cause for alarm was the current political situation in Scotland and the uncertainty that comes with issues like the current debate around Scottish independence and the United Kingdom leaving the EU. Since this situation is very specific to Scotland to the time presently, it would not have shown up in the literature. However, it would be interesting to see further research relating to how situations like these affect study abroad participation in countries like Scotland and research should potentially be done after the final decisions on these two topics have been made to see what, if any, effect they had on Scotland.

Next, the second most common answer was relating to safety. Whether it was specific to the city that the student would be studying in, or just general safety concerns relating to terrorism and other dangers that come with traveling in today's world. The respondents explained:

*"I learned that Glasgow was a not-so-safe city at night, with lots of crimes happening, and that I shouldn't walk alone after dark, especially in parks. That made me*

*question my safety for when I would want to go out to bars or clubs, or if I would come back late from the gym, or the library." – Respondent 9*

*"Might not be completely Scotland related, but all the terrorist attacks…" – Respondent 6*

***"****I was slightly concerned about the reputation Glasgow has as being a "dangerous" city." – Respondent 5*

This agrees with Hung, Chung, and Ho (2000) who explained that environmental considerations including climate and crime were important factors when considering study abroad destinations. It is widely accepted the crime and safety are key factors for people considering general travel, as well. This is important for Scotland and in this case for Glasgow and Glasgow's universities to understand and perhaps consider. If Glasgow has a reputation of being a less-than-safe destination, its international education numbers could suffer and that valuable revenue and cultural benefit would be lost.

Finally, the most common answer received by a large margin (7 out of 10 respondents) was relating to Scotland's distinctively cold, wet, and – depending on the season – often dark climate. Students explaining:

*"In almost every photo I saw of Scotland, it looked rainy and gloomy. There were a few photos of the sun shining but only a few. This "research" gave me a cause for concern, as insignificant as it may seem." – Respondent 4*

*"I would say the rainy and cold weather (compared to weather that I was used to) and everything it implies such as, for instance, difficulty in having outdoor activities." – Respondent 8*

*"Probably the weather, it's cold and dark." – Respondent 7*

*"Had I known how cloudy it was… I need my vitamin D" – Respondent 1*

*"The weather was obviously not ideal…" – Respondent 2*

*"I did hear that in winter in Scotland days are really short in terms of sunlight, but luckily the worst was behind them when I got there. Also, it's funny, but I was worried about snow on cobblestones. I tend to slip on black ice, which is not fun... I was a little bummed I was not heading towards warm weather and beaches." – Respondent 3*

Even one student who claims to be familiar with similar weather at their home university was disappointed in the prospect of spending her time abroad in Scotland's infamous climate. Expressing:

*"The weather in Scotland is similar to the weather at my home university. I was hoping to escape some of the rain." – Respondent 5*

Clearly, Scotland cannot change its weather to motivate tourists and study abroad students, but it is important for the country and its universities to understand as an issue and to be up front and honest about with prospective students, so as to keep disappointment to a minimum. Students who are best prepared for the weather and who are made aware of the weather earlier on in their process can plan accordingly and make the most of their time abroad despite their less-than-perfect climate. While climate is a key factor for study abroad students' consideration, it obviously is not a deal-breaker for every student as the 7 students interviewed can attest to.

### 4.7 | Chapter Summary

In general, Scotland as a study abroad destination has a lot to offer students. This study gained some valuable insights into some of the pull factors that attract students to Scotland and some of the factors that could potentially be dissuading students from studying in its universities. Much of the information that was gathered in this study overlaps with information that has been gathered in the past about the different factors that students consider important – cost, safety, language barrier, academics, and university prestige. However, some information contradicted what has been previously found in the literature, such as not always do students consider where their friends are studying abroad and rather they consider locations which are lesser-known and where they can have an experience that is completely unique to that of anyone they might know. Additionally, some information gathered brought unique insights for Scotland to use to its advantage when marketing to and attempting to recruit potential international students, like the fact that Glasgow has a less-than-ideal reputation in the eyes of potential study abroad students, or that the number one thing that has the potential to put students off studying in Scotland is their perception of the weather. All of this information that has been gathered through these interviews, while not completely generalizable to a larger audience, is valuable and provides interesting insights that, in some cases, should be explored further in future studies.

## 5 | Conclusions & Recommendations

### 5.1 | Introduction

This chapter outlines the final conclusions for each objective as well as provides any further recommendations for study abroad program creators and Scotland's tourism boards. Additionally, this chapter gives recommendations as to any further research on this topic that could prove to be useful and beneficial.

### 5.2 | Conclusions & Recommendations

The first research objective set out to gain a better understanding as to what factors

were most critical and most considered for students when they are making their choice as to what study abroad destination is right for them. Many different factors were mentioned throughout the courses of the interviews, further proving that this particular decision-making process is not one that comes easy for most students. Many factors already exist within study abroad literature including cost, safety, and university prestige. Interestingly, this study adds to the literature because it discovered that some students go against the grain and have a desire to choose a study abroad destination that is less-known and less-traveled-to, especially by friends and other students at their university. Further research could be done to see just how common this trend is and to determine ways that this idea of using the road less-traveled-by could benefit both study abroad destinations and general travel destinations alike. Travel destinations are already able to use information like this to their advantage and capitalize on the idea of being the lesser-known locations for those people who seek a unique experience. If done correctly, study abroad locations could be adapted to do the same thing – perhaps at lesser-known universities around the country or in more rural and different locations.

Finally, it was noted for this objective that the idea of language – and specifically for Scotland the fact that its English speaking – was a critical factor for nearly every student who was interviewed. Scotland and its universities could use this information to create programming and the sequential marketing efforts for that programming based around the English language aspect, such as language-intensive courses for non-native speakers, and even base programming around the Scots dialect for the more daring student who is interested in the stepping a bit further out of their comfort zone. Either way, it is important for Scotland and its universities to remember that its English-taught classes and English-speaking population is a real draw for international students and that should be treated as paramount.

In relation to the second research objective, students were interviewed to determine what is considered to be a "perfect" study abroad location. Nearly every student mentioned the aspect of difference in some way. Different culture, different people, different perspectives, making it clear that students are attracted to a destination when studying abroad because it appears to be different and unique in comparison to what they are used to at home. For Scotland, this is great news because Scotland, like many countries, has a rich and unique history and culture. While it might not be the most diverse in terms of ethnicities and languages, it is arguably one of the more diverse countries in terms of traditions and customs and that can be a major selling point for it and its programs.

One important recommendation for Scotland and its destination marketers to take note of is that it was discovered that some students do still struggle to separate Scotland from the rest of the United Kingdom and that could pose issues in the future when you take into account Scotland's current political climate. If Scotland should want to continue to attract study abroad students from around the world because of its unique offerings, it might be important to determine ways to separate itself from the rest of the United Kingdom and focus more on what makes it different than its neighbors.

The third research object related to gathering information about what made Scotland specifically attractive to students for study abroad purposes. As previously stated, its unique culture and history was attractive to students and so was its English-speaking culture, but the two most common responses within the interviews were the programming and courses offered at the universities and the prestige of the ancient and historic universities and the fact that a few students have ancestral ties back to the country. Using the ancient universities and their wide array of programming to its advantage, Scotland has a clear selling point to students. But, one area of potentially un-tapped study abroad student recruitment could be through ancestral means, similar to the way that Scotland recruits its general tourists. Future research should be done to determine the significance of students attending schools in Scotland because of family heritage. If it is determined that family heritage is a key pull factor for Scotland, then that would create a whole market of commonwealth and other international students to market to and recruit. Programs could be designed around finding their heritage – combining lessons in history, archeology, and literature, and giving students the opportunity to visit places that their families used to call home on excursions and day trips.

Research objective 4 involved determining what prior information students had about Scotland before they decided to study abroad there. A high number of the respondents mentioned have little to zero knowledge about the country before they came, which generally contradicts the idea that this decision is one that is usually not taken lightly by students. This shows that not all students consider studying abroad to be a high-involvement decision and shows that it might also be important to determine why these students chose to choose a destination that they had little knowledge about. Did they actively avoid doing research or were they just unaware of Scotland and its offerings specifically? One student mentioned only knowing the stereotypes about Scotland and this could lead to the notion that Scotland needs to do more to promote itself to study abroad students in a way that is not stereotypical and more factual. Further research should be done to determine the nature of these students

who knew little about their destination before going to determine if this is a common occurrence.

The final objective was centered around determining if there were any factors relating to Scotland that might have dissuaded students from choosing it as their study abroad destination. One student made mention of the political uneasiness within the country at the moment. As previously mentioned, further research could be done to determine the effects that events and debates like Scottish Independence and Brexit have on the participation of study abroad in other countries and specifically in Scotland.

The two most common responses were safety and the weather. In relation to safety, it is important to note that two students who studied in the city of Glasgow mentioned their apprehensions about Glasgow being a "dangerous" city. This is noteworthy because it is apparent that Glasgow still has some work to do to overcome its safety stigma and it should continue to try and focus its future efforts on breaking down the danger stigma for students in order to prevent students from shying away from the location. As for the weather issue, 7 out of the 10 respondents mentioned in some form the dark, wet, and cold weather. Clearly Scotland can do nothing about changing the weather for students, however being as honest as possible to potential students about the weather is its best option. Since all 7 of these students still ended up attending programs in the country, it is apparent that the weather is not enough of an incentive to not come, but preparing the students as best as possible for what to expect will allow them to plan accordingly. This will help program organizers and the universities feel the least amount of blowback by helping to eliminate overall dissatisfaction from students who feel highly dissatisfied about the weather.

All in all, many important insights were gathered throughout the course of these interviews. Scotland and its tourism marketers, universities, and program coordinators can use this information to continue studying the thoughts and opinions of students who intend on, and who complete study abroad programs in the country, so they can continue to provide world-class, unique, and enriching programs for the highly sought-after market of study abroad students.

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## 7 | Appendices

### I | Interview Transcription

Interviewer: “Alright, so. First Question: What locations were you initially considering when you decided to go abroad for your education and can you talk to me about your process of narrowing them down?”

Respondent 1: “I was thinking of Scotland, South Africa, maybe London – or England, of course. Um, what decided Scotland for me was the fact that I was able to do the Parliamentary Program here and in South Africa I was not and it’s also considered to be a much more dangerous country. So, I knew I wanted to go somewhere that was English-speaking just simply because of the fact that I knew it was going to be what I needed in order to – I wasn’t studying another language, so, I figured that it would be the best.”

Interviewer: “Okay, great! What countries did you end up applying to and was Scotland your first choice of destination? If not, what was?”

Respondent 1: “Yes, Scotland was my first and only choice.”

Interviewer: “Great! Um, Describe your idea of a “perfect” study abroad location?”

Respondent 1: “Um, I would say somewhere where I have enough money to get by. I would say somewhere that is filled with things to do. Um, accessibility to other locations around the country is another thing. Um, and I would definitely say the academics are challenging, but not overly consuming.

Interviewer: “Okay, awesome. Next question: what were some of the critical factors that you were concerned with in a study abroad destination? And what factors did you consider that eliminated other countries from your list? What were those countries? You already sort of talked about it a little bit, but…”

Respondent 1: “Expense. That’s pretty much it.”

Interviewer: “Okay, can you tell me – any of the countries you were considering, did expense really take them off the table for you?”

Respondent 1: “No.”

Interviewer: “Okay, can you talk to me about what you knew about Scotland or what perceptions you had about Scotland or about Edinburgh chose to study in before you made your choice to study here?”

Respondent 1: “I mean, I had studied the history of the country quite a bit. And I had a general familiarity with the culture and the history. Of course, it’s not something that I would have – of course my knowledge has been extended greatly by actually

visiting here, but I had a general basis – it wasn't just a shot in the dark for me."
Interviewer: "Okay, cool! What information did you gain about Scotland during your research process and what information did you learn about Scotland after making your decision, but before you arrived that made you feel like Scotland was a good choice.
Respondent 1: "I would definitely say the accessibility to all of the really important aspects of Scottish society. Edinburgh is a city I didn't know too much about. But after I decided to go I started to read up a bit more everything that the city had and its history, and I definitely think I learned a lot of history from doing that."
Interviewer: "Okay, and what information did you gain in your research that you felt was cause for concern before you arrived?"
Respondent 1: "Nothing."
Interviewer: "Great! **Both laugh** Awesome, okay…"
Interviewer: "What factors did Scotland possess that you found attractive as a study abroad location?"
Respondent 1: "Oh God, like I said beforehand, the history if the place, um, the small capital city – the nature of Edinburgh as that, um, I mean that's pretty much it."
Interviewer: "Okay, what factors did Scotland possess that might have dissuaded you from choosing Scotland?"
Respondent 1: "Had I known how cloudy it was. I need my vitamin D. "*Respondent laughs**
Interviewer: "Great! Okay, and then what is your nationality?"
Respondent 1: "U.S.A."
Interviewer: "What program are/were you on?"
Respondent 1: "Scottish Parliamentary"
Interviewer: "What Scottish University are you studying at and in what city?"
Respondent 1: "Edinburgh Uni, Edinburgh"
Interviewer: "What are you studying specifically?"
Respondent 1: "Government. That's what they call it here. It's political science in the U.S., but here they consider it government."
Interviewer: "Okay, and what are you studying at your home university?"
Respondent 1: "Political Science and Economics."
Interviewer: Okay, what is your home university and what year are you in?
Respondent 1: "RWU, incoming Senior."

Interviewer: “What is your age and… yeah, what is your age?”

Respondent 1: “21!”

Interviewer: “Oh, that’s right! Happy birthday!” **Both Laugh**

Interviewer: “What is your gender?”

Respondent 1: “Male”

Interviewer: “Thank you very much for helping me with these questions. I really appreciate you taking the time to sit down and have a chat with me. Do you have anything further you would like to add?”

Respondent 1: “No.”

Interviewer: “That’s it, thank you!”

**II | Table 1 – Research Objectives & Corresponding Interview Questions**

Table 1

| Research Objective | Corresponding Interview Question |
|---|---|
| **1** To explore when choosing a study abroad destination, what elements about the different locations were most important to the students. | • What were some of the critical factors that you were concerned with in a study abroad destination? And what factors did you consider that eliminated other countries from your list? What were those countries? |
| **2** To explore what students look for in their “ideal” study abroad destination. | • Describe your idea of an “perfect” study abroad location? |
| **3** To explore what factors attract students to, or prompt students to choose, Scotland, as their study abroad destination. | • What information did you gain about Scotland during your research process/what information did you learn about Scotland after making your decision, but before you arrived in the country that made you feel like Scotland was a good choice for you.<br>• What factors did Scotland possess that you found attractive as a study abroad location? |
| **4** To identify what prior information the students had about Scotland before they came that helped persuade them to study in Scotland. | • Can you talk to me about what you knew about Scotland and/or what perceptions you had about Scotland and |

| | |
|---|---|
| | the city you chose to study in before you made your choice to study in Scotland? |
| **5** To identify what prior information students had that might have dissuaded them or might have negatively influenced their decision to study in Scotland. | • What information did you gain in your research that you felt was cause for concern before you arrived?<br>• What factors did Scotland possess that might have dissuaded you from choosing Scotland as your study abroad location? |
| Questions not directly relating to a research question<br>**6** Questions to gain further understanding and context | • What locations were you initially considering when you decided to go abroad for your education and can you talk to me about your process of narrowing them down?<br>• What countries did you end up applying to and was Scotland your first choice of destination? If not, what was? |
| **7** Demographic questions | • What is your nationality?<br>• What program are/were you on?<br>• What Scottish University are/were you studying at/what city are/were you studying in?<br>• What are/were you studying at your home university and here in Scotland?<br>• What is your home university and what year are you in/were you in?<br>• What is your age/what was your age at the time of your study abroad experience?<br>• What is your gender? |