

An Investigation of Factors Associated With Student Participation in Study Abroad

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International student exchange programs are widely promoted in higher education as a means of developing desirable intercultural skills and understanding among students. This multimethod study employed data from student surveys, tertiary institution case studies, and interviews with key stakeholders to identify factors that inhibited or promoted the uptake of international exchange programs among New Zealand students. These factors include the development of early understanding of the benefits of studying abroad; ongoing support to students; social, cultural, and linguistic capabilities; and how effectively overseas study was integrated into student degree programs. Implications of these findings for exchange programs in general are discussed in the context of future strategic development of expanded, more diverse opportunities for study overseas.

Keywords: *study abroad; internationalization; globalization; higher education; student exchange; student mobility; education policy; Bologna*

As economic and social life becomes more globally connected and challenging, there is increased need to develop societies with the capacity to connect, engage, and prosper internationally (Daly & Barker, 2005; Desai-Trilokekar &

Shubert, 2005; DEST [Department of Education, Science and Training], 2004a; NAFSA, 2003). Countries around the world are forming connections and agreements to grow trade; facilitate the mobility of people, goods, and services; and address environmental challenges. Events such as 9/11, strife, and famines, along with the growing economic importance of China, India, and other Asian countries accentuate the need for citizens with the skills, knowledge, and understanding to engage meaningfully in international contexts (Dodds, 2008; Doyle et al., 2008; Fitzgerald, Jeffrey, Maclean, & Morris-Suzuki, 2002; Levin & Lorimer, 2005; NAFSA 2003; Shubert, 2004; Smith, 2005). Historically, New Zealand has relied on its ties with Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Similarly, European countries have focused on ties with other European and English-speaking nations rather than with Asia, South America, Africa, and the Middle East. But there is growing recognition that, to take their place in a global economy, countries must increase their engagement with the peoples and economies of other parts of the world.

In response, New Zealand universities and other tertiary institutions have implemented various initiatives to promote the skills, knowledge, and intercultural understandings for international engagement. Consistent with trends in higher education, student exchange agreements with overseas universities have been a major component of institutions' internationalization strategies (Doyle et al., 2008; NAFSA, 2009). The New Zealand government has specifically encouraged the building of educational partnerships through undergraduate study awards that support student exchanges with Asian, Central, and South American countries such as China, India, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Chile, Brazil, and Mexico. However, students continue to favor traditional English-speaking destinations such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Furthermore, the participation rate of undergraduate students in student exchanges remains low, with a persistent imbalance between outbound and inbound students. In 2004, for example, New Zealand had only 281 outbound students in comparison to 903 inbound students; the inbound exchange students came from 280 overseas institutions, whereas outbound students went to 184 overseas institutions (McInnis, Peacock, Catherwood, & Brown, 2006). This pattern of involvement by New Zealand students in overseas exchanges is a concern to both the New Zealand government and tertiary education institutions and is exacerbated by the thin spread of exchanges across diverse destinations.

The present research was designed to investigate factors influencing student participation in exchanges. A multimethod approach was used with data triangulation across policy documents and surveys of students, faculty, and key tertiary institution

Authors' Note: This research was supported by a research contract from the New Zealand Ministry of Education. However, the opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors, and no official endorsement should be inferred. Please address correspondence to Stephanie Doyle, Jessie Hetherington Centre for Educational Research, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand; e-mail: stephanie.doyle@vuw.ac.nz.

decision makers. More specifically, the study examined how various stakeholders viewed existing program opportunities, which factors they thought inhibited or facilitated participation in study abroad, and how existing opportunities for undergraduates could be modified and made more attractive.

Background

Exchange partnerships between universities enable students to study overseas as part of their degree program without increasing their undergraduate tuition fees. Typically, students study abroad on exchange for either one semester or for a full year. Internationally, the largest and most significant exchange program is the ERASMUS (European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) program funded by the European Commission (NAFSA, 2003). The emphasis on student exchanges as part of the development of international relations is evidenced by the G8 countries' commitment to double student mobility from 2000 to 2010, the U.S. plan to increase participation in study abroad and student exchanges by 500% from 2008 to 2018, and the European Commission's target for ERASMUS participation of 10% by 2012 (Bell & Watkins, 2006; NAFSA, 2009; Szarka, 2003).

European countries have been in the forefront of developing a strategy and a specific framework to increase student mobility through the Bologna Process, with 50 countries committed to the actualization of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 2010. Bologna aims to systematically remove barriers to student mobility, using mechanisms such as the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and transparency in qualifications (The Diploma Supplement). The SOCRATES–ERASMUS scheme for student exchanges is visible on campuses throughout Europe and is the major vehicle for exchanges. Bologna, the EHEA, and ERASMUS have served as beacons for the internationalization of higher education while galvanizing other regions into examining their own arrangements. Australia, for example, is currently in the process of examining how its university system could fit within the Bologna Process to align with European universities (Healy, 2008).

Many English-speaking countries including the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia share with New Zealand the problem of a marked imbalance between numbers of incoming and outgoing exchange students. Only 1% to 3% of students from these countries go on exchange during their undergraduate degree (DEST, 2004b; Marcum, 2001; McInnis et al., 2006; NAFSA, 2003). This contrasts with a figure of between 6% and 7% of the eligible student population that participates in ERASMUS exchanges. Like their counterparts in the United States, mobile students are more likely to be White, young, female, from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, and to have been abroad previously (Bell & Watkins, 2006; Sussex Centre, 2004). The U.K. students are more likely to have come from one of Britain's pre-1992 research universities that offer strong language programs. It would appear

that student participation in study abroad programs has been somewhat restricted and participants have not been representative of the undergraduate population.

Research on Obstacles to Student Study Abroad

Several studies have identified challenges affecting participation in study abroad and student exchange programs, including an Australian review of policies across 12 industrial countries (DEST, 2004b), a survey of 15,000 students participating in ERASMUS (Otero & McCoshan, 2006), and a comprehensive study involving data from 80 higher education institutions in the United Kingdom (Sussex Centre, 2004). Finance is the most commonly identified barrier cited in these studies, but other obstacles include the lack of a comprehensive, integrated institutional approach to internationalization by universities. Specific issues mentioned also include the following:

- Study abroad being available only as an “add-on” rather than as part of the student’s undergraduate degree, thus extending the time required to complete a degree;
- Inflexible and over-full curricula so there is no “space” in the undergraduate program for coursework opportunities overseas;
- Lack of incentives for academic faculty to promote and support study abroad;
- Failure to make opportunities available for nontraditional students to study overseas;
- Students having narrow views on potential destinations;
- Students’ lack of foreign language skills restricting opportunities to other universities or countries where English is the primary language;
- Institutional prioritization of the recruitment of inbound foreign students over outbound exchange study programs, often based on the income generated by international students.

The European Commission report on obstacles to transnational mobility for teachers, students, and workers identified linguistic and cultural factors as the major obstacles to mobility, with the inability to speak a foreign language being the chief hindrance (Commission of the European Communities, 1996). Subsequently, a European cross-national report identified language, finance, and issues of recognition and admission as the three major barriers to student mobility (ADMIT Project Team, 2002).

Students from English-speaking countries have been privileged and even cocooned when they speak a first language that is lingua franca in many contexts (business, the Internet, aviation, and so on). This reality has seduced many into thinking there is no need to foster foreign language proficiency (Group of Eight, 2007; Szarka, 2003). Australia’s leading universities have warned that monolingualism and the demise of foreign language learning is putting Australia at risk educationally, economically, and security-wise (Group of Eight, 2007). Interestingly, though the proportion of students studying foreign languages is declining in Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, foreign language study is required by most major U.S. universities, and competency in a foreign language is a characteristic

of ERASMUS students (Findlay, King, Stam, & Ruiz-Gellices, 2006; Group of Eight, 2007; Szarka, 2003). In Europe, for example, a survey of 2004/2005 ERASMUS students found that 97% spoke at least two languages, with 75% having some competence in three or more languages, and 31% speaking four or more (Otero & McCoshan, 2006). The ability to communicate in other languages creates the potential for engagement, enhances knowledge and understanding of others, and may be critical to facilitating expanded use of exchange opportunities (Brustein, 2007; Döring et al., in press).

Initiatives to Promote and Support Study Abroad

In the United States, a number of significant national and institutional initiatives have been launched to address obstacles to study abroad and to grow participation (Childress, in press; Engberg & Green, 2002; Levin & Lorimer, 2005). These initiatives include setting bold national and institutional targets (e.g., the 500% increase in study abroad participation), funding incentives, collaborative partnerships with other countries, and institution-wide frameworks and strategies (Institute of International Education, 2007; Marcum, 2001; Skocpol, 2008). Curricula are also being reformed to create space for expanded exchanges, including changes in professional and other disciplinary programs such as teaching, nursing, science, and mathematics, fields that have not historically shown high levels of study abroad participation at undergraduate level (Brustein, 2007; Harvard University, 2004). There are also growing examples of alternative models such as short-course, employment-related, and group opportunities that do not require longer time periods and/or coursework outside students' core programs (Leask, in press).

However, these initiatives are not usually empirically grounded. Instead, they are typically generated as high-level policy developments that reflect the informed opinion of program directors and government officials, which may or may not reflect students' views. U.K. evidence suggests students who have studied abroad are very satisfied with the experience and believe it enhances their personal and career development (Sussex Centre, 2004). However, less is known about the factors that militate against acceptance of international exchange opportunities. To date, the information on factors that might be responsible for existing patterns of student exchange participation has been primarily anecdotal. The current research was undertaken to address this deficiency and to provide key decision makers with data to inform future policy and program initiatives.

Method

The main objective of this research was to identify factors that assisted or deterred the development of international student exchange programs. The research

was designed to enable development of evidence-based guidelines that would promote student exchange and study abroad initiatives.

Overall Approach and Focus of the Report

The interdisciplinary research team represented expertise in educational and marketing survey research. A multimethod approach with data triangulation across sources was used, incorporating a review of the international literature, case studies of five New Zealand tertiary institutions (universities and polytechnics), focus groups with secondary school students, interviews with New Zealand outbound exchange students, an online survey of undergraduate students, and interviews with selected faculty and other staff.

The student survey and tertiary student interviews were the main sources of data on students' knowledge of, and attitudes towards, exchanges; these are the focus of this paper.¹ Ethical review and approval was gained from the researchers' universities, and permission to access students for the survey and interviews was negotiated with senior managers and gained from individual students at each of the participating institutions. Five tertiary institutions participated as case studies, and students at all but one case study university were surveyed; this university declined to participate in the student survey because it limited these

Participants

Student survey and interview participants. The survey sample was a disproportionately stratified sample of randomly selected first- and second-year undergraduate students, 400 from each of three New Zealand universities and 200 from a New Zealand polytechnic. Sample members were e-mailed an invitation to participate in the survey; this invitation included a unique identifier code and an embedded link to the survey Web site. A reminder e-mail was sent 3 weeks later. Nonrespondents were sent a hard copy of the survey, and 2 weeks later another hard copy. A slight difference in the surveyed sample from the specification occurred with some postgraduate students being included in the sample. This resulted in an actual sample size of 1,368 rather than 1,400 and an overall response rate of 42% ($n = 625$). The median age of respondents was 20, ranging from 17 to 47 years of age. Two thirds of the sample were female, with 80% identifying themselves as New Zealand European, 8% as Māori, 7% as Chinese, and 18% as Other (respondents could identify with more than one ethnic group). Almost 70% of respondents said they could not speak or write in a language other than English, with 84% of the New Zealand European students being in that category.

The secondary student focus groups comprised 8 boys in their final year at a state single-sex high school and 10 girls in one of the final 2 years at a private single-sex high school. The schools constituted a convenience sample as they were geographically

accessible to the researchers; however, participating schools had a relatively high proportion of students who had gone on to university study. The student focus group participants were high-achieving students intending to go to university and who were invited to participate in the study by their school principals; individual student consent was obtained. The 17 tertiary students who were interviewed attended one of the four institutions involved in the student survey. They were nominated by the institution's international office as either outbound or returning exchange students; again, individual consent was obtained for all participants.

Staff interview participants. In all, 23 staff across the 5 case study institutions participated in the interviews and gave individual consent. This group included the senior academic with responsibility for the tertiary institution's international portfolio and the person who coordinated each institution's student exchange program and other study abroad activities; these participants were selected based on their role. In addition, eight academic staff were interviewed from a range of disciplines including the sciences, psychology, Japanese, Spanish, communications, and journalism.

The Survey and Interview Protocols

The student survey. The survey of first- and second-year undergraduate students was designed to determine awareness and knowledge of international student exchange programs, perceptions of the benefits and obstacles to international exchanges, and reactions to different strategies designed to increase the attractiveness of international student exchanges. The survey incorporated items from the International Student Mobility Study conducted by the Sussex Centre for Migration Research (Sussex Centre, 2004), as well as other issues arising from the literature review, the focus group discussions with secondary students, and preliminary interviews with international exchange managers at the tertiary institutions.

Interviews with students and staff. Focus group interviews were conducted with secondary students to explore what they knew about study abroad, their information sources, their perceptions of the benefits of international exchanges, and their attitudes toward participating in an exchange program. Interviews were also carried out with individuals, pairs, or small groups of tertiary students who were either about to embark on an international student exchange or who had recently returned from an exchange. Students were asked about their motivations for participating in the exchange, factors they perceived as positive or negative influences on their participation, and their expectations for, and experiences of, the process; returning students were also asked about the personal and academic impact of the experience.

The case studies were developed from semistructured interviews with key senior managers who had responsibility for oversight and management of student exchange programs, student exchange program managers who administered such programs,

and academic staff who were involved in student exchanges. These interviews were conducted in person or by telephone and focused on what staff saw as facilitators or barriers to student exchanges, including government and institutional policies or practices that they perceived to be working well or requiring further development.

Results

Awareness and Knowledge of Exchange Programs

The undergraduate students surveyed reported being only vaguely aware of international exchange programs and indicated generally that they did not have the detailed knowledge required to plan an exchange as part of their undergraduate degree. Of the 78% of those who said they were aware of exchange programs, only 29% said they had ever seriously thought of going on an exchange; 55% had considered it, though not seriously; and 16% had not considered the possibility at all.

Word of mouth was cited as the most common and effective source of information about student exchanges. Those surveyed learnt about exchanges from friends or other students who had been overseas. Institutions with small exchange programs have less potential for word of mouth, which may limit their ability to grow their programs. However, the relative success of one university's exchange program suggests that word of mouth can be reinforced by effective brochures; a Web site; and the efforts of liaison officers, lecturers, and international program staff.

When asked to nominate countries that might interest them, survey respondents' choices were dominated by the traditional overseas destinations for young New Zealanders: the United States, Canada, England, Australia, and Western Europe. These predominantly English-speaking destinations are consistent with the monolingualism of New Zealand university students.

Perceived Benefits of Overseas Exchanges

Among respondents, the most important benefit from studying overseas was the exposure it would provide to a different culture and language, followed by the chance to see whether they would like to live and work overseas, being able to list a semester at an overseas university on their CV, and the prestige of attending a top overseas university (see Table 1).

Other potential benefits of overseas exchanges, such as being immersed in another language, the opportunity to study subjects not available in New Zealand, or pursuing sport or cultural interests were important to some students but generally much less so than the four main benefits described above. These conclusions are supported by the attitudes to benefits of exchange programs shown in Table 2.

Many students were unaware that exchange programs could offer opportunities to study subjects that are not available in New Zealand, a finding consistent with

Table 1
Perceived Benefits from Studying Overseas

Benefit From Studying Overseas (N = 620)	Most Important Benefit %	Three Most Important Benefits %
Exposure to a different culture or language	40	70
The chance to see if you would like to live and work overseas	21	64
Attending a prestigious overseas university	11	34
Being able to list a semester at an overseas university on your CV	11	45
The opportunity to study subjects not available in New Zealand	4	21
Opportunities to pursue sport or cultural interests	4	18
The competition of studying at a top-rated overseas university	3	14
The opportunity to study in your family's culture or language	2	8

students' general lack of knowledge about exchange program opportunities. Few students saw competing at a top-rated overseas university as a benefit; on the contrary, about 20% of respondents disagreed that they would like this idea. Only a small proportion of students saw the opportunity to study in their family's culture or language as a potential benefit of an overseas exchange, a finding that may reflect the largely monolingual status and European ethnicity of New Zealand students. Nevertheless, our findings leave open the issue of whether more students might take advantage of the opportunity to study abroad if they were given more information, support, and clarity about what was involved.

Perceived Obstacles to Overseas Exchanges

The cost of studying overseas was identified as the most important obstacle by students asked to select from a series of potential obstacles (see Table 3). Other obstacles rated as important included leaving friends and family, studying in a language other than English, and a preference for finishing an undergraduate degree before going overseas.

Other potentially important obstacles mentioned by survey participants included lack of knowledge about overseas exchanges, the possibility that their grades would not be good enough to be accepted in a program, concerns about eligibility for student loans and allowances, lack of confidence about how they would cope at an overseas university, and concerns that the length of their degree study would be

Table 2
Attitudes to Benefits of Exchange Programs

Statement	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Don't Know %
It would be good to have exposure to a different culture and language	87	8	1	4
Studying overseas would help me decide if I'd like to live and work overseas for a longer period of time	77	14	3	6
Having a semester at an overseas university would look good on my CV when I graduate	70	22	2	7
I'd like to go to a prestigious university in another country	61	30	4	5
Going overseas would be good because I would be immersed in another language	51	33	11	6
Studying overseas would provide good opportunities for me to pursue my sporting or cultural interests	43	36	13	8
An overseas university would allow me to study subjects I could not study in New Zealand	33	36	13	18
I'd like the competition of studying at a top-rated overseas university	32	43	18	7
Going overseas would allow me to study in my family's culture or language	18	33	41	9

extended. Interestingly, however, the obstacles identified by students as being important fell into two groups—those that could be overcome relatively easily and those that might prove more intractable. This is illustrated by respondents' attitudes to obstacles to exchanges, shown in Table 4.

Most respondents (63%) agreed that it would be too difficult to study in a country where the teaching was not in English. Similarly, many respondents agreed they did not know enough about study overseas (57%) or were not sure whether they would be eligible for a student loan or allowances while they were overseas (50%), obstacles that relate to lack of information about exchanges. There were also perceived psychological barriers for some students, such as whether they could leave friends and family, a lack of confidence in their ability to do well at an overseas university, concerns about the effect of an exchange on their academic performance, and preferring to finish their degree before going overseas; however, these seem unlikely to be insurmountable.

Potentially intractable obstacles included the cost of studying overseas, the difficulty of organizing a suitable overseas program, and having grades that are not sufficiently high to be accepted for study at an overseas university. For some students

Table 3
Perceived Obstacles to Studying Overseas

Obstacle to Studying Overseas (<i>N</i> = 616)	Most Important Obstacle %	Three Most Important Obstacles %
The cost of studying overseas	23	60
Leaving friends and family	17	39
Prefer to finish degree first	14	32
Studying in a language other than English	14	40
Grades not good enough for an exchange	7	20
Don't know enough about what is involved	7	24
Taking longer to finish degree	6	22
Not confident about coping at an overseas university	4	17
Inflexibility of degree	3	10
Concerns about eligibility for student loans and allowances	3	18
Difficulty of organizing a suitable overseas program	2	10
Have already moved to study and don't want to move again	<1	2
Leaving flat	<1	3
Leaving job	<1	4

at least, these concerns would appear to be serious barriers to participation in an overseas exchange. Nevertheless, measures that could facilitate overseas study, even for these students, emerge in the findings described in the next section.

Increasing the Attractiveness of Exchange Programs

From a list of 14 interventions that might make an overseas exchange more attractive, 4 main themes emerged from the items selected by respondents as most attractive (see Table 5). These were financial support, emotional support, being able to study in English, and having more information about and assistance to organize an overseas exchange program.

Finance featured prominently among students' responses; more than half the respondents selected eligibility for a scholarship as an important facilitator, and one third selected the ability to work part-time while overseas. The findings regarding cost factors are consistent with research by Guest, Livett, and Stone (2006), who reported that perceptions of cost were the single most important impediment to Melbourne University science students undertaking international exchanges. The importance of financial support and the ability to earn money while overseas were also apparent in students' perception of their family's support. Most (88%) believed their families would be supportive of an overseas exchange, but only one third reported that this support would include financial help.

Interestingly, few of the students surveyed reported that they had seriously explored student exchange opportunities, so they may not have been aware of available scholarships, eligibility for loans, and allowances to study overseas, or even the

Table 4
Attitudes to Obstacles to Exchange Programs

Statement	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Don't Know %
I would find it too difficult to study in a country where the teaching was not in English	63	17	12	9
I don't know enough about study overseas	57	25	12	7
I'm not sure if I would be eligible for a student loan or allowances while I was overseas	50	18	13	20
It would be too expensive for me, so I couldn't afford to study overseas	46	29	13	13
I'd much rather go overseas after finishing my degree than study abroad while I'm still doing my degree	37	34	22	7
I would find it difficult to leave my family	37	27	30	5
I would find it difficult to leave my boyfriend or girlfriend	29	20	43	8
Study overseas could interrupt my degree study and might affect my academic performance here	29	25	35	11
I can't afford to lose up to a year of study time for my degree here	28	29	34	10
I don't feel confident I could do well at an overseas university	28	28	34	10
It is very difficult to organize a suitable overseas program	25	30	18	27
My grades aren't good enough to be accepted for study abroad	24	28	28	20
I wouldn't want to leave my friends for study overseas	20	33	41	6
I would find it difficult to leave my flat and find another when I got back	17	23	52	9
I would find it difficult to leave my job and find another when I got back	13	21	58	8
My degree is not flexible enough to allow me to study overseas	12	18	35	35
I have already moved to study and don't want to move again	10	24	60	7

fact that fees for student exchange study overseas would be at their current domestic rates. Furthermore, when asked where they might like to go on a student exchange, students typically identified popular, expensive destinations such as the Northeastern United States or England.

The perceived lack of emotional support sits largely within a student exchange model whereby students generally go singly to overseas institutions for study rather

Table 5
Increasing the Attractiveness of Exchange Programs

Facilitators for Studying Overseas (<i>N</i> = 609)	Most Important Facilitator %	Three Most Important Facilitators %
Being eligible for a scholarship	27	53
Going overseas with a group of students	18	41
Being able to study in English	17	46
Being able to work part-time overseas	9	33
More information about the costs of overseas exchanges	7	26
Help to organize an overseas study program	4	19
Having an academic and personal mentor overseas	3	18
Reasonably priced accommodation overseas	3	17
Having a buddy in the overseas institution	3	13
Knowing potential employers value an exchange	3	13
Having support from lecturers	1	7
Hearing from students who have been on an exchange	1	8
Learning about exchanges at school	1	4
Learning about exchanges sooner after school	1	3

than as part of an organized group. References to emotional support included missing family and friends and suggest greater emphasis could be placed on programs that featured groups of students traveling together and provision of academic mentors and student buddies, with whom contact could be made prior to travel.

Findings From the Student Interviews

Tertiary students who had made the decision and were about to participate in an exchange at an overseas university were more likely than those who had not considered this possibility to indicate their interest in seeking independence and challenge. The interviews with these 17 outbound students suggested that the process of researching and developing an exchange application had deepened their awareness of the wider benefits resulting from exchanges. They identified several factors motivating their application to participate in an exchange, including the following:

- Personal growth/independence/being put outside one's comfort zone
- Learning about other cultures
- Career orientation
- Academic interest or growth/other approaches to teaching and learning
- Access to quality U.S. education for New Zealand fees
- International curriculum/international networks
- Breaking up the time of a double degree.

Although outbound students thought they would gain many benefits from participating in an overseas exchange, they felt that a high level of motivation had been

needed to overcome barriers such as a lack of information about exchanges and the costs involved. Students on the brink of departing found the experience of considering and planning their exchange personally demanding. To find the information they required, they had searched Web sites on their own to identify and compare academic requirements, curriculum, and credit weighting between their home and destination campuses; they indicated they had received little advice and support with these logistics from their home institutions. They also needed to obtain information from embassies or high commissions, as well as from travel agents, and they often had to do their own research to find out about and secure accommodation while overseas. As the search for this information was undertaken while fully engaged in coursework and, in some cases, in addition to part-time employment, it is not surprising that students found these requirements demanding.

Institutional Factors and Faculty Advice

Based on the results of the student survey and student interviews, as well as other data reviewed in this research, it would appear that there is wide variability in the sophistication of student exchange opportunities in New Zealand tertiary institutions and in the rates of participation in these opportunities. Only two of the tertiary institutions included in our case studies had well-developed policy and practices in place to oversee and manage the various processes connected to student exchanges. However, the numbers of participants at those institutions were modest and did not appear to be increasing significantly, despite their institutions' stated intentions to foster participation in exchanges. Nevertheless, all five tertiary institutions reported that they were now intensifying their focus on outbound exchanges, so future research could paint a more positive picture. All case study institutions had exchange agreements with several overseas institutions and did provide interested students with multiple options. However, the list of options was generally lengthy and unedited; consequently students may not have the information needed to direct them to the most appropriate match with their interests and capabilities.

Our review of documents and statistics at the four universities and the one polytechnic in our sample revealed low rates of participation. There also appeared to be little strategic planning or process development at an institutional level that would facilitate or motivate participation according to the factors identified in our research and the related literature. Individual students at these higher education institutions appeared to be personally responsible for organizing most aspects of the exchange process. This included finding an overseas university of interest; applying to and being accepted for study at that university; doing their own research to match overseas study with their home institution degree requirements; organizing their own travel, visa, and housing arrangements; and going overseas with no real links to the home institution other than being listed as an exchange student. It is difficult to see how most first-year degree students would have the

motivation and organizational skills to embark on this process while simultaneously adjusting to higher education study.

Students at all five institutions reported they had access to good advice about the availability of loans and allowances for overseas study and about paying fees at their home institution; some also had scholarships to support travel. However, none of the students reported that he or she had received substantive advice from staff at his or her home institution about how to apply for a student visa or identify opportunities for work at his or her preferred destination.

In general, the faculty we interviewed indicated they had limited involvement with their exchange offices, none with a student's host institution and, other than providing academic advice, little contact with the outbound exchange students. The one exception was faculty who were teaching foreign languages who did generally have various overseas connections and other relevant information to share with students. Most faculty appeared to have limited knowledge of exchange options or grants and awards for which students may be eligible. With the exception of the language lecturers, there was little evidence of any interaction between academics and the overseas institutions students attended. Overall, academic and advisory staff members' knowledge and engagement with overseas study appeared to be limited to the specific requirements of their roles, such as approving courses for credit transfer.

Detailed examination of academic curricula was beyond the scope of this research, but we did find instances where study abroad appeared to be integrated into the academic program. At one university, students majoring in a foreign language were required to study abroad; this was, however, the only example of a required international dimension incorporated into an academic program. Aside from this one exception, the New Zealand tertiary institutions in our study offered only two choices to students seeking study abroad—they could study for a semester at an overseas university or participate in selected short courses available only in some degree programs.

Discussion

Our survey findings suggest that New Zealand tertiary students generally lack awareness of, and information about, study overseas and how to participate in student exchange opportunities. We suspect that this is the case in many other countries, despite the efforts of governments and educational institutions to promote such exchanges. However, many perceived obstacles to overseas exchanges could be relatively easily overcome by providing students with more information: Cost, one of the major obstacles, may not be insurmountable either, given that entitlements to student allowances and loans extended to study-abroad options, a fact about which many New Zealand students appeared unaware.

Nevertheless, even students who had not previously considered study abroad expressed interest in student exchanges, though they generally referenced traditional destinations for young New Zealanders on working holidays abroad such as Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. Paradoxically, New Zealand students seem to favor English-speaking destinations while at the same time identifying exposure to a different language and culture as their main perceived benefit of exchanges. The challenge for policy makers and institutions in English-speaking nations such as New Zealand is how to stimulate tertiary students' interests in studying about, and in, nontraditional localities, such as Asia, South America, and the Middle East.

Unlike European nations, New Zealand lacks a tradition and culture of study abroad, but our findings suggest actions that could increase participation. These include heightening community knowledge and understanding of the benefits of study abroad as well as promoting second language learning. Students and their families could be informed about study-abroad options earlier, in their first year of university study or even in secondary school, and given more support to identify appropriate destinations and opportunities.

Unless this situation changes, the monolingualism of students in English-speaking countries such as New Zealand is likely to continue to be an impediment to international engagement. Additional language learning options may be needed if students are to respond meaningfully to encouragement to pursue study at nontraditional destinations: Scholarships alone cannot facilitate study in a country where the language of instruction is not English. Many European universities now use English as their language of instruction (e.g., Germany) as do a growing number of Asian universities, but this may not have the desired impact on student mobility unless English is also widely used in the communities where these universities are located. English-speaking students from countries such as New Zealand may be deterred by the perceived difficulties they would have in interacting with communities where English is not common. Not only students' competencies in other languages remains limited but participation in student exchange opportunities to non-English-speaking destinations is also likely to continue to be limited.

Social support issues were identified as barriers to overseas exchanges, yet current exchange programs are overly reliant on individual placements. Being a member of a group of just two or three students could make study abroad a less intimidating prospect for many students. The social support provided in a group may reduce the psychological barriers of isolation and separation from family and friends, hence reinforcing the decision to study overseas. Students could be paired with overseas exchange students from destination countries prior to study abroad; this could provide additional social support to the overseas student. Another social support initiative that might make overseas exchange more attractive to students is providing an academic and personal mentor while overseas.

Recent research on loneliness experienced by international students highlights the importance of this issue and suggests social support structures could mitigate

social isolation for students studying overseas (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008). Empirical investigation of social relationship issues may be crucial if the goal of intercultural competence is to be achieved. It is difficult to envision how intercultural understandings would be enhanced by a study-abroad opportunity in which students felt socially isolated or where they interacted only with other foreign students (including those from the same home country).

Intercultural competence is unlikely to occur simply through geographic location but would seem to require new interactions and relationships with others in host country and institutional contexts (Dunne, *in press*; Leask, *in press*; Sawir et al., 2008). Indeed, research by McLeod and Wainwright (2009) suggests it is vital that intercultural interactions in the host country are not primarily negative experiences but have the potential of affirming the original program goals to enhance international and intercultural competence.

Internationalization of the undergraduate curriculum is widely regarded as a means of accommodating the needs of the wider undergraduate population. In our research, academic faculty members were asked about the internationalization of their curriculum and links between exchanges and the curriculum. Though it was beyond the scope of the research to examine the extent to which degree and course content subject requirements were aligned with international study opportunities, we found few examples of links between curriculum and overseas exchanges. If institutions are serious about internationalizing their students' experiences, such links may need to be integral components of higher education.

Increasing student participation in overseas exchanges and encouraging institutions to internationalize their curricula require policy and actions by government, higher education institutions, and citizens at all levels both within the tertiary institution and in the community. Although most students may never study overseas, most will be challenged professionally and personally to fit into a global economy and society. Hence, it is important for higher education institutions to pursue strategies that enhance intercultural competence and international understandings in the larger student population.

Stone (2006) suggested several indicators that institutions could use to develop opportunities to internationalize student learning opportunities, including curriculum design. Furthermore, initiatives should not be viewed or developed in isolation but rather as part of a comprehensive strategy to increase human capital, whether in New Zealand or any other country (Dodds, 2008).

Surridge (2000) used the phrase "multicultural indifference" (i.e., indifference to learning about or living in different cultures) to describe an underlying factor that deterred students from studying abroad. He argued that using institutional resources to increase funding for those already motivated to learn from study overseas should not be at the expense of other initiatives to internationalize the institution. For example, funds may be better spent on enhancing multicultural understanding among the faculty and wider student body. If countries such as New Zealand are to

take their place in a global knowledge society where people are the most valuable resource, graduates must be stimulated and supported to develop global and intercultural competencies.

Failure to integrate increased participation in student exchanges with broader national and higher education goals also presents risks. Student exchanges benefit the individuals involved, and international students bring benefits that enrich domestic students' experiences. Student exchanges offer enhanced opportunities for global understanding for both individuals and institutions. However, greater benefits can arguably be gained if student exchanges and study-abroad programs are located within a larger framework that fosters well-educated citizens who are also globally minded.

Higher education institutions in New Zealand and other countries can help develop their country's knowledge economy by developing institution-wide policy and processes that promote the development of intercultural and international understandings in tomorrow's graduates. These can include internationally relevant curricula and support for overseas study options. For a nation to become a knowledge society, its higher education system must employ diverse strategies to promote international interactions among the indifferent as well as among the motivated. The goal underlying international student exchange programs is that individual students—tomorrow's citizens—are competent internationally and interculturally. Achieving this goal depends on successful student exchange programs located within supportive institutional frameworks.

Note

1. The complete report on which this paper was based, including methodological information and results for the secondary student interviews, interviews with faculty and key managers, and the case study analyses of the tertiary institutions, is available in Doyle, Gendall, Tait, Meyer, Hoek, McKenzie, et al. (2008).

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