

Political Science Study Abroad Programs in the Global South

Prepared for the American Political Science Association Teaching and Learning Conference

Alexandria, Virginia

February 7-9, 2024

Rex Nario

San Francisco State University

January 24, 2025

Abstract

US students (including political science students) are studying abroad in places that are too similar to the US, which de-emphasizes the appeal of studying abroad in other parts of the world and constrains the field of political science to a heavily Westernized perspective. Political science students are gaining insight from studying abroad in countries that are too similar to the United States, and it will leave out the discussion of critical Global South-related issues and topics. This paper looks into the state of study abroad programs for US students, particularly in the Global South, by analyzing the number of students going to the Global South and looking at how students decide their destinations through theories in international education. It will also examine political science programs from both short-term, third-party courses and traditional semester-long courses.

Introduction

Political science undergraduate and graduate students highly benefit from experiential learning through study abroad. Students change, foster, and solidify their interests by being exposed to real-life situations or learning from experts in their field. Political scientists looking to emphasize subfields like comparative politics and international relations can develop their key interests through study abroad programs. Universities and their respective political science departments hold the key to developing the interest of their students because they decide which universities can formulate international partnerships. In the case of higher education institutions in the United States, the most profitable partnerships lie within institutions mainly located in Europe, East Asia, and other anglophone countries around the world. US universities need more internationalization and inclusivity in their programs to avoid the oversaturation of study abroad programs and/or international internship programs in Western European or anglophone countries. Programs in the Global South are often overlooked and should have more participation, especially when trends and issues in the Global South provide crucial context for the study of topics such as authoritarianism, economic development, and globalization.

This paper asserted that universities, students, and affiliated study abroad partners in the United States are overemphasizing Western European countries as their preferred choice for study abroad destinations. As a result, study abroad in the Global South have less program enrollment and overall interest. The consistent lack of participation in Global South study abroad programs has led to a decrease in program funding and justification for its existence. The cycle of lack of funding and lack of participation in Global South programs, while at the same time, increased enrollment in readily available Global North study abroad destinations are due to several factors, such as the delegation of international programs to third-party non-profit

international education organizations (or “providers”), factors directly affecting students (microeconomic factors), and familiarity of Global South study abroad destinations to US students.

This study investigates potential factors from sources (trends in study abroad, universities, and students) to determine why countries in the Global North (namely Western Europe) are chosen instead of any other countries. It analyzes the current quantitative trend of study abroad destinations to determine if recent internationalization efforts or policies are effective. It uses the theoretical framework of international education scholars using the push-pull model (primarily used in migration studies) to determine the motivation for choosing a study abroad destination from a student’s perspective. It also examines current literature related to the structure of contemporary study abroad program discourse (short courses vs. traditional courses) and whether universities adopting various forms of study abroad programs can affect students’ choices in the destination.

Study Abroad Programs for Political Science Students

Study abroad programs are one of the most used experiential learning methods in the United States, with more than 200,000 US students participating in study abroad programs worldwide (Institute of International Education, 2023). Its effectiveness in educating political science students proves that study abroad resources and awareness need expansion. Political Science students benefit from study abroad programs because of the global nature of many of its subfields (e.g., comparative politics, international relations). Both comparative politics and international relations (and their various areas of focus) involve students participating in global citizenry and directly exposing themselves to potential international research interests (peace studies, international political economy). The globalization of political science requires students

to immerse themselves in their target geographic area of study. Also, students may discover their research interests by exploring places unfamiliar to them.

The need for exposure and training in political science curricula falls in line with high-impact programs (study abroad, internships, immersion) currently used in various college programs. These scholars require actual exposure and training in these areas (including language training), and study abroad aptly provides these necessities. In Dr. Pugh's study on political science short-term study abroad programs, alumni of the program saw their experience as a way to either get themselves involved in issues related to international peace or to "deepen their understanding of peace" (2013, 794). Programs such as Dr. Pugh's are good examples of study abroad programs that deepen a student's understanding of concepts that are international and political in nature. For example, one student response from Dr. Pugh's survey stated that they are "currently producing media for research and social activism and my experience in Ecuador, particularly studying the impact of media on peace relations" (2013, 793). Study abroad programs are great experiential learning tools, especially in political science, due to being exposed to the realities of political institutions or the politics of the student's study abroad destination. It also tests any political theory a student learns in the classroom and has the ability to test it by observing actual situations. Internationalizing the curriculum of political science by increasing study abroad programs will allow students to experience more. Increasing study abroad programs in the Global South will expose students to various understudied regions in the world.

US universities need to internationalize their political science curriculum further, and one huge step forward is to directly expose prospective political scientists to experiences outside of the United States through study abroad programs. Continuing with the efforts of the American

Political Science Association's effort to internationalization the curriculum in 2011, they recommended the political science curriculum to "encourage open discussion and communication about sensitive issues in the world... emphasize the concept of global citizenship... breaking away from a purely a Westernized view of this world" (APSA 2011, 4). Increasing study abroad programs to countries in the Global South and learning more about the political science curriculum in the Global South will further increase the internationalization of the US political science curriculum and include the discussion of how the Global South perceives the field of political science.

Learning more about countries in the Global South also increases awareness of systematic and political issues of these countries and increases interest in solving issues in these regions. Students being directly involved and immersed in the area of issue/interest brings unparalleled experience in topics unmatched by a traditional setting of learning. Bowman and Jennings conducted a survey on undergraduate students participating in a study abroad program in Costa Rica focusing on environmental politics. The survey results indicated that the students "not only educated students on issues of environmental politics but also opened their eyes to the challenges of environmental protection in a developing country" (Bowman and Jennings 2005, 80). As Bowman and Jennings presented, students are shown to solidify their knowledge and influence their career/research interest by seeing current trends, such as environmental issues, in real-time. Students can develop their knowledge in one area of study through study abroad programs, and higher education institutions should adopt policies that lean towards an increasingly globalized world, including the Global South. Despite the benefits of studying abroad and globalization, the issue of oversaturating study abroad programs in Europe and other Global North countries presents a conundrum in increasing more programs in the Global South.

Recent Trends in Study Abroad

This paper used the Open Doors study abroad survey from the Institute of International Education (IIE) to see the progress of US college students going to Global South countries. The Open Doors contains data that “reflects information on student mobility from the United States for academic credit” (IIE 2024). The most recent academic year (AY), in which data on study abroad destinations was collected, is AY 2022-2023. This paper will examine a ten-year (AY 2012-13 to AY 2022-23) percentage rate of several Global South areas and Europe to determine if there was any increase in students going to Global South countries.

Based on the previous discussion on the benefits of study abroad programs for political science students, especially programs in the Global South, political science and other fields in social science have been pushing for internationalization and the deemphasis on the Westernization of its curriculum. However, there has been little progress in diversifying study abroad destinations within a span of a decade. According to Tarrant et al., “four European countries (United Kingdom, Italy, Spain and France) ranking as the most popular (and 6 out of the top 10) destinations [for study abroad]] (142). Looking at more recent data on study abroad participants from the IIE, not only Global South countries are still overlooked as study abroad destinations, but European destinations widened their gap amongst the top destinations. From the Open Doors data survey containing responses for the academic year 2022-2023, Europe (mainly Italy (15%), the United Kingdom (13%), and Spain (12%)) “hosted 64% of all U.S. students who studied abroad.” The total percentage of US students studying abroad in the academic year 2012-2013 was 53%, an increase of 11%. The gap between Europe and other regions of the world in terms of US students choosing their study abroad destination is highlighted in Figure 1, where Europe, at 64.40% for the most recent academic year (AY2022-23), is the leading host

destination for US college students with Latin America at 10.73% at second. The gap between the first and second indicates the dominance of Europe as a student preference in study abroad destinations.

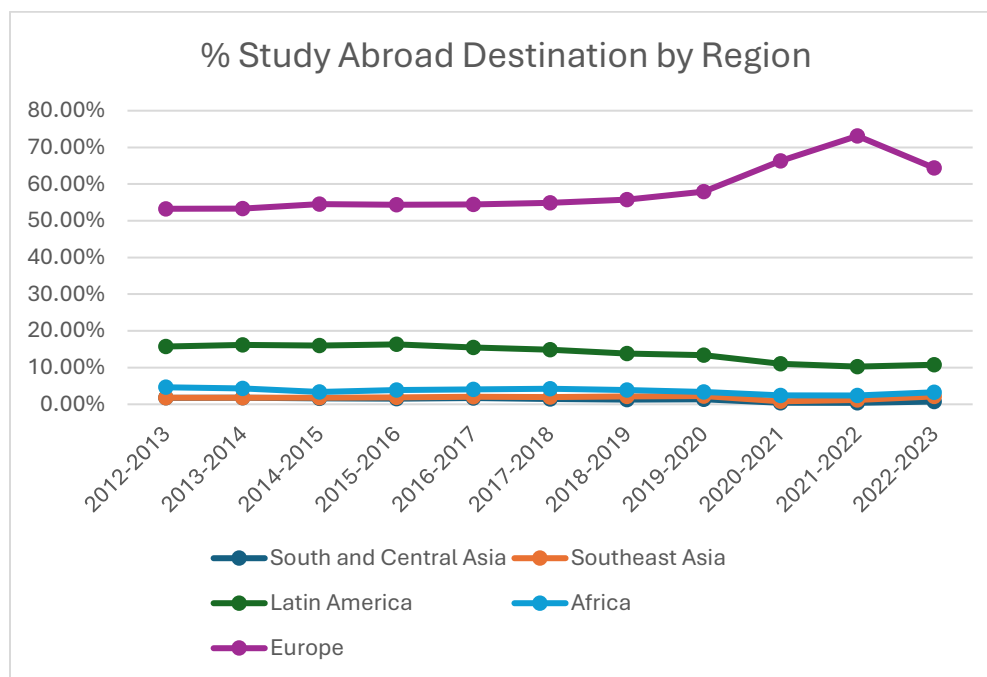


Figure 1. The percentage of study abroad participation by region from AY2012-2013 to AY 2022-23 (IIE, 2024).

While Europe still stands at the top of students' choice for study abroad destinations, other regions of the world (notably Global South countries) have not made progress in terms of increasing US study abroad participation. For the past decade, the percentage of US college students going to study abroad destinations in the Global South has declined in spite of calls for increasing Global South study abroad programs. From the Open Doors data survey, students favoring Global South destinations steadily declined with an average decline to South and Central Asia (-2.78%), Latin America (-2.17%), and Africa (-3.84%) in academic years occurring before the COVID-19 pandemic with the exception of Southeast Asia (+3.41%) (IIE,

2024). The gap between Europe and the rest of the countries substantially grew during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (AY2020-2021 onwards).

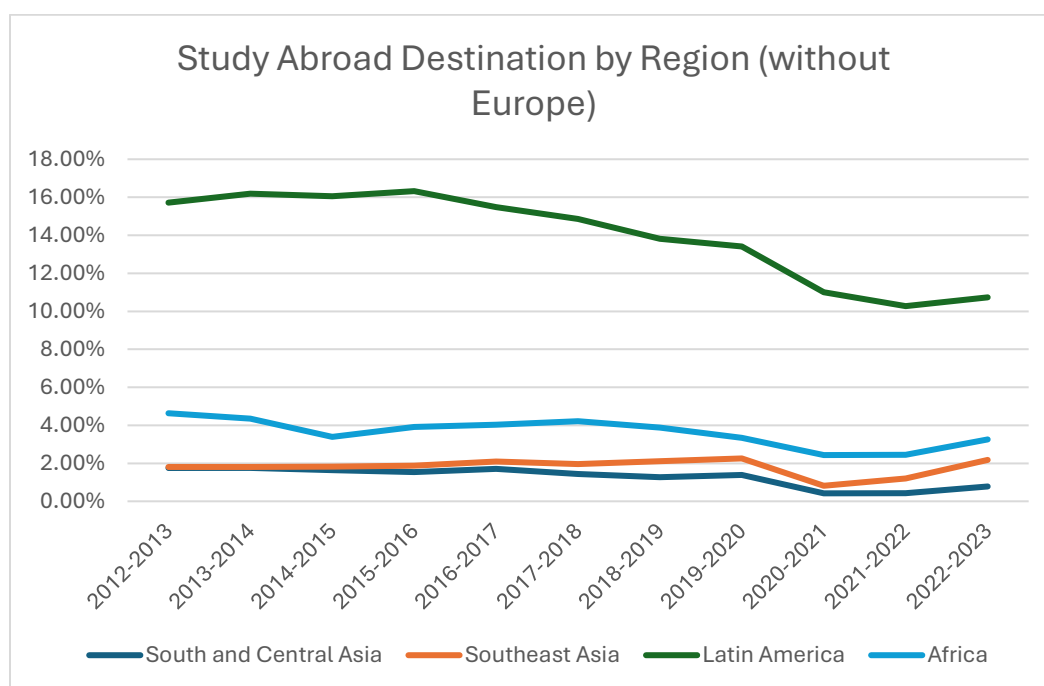


Figure 2. The percentage of study abroad participation by region from AY2012-2013 to AY 2022-23, excluding Europe (IIE, 2024).

Political science, as a social science field, represents a notable number of U.S. college students going abroad, but other fields have been leading the ranking in most students sent to study abroad programs. Comparing the total number of U.S. students who studied abroad in the academic year 2022-2023 (280,716), the whole field of “Social Science” represented 17.7 percent (49,687), and the field designated as “Foreign Language and International Studies” represents 5.7 percent (16,001) (IIE 2024). With the combination of “Social Science” and “Foreign Language and International Studies,” the total percentage and number of students who are generally related to social sciences and political science and who participated in a study abroad program are 23.4% and 65,688 students, respectively (refer to Appendix C). The

culmination brings social sciences and political science students a second place in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) fields at 27%. Even though major subfields and aspects of political science rely heavily on learning about the world outside the United States, the data indicate that other majors are more successful in convincing students to expand their horizons abroad. Based on what political science students need regarding outside exposure, political science students should be sent out to study abroad destinations more.

Push-pull Factors and Study Abroad Destination Decision-Making

Despite political science curricula and foreign language requirements, the students have the final decision whether they need to participate in study abroad programs or whether they need to go to a specific area of the world. Students have their reasons why they choose Europe over the Global South or why they prefer one part of the Global South over the other. To conceptualize the student's decision-making process, the push-pull theory primarily pinpoints some of the main factors that can influence a student's decision.

The push-pull model is mainly used to determine factors affecting international migration. Several scholars used the same push-pull theoretical model to analyze the factors of the study abroad destination choice of students. Students have their own reasons to either be persuaded to choose a destination (pull factor) or be persuaded to leave the country for better learning opportunities overseas (push factor). These push-pull factors apply to the agency of political science students and their decision to study abroad destinations. Ghazarian defines the push factor in the context of cross-border higher education as “variables that cause students or their families to look into the option of cross-border higher education” (2016, 702) and used concrete examples of “[h]ome country tuition fees, currency exchange rates... language learning” (2016, 702) of driving students to seek their educational growth overseas. Pull factors

“reveal how to best draw students to a destination” (Ghazarian 2016, 702) and are commonly drawn from “personal reasons, country image, city image, HEI (higher education institute) image, and program evaluation” (Maria Cubillo et al., 2006; Ghazarian 2016, 702). Enumerating push-pull factors will aid in expanding the discussion of study abroad destination selection strictly in the context of US political science students.

Even though there are universal push-pull factors influencing a student’s decision-making, these factors vary depending on the student’s country of origin. Strictly contextualizing the application of push-pull factors to US political science students, international education scholars found factors applicable to North American students. According to Hoshino, their motivations for participating in study abroad programs “were ‘learning the local language and culture,’ ‘career development,’ ‘getting away from home’... ‘low cost’” (Hoshino 2022, 72). From Hoshino’s definition of push-pull factors, US students are focused on what they gain in experience and see study abroad programs as long-term investments. Students may conduct their own cost-benefit analysis whether one study abroad destination is more fruitful than another. Contrasting with Ghazarian’s factors, such as imagery and aesthetics, Hoshino’s observations draw into the student’s perspective on the overall return on investment in study abroad programs. Imagery is highly subjective, wherein some may be attracted to the glamour and prestige of European destinations and unattracted to the unfamiliarity and uniqueness of Global South destinations or vice versa. The return on investment for students also depends on the interest of the student. Political science students interested in comparative European politics may need experience in European countries, while students interested in the political economy of developing countries need to experience the Global South. While both focus on internal factors

in a student's decision-making, the next interpretation of push-pull theory focuses on external factors.

Factors of deciding study abroad destinations can also be conceptualized as “capital,” where both students' and study abroad destinations are measured by their cultural, linguistic, and economic capital. As explained in Jon's study and by using Bourdieu's theory of capital, there are three main sources of capital that influence a student's decision on study abroad destinations (Bourdieu 1986; Jon 2024, 389). For US college students, social capital refers to influence from friends/family members/faculty members (Jon 2024, 389). Linguistic capital refers to either one student's comfort in either only speaking English or learning a foreign language of their choosing (Jon 2024; 390). Program capital refers to the relevance of the study abroad destination to course requirements or their own interests (391). These three equally important capitals are out of the student's control, yet these external factors need to be considered when one contemplates why students go to Europe instead of Global South destinations.

Scholars have also stated that government policy initiatives and the socioeconomic status of study-abroad destinations can be push factors to “push” students in increasing international exchange. There are instances where governments increase interest and funding for international exchange, persuading their domestic students to participate in more study abroad programs. One notable case is the Japanese education policy reform in the 1980s. Japanese education policies increased the value of study abroad programs in Japanese society by “(1) developing research, sending Japanese students abroad, and increasing international interaction; (2) chang[ing] in purpose from international development and cooperation to national competitiveness; and (3) emergence of ... countries as priorities for national policies” (Hoshino 2022, 70). Government policies can incentivize students to participate in study abroad programs. The United States

federal and state governments have the capability to influence their students to study abroad in more Global South destinations, especially if these programs can be used to benefit both the students and the government. The government can use international exchange programs to increase its diplomatic capital or “soft power” in the Global South.

Also, Li and Bray discussed the socioeconomic position of study abroad destinations (Macau and Hong Kong) compared to their home country (Mainland China) as a “push factor” for study abroad students. The results of their survey regarding students from Mainland China choosing Macau/Hong Kong rather than other foreign destinations coincided with previously mentioned internal and external factors. The results indicate that Chinese students chose Hong Kong or Macau instead of China or overseas because of the lack of higher education quality and the lack of internationalization in their home country (and, to an extent, their home universities) (Li and Bray, 2007, 805-806). Study abroad programs prove to solve the issue of the lack of academic expertise in a student’s own university, and it can apply to a US political science student’s dilemma of wanting to specialize in a niche or understudied area of study.

University perspective: Exchange Programs vs. Short Courses from “Providers”

Students will pursue study abroad programs that match their interests, but their pursuit of participating in a study abroad program also depends on the availability of the program in their universities. While some students already have an idea of their future specialization, some may take inspiration from study abroad programs. Both situations will make the availability of study abroad programs a factor in a student’s decision-making progress. Traditionally, universities make international exchange agreements with foreign universities to facilitate cross-cultural exchange. However, the rise of short-term study abroad programs from third-party providers gained in popularity. Based on my preliminary findings from the University of Wisconsin-

Madison (UW-Madison) and using program definitions from the UW-Madison's "Program Search" function, three types of study abroad programs categorized by organizer are available to students. The three types are (1) international exchange programs, (2) third-party providers, and (3) affiliate programs (UW-Madison), with the first two types are the most common.

The traditional international exchange program, which is created through an international agreement between US universities and foreign universities is in decline, and instead, universities delegate the work of non-profit organizations as third-party providers such as the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) or School for Field Studies (SFS) to create short-term programs tailor-made to cater the standards of client-universities. According to Barkin, short-term programs "allow universities to increase prestige-laden study abroad rates more easily than long-term programs" (Barkin 2018, 308). However, it also presents a higher cost to students where these programs "generally push all program costs onto students, including faculty expenses and providers' fee, which are rarely covered by tuition costs nor reduced by conventional financial aid" (Barkin 2018, 308). While students cover the brunt of the costs and providers handle the administrative and logistical workload in making the study abroad program work, it leaves the availability of these program to its marketability and profitability. For unprofitable and unpopular programs, regardless of the quality of the program in questions, these programs run the risk of being phased out.

Universities are prioritizing short courses for study abroad instead of traditional study abroad programs, leading to the oversaturation of study abroad in Europe. The overwhelming favorability of Europe as the top choice for study abroad programs indicate factors relating to the profitability of Europe-heavy short-term "provision" programs and the availability of exchange agreements between US and foreign universities. Universities seek to use "providers" or third-

party organizations to act as intermediaries among other universities to create study abroad program, which leaves traditional student exchange programs obsolete or underfunded. While using short course study abroad programs are effective in increasing overall enrollment, marketing, and ease of logistics in executing study abroad programs, the availability of courses in certain regions will depend on its profitability. This unreliability in availability will cause an issue with students who want to study niche topics or students who are highly interested in testing themselves in unfamiliar territory.

While both methods have their respective pros and cons, both methods are effective in educating and immersing students in different areas of the globe. In addition, if universities do not initiate the increase in study abroad programs through their own institution, there is potential in creating and funding non-profit organizations solely devoted to one country or one area. Creating these organizations can increase more programs in the area, work with multiple universities, and have a permanent source for universities when coordinating with students while on their study abroad program. One example is the Center for Lao Studies where the center has their own study abroad program. Any student who are interested in studying abroad in Laos can work with the center. This center has worked and are affiliated with US universities such as UW-Madison. The model of study abroad program from the Center for Lao Studies present an opportunity for nonprofit organizations set themselves up for maintaining and overseeing study abroad programs in some Global South countries. While this model may not be profitable, it provides a way for students to learn about more Global South countries and will be a great resource for future scholars interested in these countries. These centers will not only provide resources to students regarding the country in question, it can also be potential point of resources for other entities like the US government and many others.

Recommendation and Conclusion

Seeing the large gap between Europe and the Global South in terms of leading study abroad destinations for US college students made me reflect on how political science departments can spearhead the movement of increasing international exchange programs between US universities and universities in locations like Latin America, Africa, Southeast Asia, and many other countries in the Global South. The increase in international partnerships will increase the following:

1. Interest of US political science students in topics prevalent in the global south such as political economy of developing countries, democracy, colonialism, etc.
2. Increase the sharing of knowledge and resources between partners. Partner universities can create programs like visiting scholars programs

While I recognize that adherence to government regulation, university policies, and the socioeconomic status of the United States halt or hinder international exchange agreements with Global South destinations, US universities can take small steps to formulate and solidify an agreement to test the feasibility of the exchange agreement and potentially make the agreement more comprehensive in the future. Having universities start small and create memoranda of understanding and agreement stipulating a select few Global South universities can prove to be fruitful to both partner universities. Students will learn from experts in host universities, and some of them may even develop an interest in the topic and teach others. This educational cycle can increase and retain foremost experts in political science.

According to Jon, there is not much research on the decision-making of students regarding study abroad destinations, and there is a “need to fill this gap by investigating how students choose a study abroad destination and program” (Jon 2021, 386). While using push-pull

factors aids in determining the student's motivation and decision-making process for selecting a study abroad destination, further quantifying factors (e.g., micro (student) and macroeconomic (study abroad destination) factors) and/or analyzing specific educational policy on international education in Global South countries will pinpoint the reason why students may choose Europe as the leading student destination than any other regions in the world.

Political science has the potential to internationalize not only their own curricula for students, but it can also serve as a model for other fields in social sciences to internationalize. Political science is a global field in nature, and it has great influence in increasing student participation in study abroad programs. By leading the charge in internationalizing higher education curricula through involving more Global South study abroad programs, political science students will fully demonstrate global citizenry and increase international exchange throughout various universities.

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Appendix A. Number of U.S. Study Abroad Students by Field of Study, 2012/13 – 2022/23 (IIE 2024).

Acad Years	World	South and Central Asia	Southeast Asia	Latin America	Africa	Europe
2012/13	289408	5074	5219	45473	13411	154182
2013/14	304467	5337	5493	49312	13266	162282
2014/15	313415	5162	5726	50298	10647	170879
2015/16	325339	4980	6091	53105	12738	176890
2016/17	332727	5678	6966	51513	13433	181145
2017/18	341751	4919	6675	50807	14416	187534
2018/19	347099	4386	7352	47954	13455	193422
2019/20	162633	2262	3669	21819	5444	94230
2020/21	14549	61	119	1600	354	9647
2021/22	188753	804	2253	19387	4614	138007
2022/23	280716	2194	6094	30126	9163	180778

Appendix B. Percent of U.S. Study Abroad Students by Region, 2012/13 – 2022/23 (IIE 2024).

Acad Years	South and Central Asia	Southeast Asia	Latin America	Africa	Europe
2012/13	1.75%	1.80%	15.71%	4.63%	53.27%
2013/14	1.75%	1.80%	16.20%	4.36%	53.30%
2014/15	1.65%	1.83%	16.05%	3.40%	54.52%
2015/16	1.53%	1.87%	16.32%	3.92%	54.37%
2016/17	1.71%	2.09%	15.48%	4.04%	54.44%
2017/18	1.44%	1.95%	14.87%	4.22%	54.87%
2018/19	1.26%	2.12%	13.82%	3.88%	55.73%
2019/20	1.39%	2.26%	13.42%	3.35%	57.94%
2020/21	0.42%	0.82%	11.00%	2.43%	66.31%
2021/22	0.43%	1.19%	10.27%	2.44%	73.12%
2022/23	0.78%	2.17%	10.73%	3.26%	64.40%
Average gain (2012/13 - 2019/20)	-2.78%	3.41%	-2.17%	-3.84%	1.22%

Appendix C. Percent of U.S. Study Abroad Students by Field of Study, 2012/13 – 2022/23 (IIE 2024).

Field of Study	<u>2012</u> <u>/13</u>	<u>2013</u> <u>/14</u>	<u>2014</u> <u>/15</u>	<u>2015</u> <u>/16</u>	<u>2016</u> <u>/17</u>	<u>2017</u> <u>/18</u>	<u>2018</u> <u>/19</u>	<u>2019</u> <u>/20</u>	<u>2020</u> <u>/21</u>	<u>2021</u> <u>/22</u>	<u>2022</u> <u>/23</u>
STEM Fields	22.5	22.6	23.9	25.2	25.8	25.6	26.8	24.5	29.2	25.6	27
Business & Management	20.4	19.6	20.1	20.9	20.7	20.8	20.7	20.8	17.3	20.8	21
Social Sciences	22.1	18.7	17.3	17.1	17.2	17.1	17	19.2	17.2	17.6	17.7
Foreign Language and International Studies	-	7.8	7.7	7.4	7.3	7.1	6.9	7.8	8.8	7	5.7
Fine and Applied Arts	7.8	7	6.9	6.9	6.3	6.8	6.9	6.9	6.4	7.1	7.4
Communications and Journalism	-	5.6	5.8	5.7	5.6	5.5	5.4	6.1	4.6	5.2	5.1
Humanities	10.4	4.1	3.8	3.7	3.6	3.6	3.3	3.7	3.1	3.4	3.1
Education	4	3.7	3.5	3.4	3.3	3.3	3.1	2.4	1.9	2.4	2.4
Legal Studies and Law Enforcement	-	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.6	1.4	1.2	1.5	1.8
Other Fields of Study	5.2	6.7	6.8	6.5	6.8	6.7	6.8	6.2	8.4	7.6	7.6
Undeclared	2.7	2.6	2.6	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.6	1.1	1.8	1.8	1.4
Total	289,408	304,467	313,415	325,339	332,727	341,751	347,099	162,633	14,549	188,753	280,716