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An Exploration of the Study Abroad Experiences of United States Students in Three Halls of Residence at a Catholic University in Western Australia

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Signed: _____ Date: _____

Nicole Schiffer

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to explore the ways United States students develop through studying abroad at a Catholic university in Western Australia. The significance of the research lies in the belief that host and home universities should be aware of the needs of these study abroad students. The needs of these students were understood through an exploration of the challenges faced, the support received, and the personal and professional development attained.

Four dimensions of the context contributed to an understanding of this study. These four dimensions were the University of Notre Dame Australia Fremantle, the UNDA three halls of residence, Fremantle and Perth cities, and the role of the residential supervisor. These contextual dimensions describe the environment, setting, and background necessary for the research.

A review of the relevant literature was undertaken. In light of this review it seemed appropriate that the conduct of the study should be qualitative, interpretive, and utilise a collective case study. The collective case study utilised two methods of data collection: focus group interviews and reflective journal entries. The method of analysis for the qualitative data followed a format similar to that outlined by Miles and Huberman (1984): data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion-drawing/verification. Both the focus group interview transcriptions and the journal entries were coded and analysed according to themes drawn from the three specific research questions for this study.

Findings from the study indicated that the students developed both personally and professionally in light of their study abroad experiences. In the area of personal development the following were identified: independence, confidence, openness to try new things, and self-awareness. Both professional experience and professional possibilities were identified in the area of professional development. Three conclusions that have not previously been detailed in the literature were the development of global-mindedness, difficulties with differences in grading systems and, how these are interpreted by US students, and balancing multiple roles, particularly within new settings.

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