



The Scholar of Global Distinction Program:

An Exploration of Access to Global Experiences at North Carolina Community Colleges

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Scholar of Global Distinction Campuses

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Introduction

Since 2013, the Scholar of Global Distinction Program, a program through which community college students can earn a global distinction credential after fulfilling a series of internationally-focused requirements, has provided unique global experiences to participating students. The program is a partnership between community colleges and the University of North Carolina World View (UNC World View). UNC World View is a public service program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill that equips K-12 and community college educators with global knowledge, best practices, and resources to prepare students to engage in our interconnected and diverse world. As part of the Scholar of Global Distinction program, many community colleges collaborate with UNC World View. However, the schools autonomously implement the Scholar of Global Distinction Program on their respective campuses. Administrators at community colleges (Scholar of Global Distinction Program liaisons) provide guidance and information about applicable programs and resources to participating students. These liaisons guide students as they fulfill core standard requirements, which include completion of 15 credit hours of globally-intensive courses, participation in eight international activities and dialogues, completion of 30 hours of a global experience in an international study abroad or a domestic global experience, and delivery of a capstone presentation related to this global learning experience. By completing the program, students engage in unique global learning experiences at their respective community colleges and obtain a credential from UNC World View.

There are several student outcomes tied to the Scholar of Global Distinction Program. Specifically, students:

- ▶ Investigate the world beyond their immediate environment, framing significant problems and conducting well-crafted and age-appropriate research;
- ▶ Recognize perspectives, (others' and their own), articulating and explaining such perspectives thoughtfully and respectfully;
- ▶ Communicate ideas effectively with diverse audiences, bridging geographic, linguistic, ideological, and cultural barriers; and
- ▶ Reflect critically on their role as a member of the global community and pursue ways to create positive change.

Positive informal feedback about the program points to the above outcomes having been consistently achieved at participating community colleges. Furthermore, the popularity of the program among community colleges has grown significantly, with both the number of students participating in and graduating from the Scholar of Global Distinction program steadily increasing since the program's inception at Davidson-Davie Community College in 2013. Even amidst the COVID-19 global pandemic, the program boasted its largest graduating class in May 2021 and expanded to community colleges in South Carolina and Florida.

The purpose of this report is to explore the extent to which the Scholar of Global Distinction program provides access to global learning opportunities for students enrolled at participating community colleges. To evaluate this impact, we analyze survey and focus group data collected in the spring of

2021 from program alumni. We first provide context from the literature on diversity, equity, and inclusion in community college international education before explaining our data collection strategy.

We then present information about the backgrounds and demographic profiles of the program alumni who completed our survey, along with information about their global learning experiences, disaggregated by gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, and Pell recipient status. We then highlight responses participants shared about the Scholar of Global Distinction program in focus group discussions, attending particularly to students' ability to access global learning opportunities. We conclude this report by sharing the implications for both the Scholar of Global Distinction Program and North Carolina community colleges that participate in the program.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Community College International Education

Although international learning opportunities, and study abroad in particular, represent an exclusive opportunity at many institutions of higher education (Hoffa, 2007; Lingo, 2019), recent research and reports indicate that community colleges provide a nexus of access to international education for several historically underrepresented student populations (e.g., Whatley & Raby, 2020). These populations include most notably students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups (e.g., Institute of International Education, 2020; Whatley 2021), working students (Robertson, 2019), first-generation-in-college students (Quezada & Cordeiro, 2016), and students in degree programs that do not, at face value, appear to be connected to international topics (Malveaux & Raby, 2019; Whatley, 2021). Writing about study abroad in particular, Raby and Rhodes (2018) find that the demographic characteristics of participating students tend to reflect their local communities, a result that speaks to the accessibility of international education in the two-year sector.


While this report is the first publication to draw from student-level data representing international education at the 58 community colleges that comprise the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS), a recent report (Whatley, 2020) summarizes the international opportunities available at these colleges. This report indicated that the most common student-focused international education programming activities on community college campuses in North Carolina were on-campus international events (reported at 57% of NCCCS institutions), study abroad (at 52% of NCCCS institutions), and globalized coursework (at 43% of NCCCS institutions). Passport Events at Davidson-Davie Community College represent an example of this first group of international opportunities, with specific events such as conversation hours with Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistants and Irish traditional folk dancing (Whatley & LaVenture, in press, 2022). Regarding study abroad, NCCCS institutions provided students the

opportunity to study in over 30 locations on five continents during the 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19 academic years (Whatley, 2020). Globalized coursework, often developed with the support of UNC World View's grants (Whatley & LaVenture, in press, 2022), involve the "incorporation of international, intercultural, and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods, and support services of a program of study" (Leask, 2015, p. 9). While not exclusive to the Scholar of Global Distinction Program, many of these international learning opportunities support program participants and allow them to complete program requirements over the course of their enrollment at an NCCCS institution.

Data Collection

The purpose of the data collection that informs this report was to provide an initial evaluation of the Scholar of Global Distinction program. Scholar of Global Distinction liaisons at participating community colleges were advised that a study, consisting of both survey and focus group data collection, would be conducted to further explore the ways in which the Scholar of Global Distinction program impacts students' educational experiences. The digital survey was designed to gather data on program participants, their program experiences, and the learning outcomes achieved by participating in the program. Over the course of designing both the survey and focus group questions, feedback and guidance were provided by Scholar of Global Distinction liaisons from five community colleges. After the digital survey questions were finalized, a web link was shared with all Scholar of Global Distinction liaisons, who, in turn, were asked to share the survey with program alumni from their respective community colleges. The survey was open from February 1, 2021 to March 31, 2021. The last question of the survey asked participants if they would be willing to participate in follow-up focus groups. Out of a total of 36 survey respondents, 11 elected to participate in a focus group. A total of four focus groups were conducted to learn more about the experiences of students who graduated from the Scholar of Global Distinction Program.



A photograph of a tropical forest path. The path is made of dark gravel and leads into a dense forest of palm trees and other tropical plants. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating a dappled light effect. A white rectangular box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing text.

Recent research and reports indicate that community colleges provide a nexus of access to international education for several historically underrepresented student populations.

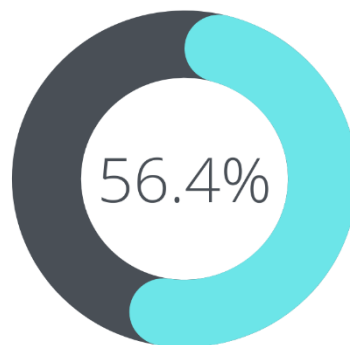
Survey Results

Survey results represent alumni who completed the Scholar of Global Distinction program at eight North Carolina community colleges: Central Piedmont Community College, Davidson-Davie Community College (formerly Davidson County Community College), Guilford Technical Community College, Nash Community College, Pitt Community College, Stanly Community College, Surry Community College, and Wilkes Community College. Table 1 summarizes the number of survey respondents representing each college as well as the percentage they comprise of the survey data.

Table 1: Number and Percentage of Survey Respondents Representing NCCCS Institutions

College	Freq.	Percent
Central Piedmont Community College	4	11.11
Davidson County Community College/Davidson-Davie Community College	12	33.33
Guilford Technical Community College	3	8.33
Nash Community College	1	2.78
Pitt Community College	1	2.78
Stanly Community College	3	8.33
Surry Community College	11	30.56
Wilkes Community College	1	2.78
Total	36	100

Survey respondents represented a variety of international and academic experiences. 56.4% of survey respondents indicated that they had engaged with the culture of another country before entering the Scholar of Global Distinction program.



of survey respondents had experienced another country prior to enrolling in the Scholar of Global Distinction program.

On average, program alumni responding to the survey were around 25 years old at the time of taking the survey, with a minimum age of 18 and a maximum age of 60 (N=36). Figure 2 summarizes other participant demographics. Regarding gender identity, 40% identified men, 57.14% of respondents identified as women, and 2.86% preferred not to respond to the survey question about gender identity (N=35). Out of 35 respondents, 2.86% reported their racial/ethnic identification as Asian, 8.57% as Black, 31.43% as Hispanic/Latinx, 45.71% as white, and 11.43% identified with more than one racial/ethnic group. Finally, regarding Pell Grant receipt, a proxy for socioeconomic status, 76.46% of respondents reported receiving a Pell Grant at least once in their studies to help pay for school. 20.59% did not receive a Pell Grant, and 2.94% reported not knowing whether they received Pell funding.

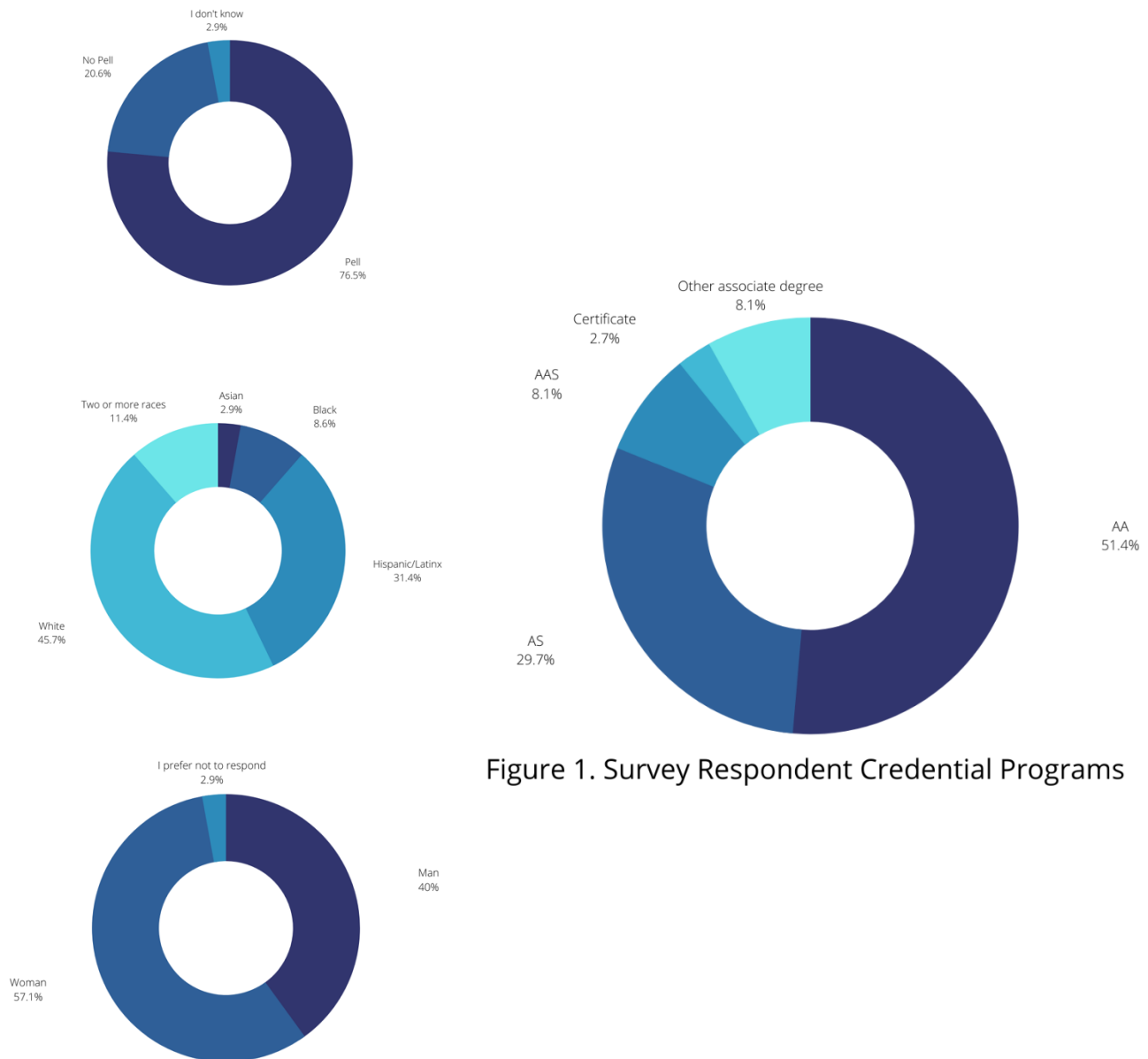


Figure 1. Survey Respondent Credential Programs

Figure 2. Survey Respondent Demographics

Scholar of Global Distinction Learning Experiences

Survey respondents reported having engaged with several world regions because of their participation in the Scholar of Global Distinction program. Respondents could select more than one response to this survey question, and the numbers reported in Figure 3 represent responses of 36 program participants. Overall, Latin America/the Caribbean was the most frequent region selected among these participants (N=19), followed closely by Europe (N=17). Other world regions that were frequently selected included North America (N=14), Asia (N=13), and Africa (N=12). Participants selected Australia/New Zealand and the Middle East less frequently (N=2 in both cases).

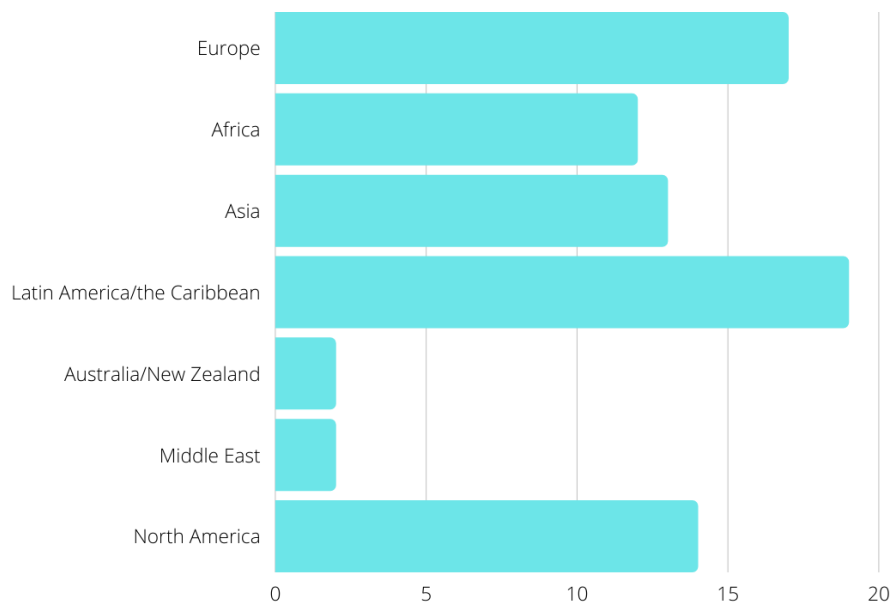


Figure 3. World Regions Experienced by Respondents

Respondents also indicated fulfillment of the 30-hour requirement for the global distinction program in numerous ways. As shown in Figure 4, which represents the survey responses from 36 students, study abroad was the most frequent way students fulfilled this requirement (N=16). Only four participants reported completing the 30-hour requirement through virtual exchange. Students also frequently chose to share other ways in which they fulfilled this requirement (N=15). Write-in responses included volunteer work (e.g., helping elementary school students with Spanish, supporting the local immigrant community), leading presentations focusing on international topics for others on campus, participating in clubs and on-campus events with a global focus (e.g., attending film screenings), interviewing immigrants in the colleges' local communities, conducting an independent research project, and hosting an international student.

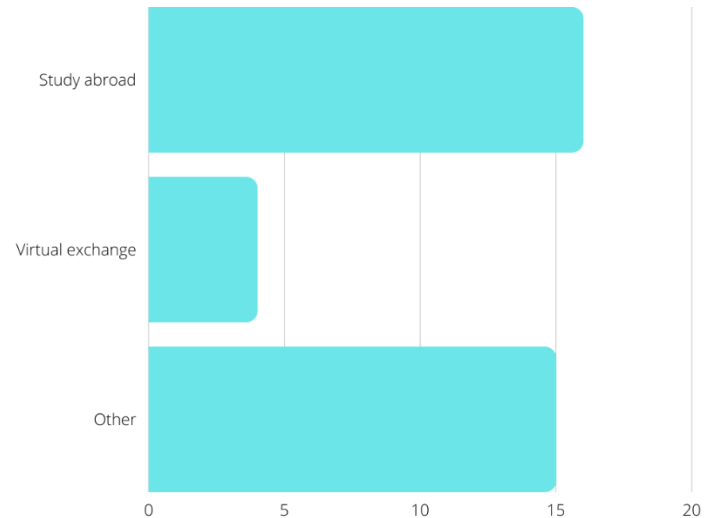


Figure 4. How Respondents Fulfilled Program Requirements



Learning Experiences by Student Demographics

While the previous sections provide important context on who participates in the program and how they fulfill program requirements, further research was needed to evaluate how students differentially experience the program. That is, it is possible, and likely, that not all demographic groups engage with the Scholar of Global Distinction program in the same way. To this end, we analyzed the data on world regions experienced and modes of program fulfillment according to gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, and Pell recipient status.²

Engaging with World Regions

Latin America/the Caribbean was a popular destination among both men- and women-identifying participants. Among women-identifying participants, Europe and Asia were the second and third most frequently experienced world regions, respectively. In contrast, no clear alternative destination emerged among men-identifying survey participants, with equal numbers of men each selecting Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America.

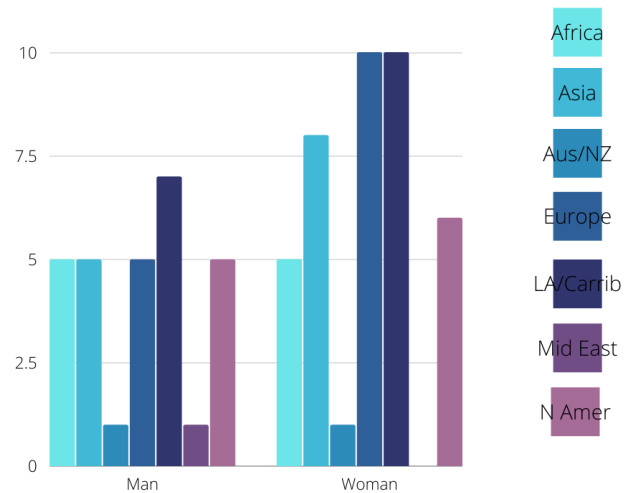


Figure 5. World Regions by Gender Identity

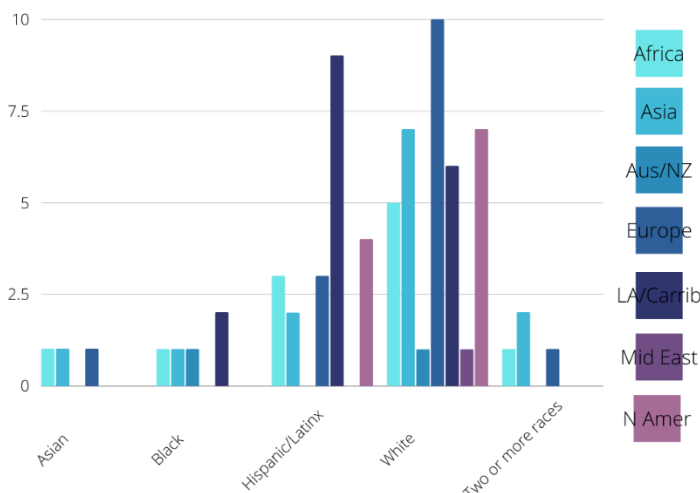


Figure 6. World Regions by Racial/Ethnic Identity

Differential patterns also emerged among participants grouped by racial/ethnic identity. Among both Black and Hispanic/Latinx students, Latin America/the Caribbean was the most frequently selected world region. Europe was the most frequently selected region for white participants. Asia and North America were the second and third most frequently selected regions, respectively, for white participants (see Figure 6).

Among Pell recipients, Latin America was the most frequently selected world region. Europe was the most frequently selected region among non-Pell recipients (see Figure 7).

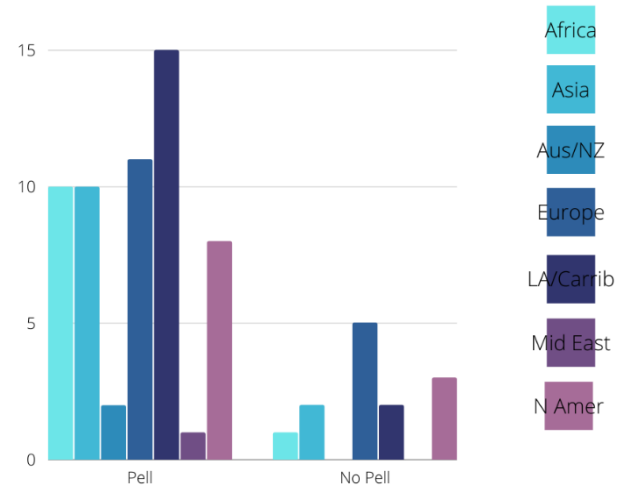


Figure 7. World Regions by Pell Status

Fulfilling Immersion Experience Requirements

We also studied how survey respondents fulfilled the program's 30-hour immersion requirement according to the same demographic categories. While study abroad was the most common immersion experience chosen by both men- and women-identifying respondents, women also frequently selected the 'other' option. Figure 8 summarizes these results.

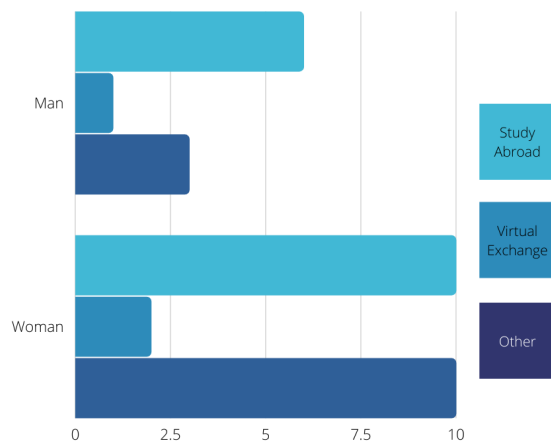


Figure 8. Program Requirements by Gender Identity

Key differences in immersion experiences also emerged among survey respondents according to their racial/ethnic identity. First, study abroad was the most frequently selected option among both Black and Hispanic/Latinx participants. White participants were more likely to select the ‘other’ category. Second, virtual exchange was equally represented among Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and white respondents. Finally, Asian participants did not select any of the three options provided (study abroad, virtual exchange, or ‘other’). Figure 9 summarizes these results.

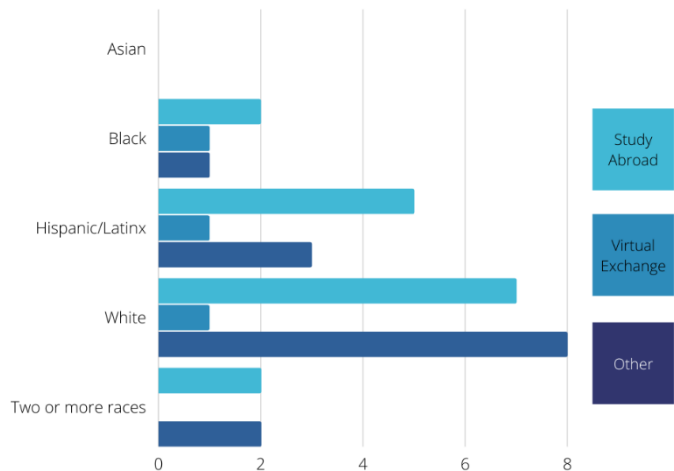


Figure 9. Program Requirements by Racial/Ethnic Identity

While study abroad was popular among both respondents who received and those who did not receive Pell grants, virtual exchange appeared to be more popular among Pell recipients compared to their counterparts. Pell recipients were also more likely than non-recipients to select ‘other’ when asked how they fulfilled the 30-hour immersion requirement (see Figure 10).

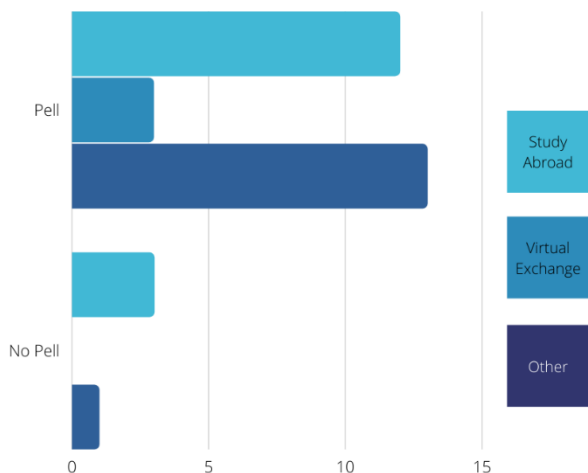


Figure 10. Program Requirements by Pell Status

Focus Group Analysis: Gaining Access to Global Knowledge

Eleven students who completed the survey opted to participate in the focus groups. A total of four focus groups were conducted with participants from five community colleges. Narratives from the focus groups revealed information that was not captured in our survey data, including ways in which the Scholar of Global Distinction program offered graduates access to global opportunities and knowledge. Camilia, a community college graduate who is currently working in the United Kingdom, shared how the Scholar of Global Distinction program fostered the confidence, independence, and open-mindedness needed to live and work abroad. Further, the college's support was instrumental in helping her find a pathway to global opportunities. Camilia shared:

When I did the Scholar of Global Distinction Program, I studied abroad in England, Ireland, and Scotland, and I currently live and work in the United Kingdom. After the Scholar of Global Distinction program afforded me the opportunity to study abroad in England, I knew I wanted to live abroad. I definitely attribute my preparation to live and study abroad to the Scholar of Global Distinction program.

Another participant, Darius, shared how the Scholar of Global Distinction program provided critical access to global experiences for him. Darius indicated his participation and involvement in the Scholar of Global Distinction program provided him with the opportunity to travel to Peru and Ecuador where he received academic credits. Also, he had an opportunity to travel to Colombia as part of a film production internship. Darius shared how those experiences influenced his decision to pursue a major in film production and to further explore and engage in its global opportunities. Darius highlighted the following:

I have been to multiple film festivals, and, whenever I do so, I try to go watch foreign cinema, which opens my eyes. My goal is for my first film to be a foreign language film....When the world opens back up, I will have the opportunity to travel to French Guiana and South America to visit indigenous communities to make a short documentary. I am excited for people to tell their stories as I am not sure if anyone has brought cameras into that side of the Amazon jungle. I am excited to go shoot that film...that would have never happened if I had not joined the Scholar of Global Distinction program and studied abroad.

While many of the alumni who completed the Scholar of Global Distinction program had the opportunity to study abroad, a few participants embraced domestic global experiences. According to those participants, domestic global experiences provided students with global learning that was both local and impactful. Kimberly, another Scholar of Global Distinction graduate, shared that she initially decided to attend a community college because “[she] did not have any plans.” She elaborated on how the Scholar of Global Distinction program provided a pathway for her to complete a research and advocacy program about a country in East Africa with a focus on western non-profit organizations. Kimberly was thankful that the Scholar of Global Distinction program also provided a gateway for her to learn from immigrants in the county through a volunteer program. According to Kimberly, the experience “connected [her] on a global level with [her] county.” Kimberly, who is now a history major

at a four-year institution in North Carolina, believed that experience was instrumental in gaining entry into that institution.

Tom, another community college graduate who also chose a domestic global experience, shared his reflections on his global volunteer work. Tom volunteered with a local refugee program and explained how it opened his eyes to the global applications of his academic degree. Specifically, he noted:

At the time, I was not aware of exactly what I wanted to do but going through the Scholar of Global Distinction program and helping new arrivals to the United States was very impactful. These people come from a refugee program and are put into society, and they have to work to find [careers] with hopes of [better lives] here in America. Working with them sparked an interest [in me] to find work in the global and international field. Now I am getting my business management degree and hoping to have a global and international focus.

A few participants affirmed that the diversity of participants in the Scholar of Global Distinction program allowed them to access global knowledge. For example, both Kendra and Hendrick shared that the Scholar of Global Distinction program attracted students from other countries and created opportunities for them to engage with others from different upbringings and backgrounds. Kendra shared, “When other students from different backgrounds shared about their experiences, I felt like that really enriched my experience.” She elaborated on how global courses such as the one she took about Ireland not only increased her knowledge of cultural diversity in Europe but also encouraged her to appreciate those differences. Hendrick, studied abroad as part of the program, shared that she had always been curious about other cultures and that the Scholar of Global Distinction program allowed her to experience another culture firsthand.



Summary of Findings

Our survey and focus group data reveal ways in which the Scholar of Global Distinction program provides North Carolina community college students with access to global knowledge and experiences. The data also suggest demographic patterns in this global access. Our survey revealed that, while the Scholar of Global Distinction program appeared to increase access to global experiences generally among participants, these experiences differed along the lines of key demographics, resulting in two broad patterns in our data. The first broad pattern mimics long-standing trends in international education wherein white, woman-identifying students engage with primarily European locations (e.g., Institute of International Education, 2020; Lingo, 2019; Whatley, 2017). A second pattern is one wherein participants with lower socioeconomic status backgrounds, as indicated by their receipt of Pell funding, and students identifying as Black or Hispanic/Latinx engage with Latin America/the Caribbean to a greater extent than do other participants. These two patterns suggest that, at North Carolina community colleges, traditional in access to international education opportunities persist, wherein certain opportunities (e.g., study abroad in Europe) are more likely to be accessed by white women. At the same time, other international opportunities provide a nexus of access to international education, namely those that provide participants the opportunity to engage with Latin America/the Caribbean. Of note, as well, is that women and white participants were those who most frequently selected the 'other' option when responding about how they fulfilled the Scholar of Global Distinction program's 30-hour requirement. This finding suggests that these demographic groups were more likely to explore global opportunities beyond the standard options offered at their community college, perhaps requiring the time and resources on the part of students to creatively approach this requirement. This result also likely speaks to the extent to which institutional factors, such as study abroad or virtual exchange offerings, shape the educational experiences of students who do not fall into either of these identity categories. That is, other student groups are perhaps more likely to rely on their institutions to organize and make available global opportunities.

The focus group data revealed the Scholar of Global Distinction program enhanced participants' academic experiences while they studied at their respective community colleges, and it influenced their career paths and/or academic majors at four-year institutions. Participants specifically pointed to the opportunities to study abroad, participate in domestic global experiences, and engage in international activities as some of the core events that had a lasting impact on their future careers and life choices. These experiences are currently integrated as requirements of the Scholar of Global Distinction program, which, as participants note, plays a key role in providing students with access to these opportunities. In addition to these experiences, participants highlighted the opportunity each had to foster a diverse community of friends, while also developing personal confidence, cultural humility, and an appreciation for diverse students, faculty, and staff at their community college. Participants reported that these experiences broadened their world views, and, in some cases, encouraged them to both accept perspectives other than their own and continue exploring global experiences post-graduation. As participants reflected on the ways in which the Scholar of Global Distinction program impacted their experiences and allowed them to investigate the world, many acknowledged the positive and life-changing impacts of the program.

Implications for Community College Educators

As the Scholar of Global Distinction program expands to additional community colleges in North Carolina and beyond, our hope is that many more students will engage in international education activities and experiences. As the evidence presented in this report suggests, there is great potential for and benefits derived from community colleges offering students global educational opportunities (such as study abroad and domestic global experiences) that traditionally have only been provided to four-year students. That is, the community colleges profiled in this report provide global experiences to student populations that do not frequently access international education, such as students from low-income backgrounds. As our focus group data suggest, these opportunities can have a tremendous impact on students' future career trajectories and personal development.

The Scholar of Global Distinction program provides a guiding framework for how low-resourced institutions, such as community colleges, can begin the internationalization process. Individuals working within these institutional contexts might also share resources, such as examples of globalized curricula, or open study abroad programs and virtual exchanges to students in other partnering community colleges. For example, Davidson-Davie Community College has recently created a partnership with the University of Bordeaux for a two-week summer study abroad program which is open to all NCCCS students. Such pooling of resources can make international opportunities more financially feasible for a greater number of students.

While our data show a positive effect of the Scholar of Global Distinction Program on students' access to international education and their subsequent experiences in many respects, the data presented here also reflect traditional inequities in international education. Although community colleges host a large percentage of traditionally underrepresented students, some opportunities, such as study abroad, particularly in certain geographic locations, still favor traditionally privileged groups. More specifically, our data suggest that traditional patterns of white, female students engaging with programs and content focused on Europe remained in the NCCCS international education context. Moving forward, we recommend that educators who oversee global and international efforts at community colleges increase efforts and diversify modes of outreach to student populations to ensure that equity is achieved in international education opportunities. For example, while at face value it may appear that Black and Hispanic/Latinx students have the same access to the international education programs offered at their community college, these groups may require additional resources and advising so that their participation is equitable to that of their peers. Similarly, white students may need to be encouraged to diversify their international experiences. To reach specific demographic groups, international educators might send a target message (e-mail, post, flier, announcement, etc.) to the identified population and schedule small group (2-3 students) interactive sessions to review details of program, application, benefits, and outcomes. Students are likely to have better success when they feel part of a cohort. As community colleges continue their mission of providing open educational access, globally-focused initiatives such as the Scholar of Global Distinction Program must remain dedicated to reaching not just some but all demographics within the student population.

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