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## Developing a Study Abroad Program for Student Veterans

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Developing a Study Abroad Program for Student Veterans

Andrea Dame

University of San Diego

### **Abstract**

Universities across the nation are seeing an increase in student veterans who are taking advantage of the educational benefits offered for life after the military. These students are non-traditional and come from diverse backgrounds bringing in a unique perspective to higher education institutions (Howard and Brode, 2013). Since 2009, there have been more than 1.7 million Post-9/11 GI Bill users (Department of Veteran Affairs, 2017). This educational benefit has been instrumental in helping veterans and their dependents go to school and obtain a two or four-year degree but there is a 36-month limit to this educational benefit which reduces the time students have to explore new interests or discover new passions (Taylor, Parks, & Edwards, 2016). One sacrifice student veterans might have to make is the ability to study abroad due to barriers such as cost and time. This research sought to understand how I could develop a study abroad program for student veterans who are utilizing their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. This study is grounded in action research and aims to explore how studying abroad is impactful for a student veteran's collegiate experience and how studying abroad is different than serving abroad in a different country. Findings from this research will aid in creating a study abroad program for the School of Leadership and Educational Sciences at the University of San Diego for student veterans.

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### **Introduction**

Due to educational benefits such as the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill, student veterans have more access to college after their military service. According to the Student Veterans Association, “more than 800,000 veterans and family members use their G.I. Bill Benefits,” (Howard & Brode, 2013). Allison Hickey, Veterans Affairs Undersecretary noted, “around 73% of service members who will eventually separate from the military will use their educational benefits,” (Kirchner, 2015). With numbers increasing every year, there is a need for universities to retain and enhance the educational experience for student veterans to succeed. There are many programs that universities are starting to implement to become a more veteran friendly campus. Establishing student veteran organizations, student veteran centers, and programs like Project SERV (Supporting Education for the Returning Veterans) can help student veterans with the often-difficult transition from military to collegiate life (Semer & Harmening, 2015). While there have been initiatives taken across the country to make campuses more veteran friendly there are still areas that universities can work on to help this population take advantage of the educational experiences that a higher education presents. One area in particular is study abroad because many student veterans do not feel like they have access to these types of programs. There are multiple barriers to studying abroad for non-traditional students and for those who are on the GI Bill, this benefit only lasts thirty-six months therefore, putting a time limit on interests and educational opportunities such as internships and study abroad (Taylor, Parks, & Edwards, 2016). Universities around the country are starting to realize that many study abroad programs are not conducive for the variety of students who are coming into higher education these days. Efforts need to be made in order to meet students where they are at while also offering these educational experiences for those who are yearning to take advantage of them.

Using elements of action research as a foundation for this study, the first cycle consisted of interviewing multiple higher education professionals to understand their perspective of student veterans studying abroad and how this might impact their college experience. The second cycle, consisted of me taking two student veterans to the Lessons From Abroad Returnee Conference as a venue for them to reflect on the value of study abroad how this opportunity made an impact on them. After confirming the value that study abroad brings to student veterans, I established a partnership with a non-profit organization that would cover the costs of the program fees for student veterans. In the fourth cycle, I held a focus group for student veterans to get their feedback on the creation of this course and explored how studying abroad would look differently than serving abroad in another country. The fifth and final cycle was the creation of the study abroad syllabus for the course. This would allow the University of San Diego to have all of the tools needed when the course is set to pilot during the spring of 2019.

This research is intended to look at avenues that have not been explored yet to see how student veterans can better take advantage of study abroad opportunities. Through discussions with higher education professionals and student veterans, I explore the dynamic of the impact that studying abroad has on a student veteran's collegiate experience. Many student veterans have served overseas and have had international experiences in various countries but this research aims to explore the difference between studying abroad and serving abroad. Lastly, I wanted to create a project that had tangible results and explore the idea of establishing a partnership with an outside organization that would see the value in student veterans studying abroad and help cover the financial costs associated so that it would be less of a burden on the student.

### **Context**

The Veterans Center at the University of San Diego (USD) opened its doors in October 2014. The center was designed to serve students on topics regarding military benefits and financial aid as well as resources at USD and professional networking opportunities. The space is used for students to study, to hold meetings, and to be a place on campus that allows them to fully embrace their military identity alongside other students. The graduate assistant position started in the fall of 2017 and I later joined the team in January of 2017. In my role, I oversaw the coordination of events, the social media postings, and overhaul of the website.

In the spring, the center went through a re-branding phase and changed its name to the Military & Veterans Program (MVP). The center wanted to shift away from being named exclusively a place for student veterans but rather, to focus on the military-connected population (veterans, active duty, reserve, national guard, spouses, children and allies) at the university. I had a connection to the center and to the re-brand because I am a child of a military member who is utilizing the benefits of the G.I. Bill to go to school. Before working at the center, I only visited if I had questions regarding my educational benefits and I believe that a lot of people who are dependents like me do the same because they do not feel that the space is for them because they are not a veteran. However, I think that this direction of inclusivity will help students like myself feel as if they belong more in a military connected setting because even though we may not have served, our lives have also been impacted by the military.

Amidst the efforts of re-branding, the staff decided to go back and define the mission, purpose, and vision it has for student veterans and the organization. This gave me a unique opportunity to look at the center and see how it could better serve student veterans. “Student veterans enroll in colleges and universities for various reasons and research has shown that this

population has a lower sense of belonging and extracurricular engagement,” (Howard & Brode, 2013, p. 29). I observed students feeling like they cannot relate to their fellow students or to the culture of USD. Many student veterans are going back to school after a significant gap in their education and many are first generation students. This population has a higher chance of having families, having different life experiences, and having more responsibilities compared to their typical classmates. With the difficulty of student veterans relating to their classmates, these students tend to feel less inclined to get involved in extracurricular opportunities.

One extracurricular opportunity that many student veterans feel is out of their reach is being able to study abroad. One experience I had in particular within the center served as the inspiration for why I wanted to start this research project. There was one student who was seeking out information on how to study abroad while using his Post-9/11 GI Bill. This student was told that the benefit would cover the tuition of a course but all of the program fees would have to be covered by additional sources of funding. Study abroad is incredibly expensive and for many students it is not feasible as there are many who cannot afford this type of experience. This has been an issue that International Education offices within higher education across the country are trying to address with the addition of different types of programs, scholarships, and additional resources offered to students. I recognized that for the vast majority of student veterans, they would not realize that study abroad programs could be accessible if opportunities were to present themselves and thus this is the reason I took on this research project.

Like many other students, I had a very impactful study abroad experience that was immersive and enlightening on a global scale. There has been a reoccurring theme around study abroad and how although it is transformative it is often not accessible for most students. I was fortunate to have a six-month study abroad immersion experience in Italy. Those six months

tested me in ways I never could have imagined but taught me the importance of resilience, courage, and being self-aware. I developed tremendously personally and professionally when I was studying abroad and even though I know this type of experience does not happen to every single person who studies abroad, I see this as a valuable opportunity that many students would love to have if given the opportunity.

While in my role as a graduate assistant, I often struggled with maintaining a role of authority with many students who were older and had more life experiences. As someone who had indirect military experiences I am not proficient with military terms, bases, and various rankings. However, through building and maintaining relationships with the students I have learned a lot about life in the military but more importantly about what transitioning out of the military looks like and what students want out of this new phase of their life. I recognize that transition happens to every person as everyone goes through various stages of life. However, for student veterans transitioning from the military into a civilian context is a unique experience. These students are leaving the military system that provided a lot of structure. For those who are using their educational benefits, they are going straight into the challenging world of higher education.

In the fall of 2017, I left USD to go work at a nonprofit veteran service organization after working at the center for nine months. Although it was incredibly difficult to leave the students it was the right decision for me both personally and professionally. There were challenges however, as to how I was going to keep student veterans involved in my research project when I was not at the office every single day. Luckily, I had built up relationships that allowed for students to still be invested in the project and there was enough interest within the topic itself for

engagement. Even though I left the office, I took what I learned and wanted to continue to seek out ways on how to help student veterans create more educational opportunities for themselves. Although the challenges were evident, I know that working with this population and conducting this research project I was able to better understand the students' experiences in the military and after they exit the service. Their time in the service has made a profound impact on many of their lives and through my own understanding of this system it would better inform me on how to better support their time here at USD.

## **Literature Review**

### **Transition Theory**

Dr. Nancy K. Schlossberg created an adult development theory speaking specifically to adult transition and this framework is widely received by many educational professionals, but especially those who are working with student veterans. Schlossberg's theory is associated with adult development because people go through transitions all of the time whether that be in professional or personal settings. Veterans have a unique period of transition as they are exiting the service and re-entering into the civilian world and interacting with the rest of the society who may not be well versed with the roles of the military. According to Schlossberg, transition is when an event or a non-event happens and the result is a change in relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles ( 2006). There are three types of transitions that people go through and these transitions consists of *anticipated transitions* which are predictable events, *unanticipated transitions*, which are not predictable events, and *nonevents*, which are events that are expected to happen but do not.

In her latest work, *Counseling Adults in Transition: Linking Schlossberg's Theory with Practice in a Diverse World* (2012), the authors (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg), present that the theory is comprised of: the transition process, the integrative transition model and the 4 S system. The transition process is dealt with over time as an individual eventually moves from preoccupation with the transition to full integration. The concept of moving through transitions has three sets of phases, "moving in, moving through, and moving out (Schlossberg, 1989). The 4 S's otherwise known as, situation, self, support, and strategies are all factors that impact how someone deals with a transition. Looking at the situation, an individual can examine the factors that triggered the transition all the way through to the assessment or who is ultimately responsible for the event. (Goodman et al., as cited in Patton, Renn, Guido, Quaye, and Evans, 2016). The self-

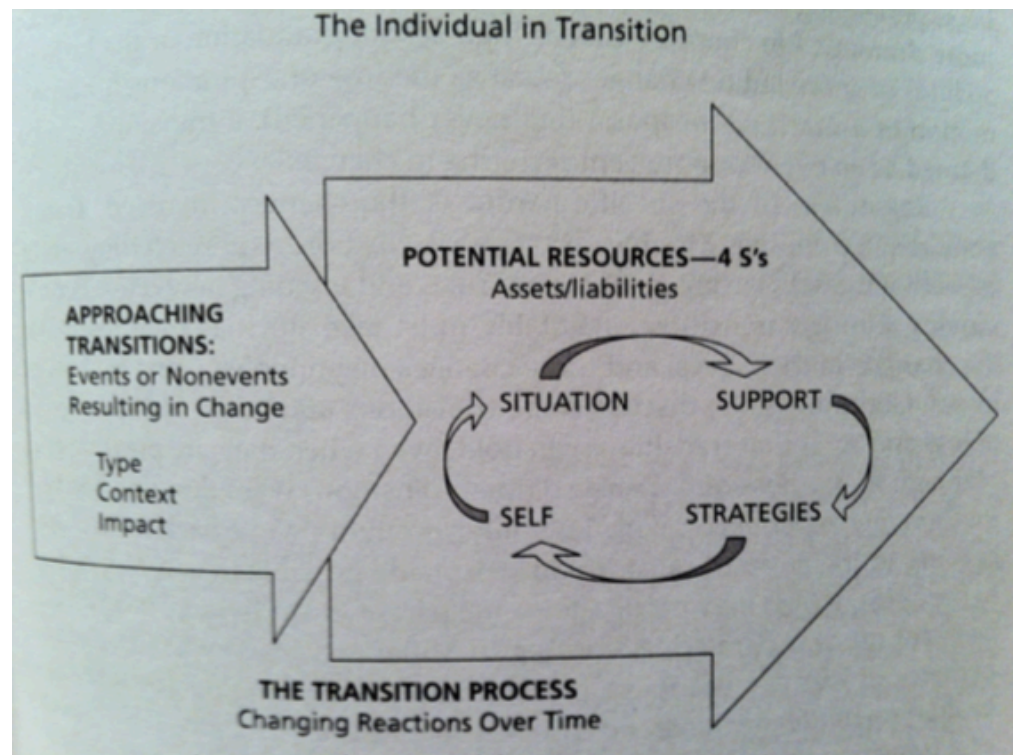


Figure 1: The Transition Process: (Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg, 2012, p. 39)

phase is looking at how someone views their life and their views are typically categorized into personal and demographic characteristics. The third S is looking at the social support that a person receives through the transition whether that be through family, friends, intimate relationships, the community, or various institutions that have interaction with the person. Lastly, strategies are given to an individual who are looking to modify a situation, control meaning, or

manage stress in the aftermath of the event ( Goodman et. al., as cited in Patton et al., 2016 ).

This graphic shows how the different types of transitions will occur resulting in some degree of change and how the 4 S's act as potential resources to assist with the transition depending upon the *type*, the *context*, one's relationship with the transition, and the *impact*, the level of how this transition changes one's daily life.

Schlossberg (2012) explains that, "Regardless of the specific natures of the changes involved, transitions require coping. Moving through a transition requires letting go of aspects of the self; letting go of former roles and learning new ones" (p. 40). Adults will react to the transition depending on the type of transition that occurs, their perceptions of the transition, and the impact that it has on their lives. This transition theory lays the foundation for understanding students specifically through the lens of the individual however, it does not cover the various other systems that make an impact on the individual as well.

### **Engaged Transition Theory**

A new theory regarding engaged transition theory development for student veterans is being created, evolving from an understanding of ecological systems theory originally developed by Urie Brofenbrenner (1979) while also incorporating Erik Erikson's (1968) stages of Identity, Intimacy, and Purpose from his psychosocial development model. I am privy to this theory because I work closely with two of my colleagues who are creating it. It is important to note that the areas of intimacy, identity, and purpose are developed significantly in the military as this system provides a structure for all of these areas to flourish but they are placed on a spectrum. The development of these areas are going to differ depending on the individual but because the military develops and reinforces these spaces they are also impacted significantly through the departure from this system as has been outlined by Derek Abbey. (Abbey, 2017) Transitioning

out of the military is a process in which a person's development is impacted by changes happening simultaneously in the various systems that surround the individual. The core of a human being is their identity, values, beliefs, sense of self, and various personal characteristics. The military makes an impact and continuously reinforces development within the contexts of identity, intimacy (meaningful relationships) and purpose (Abbey, Lasley, Dame, 2018) and are developed in parallel while in this compressed military system.

Taken from the transitional development literature, Joe Lasley (CCME presentation, 2018) compares this theory with the layers of systems to an onion. The first layer closest to the individual according to Bronfenbrenner is the Microsystem. This is where people and various aspects of the environment directly influence the individual and shape the development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, within the military this could be the unit commander, fellow unit members, or the person's spouse. Within this layer, the unit members in particular form strong bonds and create meaningful relationships and a shared identity around a common purpose.

There are often interactions between the system themselves which Bronfenbrenner explains is the Mesosystem. Within the military, a base or a ship that is deployed outside of the country may have an impact on a person's ability to speak to a spouse while reinforcing the interaction with certain unit members and enacting a strong sense of purpose shared between the members as they work toward a common mission.

On top of that layer is the Exosystem, which looks at organizations, policies, and local politics (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Within the military, there are cultural differences between the branches but there is the Uniform Code of Military Justice and a structured chain of command that influences a service member's experience of being in the military. Boot camp for example,

is a shared experience between all members no matter what branch they were in and from day one instills the sense of identity and a shared sense of purpose. The outerlayer is the Macrosystem, which looks at the cultural contexts such as national politics, laws, societal norms, etc. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Something that is more unique to the military than other professions is how adaptable families have to be in order to support the job. This type of career is not only how families maintain their livelihood but quickly becomes a lifestyle. For example, it is more accepted and understood for someone who is on active duty to move the family across the country for short periods of time compared to relationships that are outside of the military and this context. Relationships are formed, beliefs are held, and expectations are managed all by the culture of the military (Abbey, Lasley, Dame, 2018).

Taking all of these layers into account, the onion is fully formed with several tightly wound layers all influenced by the military. Now, when someone transitions out of the military the onion is spliced, like a bloomin' onion. All of the layers that used to be tightly wound together within this compressed system are now less connected, cohesive, and even have chunks that are missing. The influence that these compressed systems had on an individual's development (identity, intimacy, and purpose) often thrusts that person into a corresponding crisis of role confusion, isolation and stagnation. Lasley explains, "This is exacerbated by the delay or failure in becoming embedded into new systems. All of these crises, and the individual's way of making meaning of the world and their place in it, continue to be influenced (for better or worse) by all the layers of systems surrounding the individual despite whether or not new systems become embedded with the individual."

However, that is not to say that new systems do not have the capacity to make a positive impact on the individual's development because in theory, they do. Higher education

professionals must think of their students within this context and ask, how are we engaging the systems around the individual to promote the development of identity, intimacy, and purpose, for all of our military connected students? (Abbey, Lasley and Dame, 2018).

It is imperative that higher educational professionals are engaging with the individual and also engaging with the systems around the student in order to get that veteran to become more engaged. Showing this engagement will allow the student to take advantage of more opportunities and will encourage more involvement within the university setting. For many, study abroad is another type of transition for those who spend six months to a year and are expected to adapt to a new culture, a new life, all while having a limited support network. Awareness of these types of transitions and how they are affected will allow students to be successful as they process past experiences and how they are going to incorporate these experiences into their *new normal* because whether or not they were in the military or overseas, a person's perspective will change with the influence of a culture that they are living in.

### **Study Abroad**

Study abroad has been around for as long as higher education itself. When the first university was constructed in Bologna and later on in Paris, many students would travel to these countries to study and inherently gain a cultural appreciation through this "study abroad" experience (History and purposes of study abroad, 2012). The United States first established study abroad programs in 1879 at Indiana University and academic credits were associated with this cultural experience later on in 1890. Today, study abroad programs have many different models all usually bearing academic credit that range from immersion programs at universities outside of the U.S. to programs specifically created for students in the U.S., and short-term faculty-led programs. These programs offer students the benefits of developing an understanding

of global competence, an understanding of complex cultures, and an understanding of a student's identity (Rhodes, Loberg and Hubbard, 2014).

It is no secret that studying abroad is an expensive investment in a students' educational experience. With additional travel and program related fees/expenses on top of a students' tuition it quickly becomes very expensive and inaccessible for many students. "According to the joint study by American Council on Education (ACE) and the College Board, 50% of high school seniors indicated interest in study abroad during their college career," (Rhodes et al., 2014) There is a disparity between demonstrated interest and actual participation suggesting that there are barriers that students are encountering along the way that prevent them from participating. International education offices have struggled with trying to get more diverse students to engage in study abroad programs. Student veterans face multiple barriers when studying abroad as compared to the average traditional student. They often have families to take care of, bills to pay, work obligations, and various other responsibilities. After having multiple conversations with student veterans at the center, I realized that there was a consistent theme that many students thought that study abroad was not an option because they could not afford these experiences whether it be in time or money. It was difficult for them to imagine working around the aforementioned barriers. I wanted to start this project in order to increase access to study abroad opportunities for this demographic of students.

"There is a need to prepare students from the United States to be aware of global issues, to be culturally competent, and to be productive global citizens" (Alfattal, 2016, p. 921). It is evident that universities are encouraging global competency for their students because as the world is becoming more interconnected, students must be able to develop a cultural understanding in order to work with colleagues from many different backgrounds. "Colleges and

universities around the United States have made global citizenship a priority in student learning outcomes and mission statements, and study abroad programming is often considered to be a primary means for achieving this goal” (Dolby, 2008 as cited in Stebleton, Soria, and Cherney, 2013, p. 2). The use of study abroad programs are one way to prioritize globalization on campus as well as the increasing the number of international students on campus. Regardless of their method, universities are recognizing that it is important to graduate globally competent students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

For many students, six months is a significant time to devote to living in a completely different country and is not a feasible amount of time for many non-traditional students who have other responsibilities in life. Luckily, higher education institutions are attempting to address the gap in study abroad. “In response to the increasing demand for international opportunities, campuses have diversified their study abroad program models” (Stableton et al., 2013 p. 2). For those who cannot afford to study abroad whether it be due to the investment of money or time there are alternatives to six months or one year study abroad programs. Many colleges and universities have expanded past the typical academic and semester long study abroad programs and have expanded programs to include additional opportunities such as non-credit volunteer, internship and work abroad (Stableton et al., 2013, p. 2). These alternatives can be shorter in length and are more affordable options than the traditional longer study abroad programs that are offered.

### **Serving abroad vs Studying abroad**

Many student veterans have deployed to various countries across the world and are very well traveled. After talking to some student veterans, they were unsure as to why studying abroad would be beneficial for them, especially if they have served outside of the country and

have had an international experience, albeit a different one. One theme that I discovered through a few interviews with student veterans was their perceived lack of value added through study abroad if they had served outside of the country. For all students, this would be an additional course to take on top their regular classes. Through my interviews, I gathered that many would worry about how this would create additional work on top of their regular classes and how long the trip would take them away from their families and responsibilities at home. Because many of these students have served abroad, it seemed as if they would easily forgo this opportunity because they have already been overseas and think that the experience might be similar or this opportunity is wasted on them.

“A study abroad experience lets you expand your academic learning outside of the classroom, because you live what you are learning,” (Advocating for education abroad: benefits to students, 2009). Students have a different intention when they are simply studying abroad rather than being deployed overseas in a military capacity. When a service member is overseas, he/she is operating in a work context. In cycle four, during the focus group that I had with some student veterans, the difference between their past experiences and a study abroad trip was discussed. One of the students said, “Being deployed, there is a certain objective that you are there for and you get very little exposure to the culture like you would in an academic setting.” Having that work mentality allows service members to do their job but not to truly appreciate the surroundings that they are in. One of the other students explained, “No matter how much you want to break out of that and experience the local culture, you’ve been pumped with four hours of intelligence briefs before going into this area and so even when you are going in to have a beer, you’re constantly like ‘oh well I wonder which one of these guys are a part of the local gang xyz that we were told not to go to this bar because of.’ So, there’s always that underlying

structure and conditioning when you're going abroad in the military." The study abroad advisor from San Diego State University explained that the student veterans she worked with typically preferred going on faculty-led study abroad programs because these programs provided a lot more structure and comfortability since a faculty member would be leading the group. This type of study abroad program is called the embedded model which involves the students learning the regular topics of the course and then a study abroad experience is embedded into the class either during the middle of the semester, or more commonly at the end (Gaia, 2015). "Much academic and practical preparation is completed on the home campus and then the time abroad is spent highlighting cultural and historical sites, attending lectures, and interacting with the local cultures. These types of programs are not new, but have become increasingly common," (Gaia, 2015, p. 22-23). The majority of programs in the SOLES Global Center follow this embedded model and it seems that this type of program is beneficial for the students and the faculty members as the majority of the instruction is done domestically and is already part of their course schedule.

It is helpful when the faculty member is well associated with the area because in this setting students are invited to work with the instructor and to immerse themselves with the culture that they are learning about. Students are going through experiential learning as they are having direct access to the population that they are studying about. "Cultural immersion and direct interaction with the individuals who live in the studied culture is essential. The goal of cross-cultural understanding is prominent-even in relation to the disciplinary knowledge base" (Gaia, 2015, p. 23). In this model, the study abroad component of the class seems to provide more authentic exploration and reflection of the experiences gathered in the new culture rather than worrying about the content of the course being learned.

### **Post-9/11 GI Bill**

The creation of the Post-9/11 GI Bill has played a major role in the amount of students attending colleges and universities but especially for student veterans who are utilizing their GI Bill more than ever. This is a benefit that lasts a maximum of thirty-six months and pays for the tuition and fees of classes that the student is enrolled in. The GI Bill also give students a book stipend and a monthly housing allowance. This housing allowance is dependent upon where the student is enrolled for the majority of their classes and the allowance also fluctuates as cost of living is different in various areas across the United States (Post-9/11 GI Bill, 2017). This housing allowance is paid to the student at the beginning of the month but is only given if the student is enrolled in classes. Therefore, if a student is on summer break he/she will not be getting their housing allowance and students need to be responsible with the allocation of these funds. For many, the housing allowance is their main source of income so when it does not come in, it can cause a big strain (VA Benefits for Undergraduate Students Video, 2017).

The Post-9/11 GI Bill provides different support to beneficiaries based on whether the student is attending a private or public institution. This research was conducted at a private university. The following outline of the benefit includes the assumption that the student veteran is attending a private college and is 100% eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill. To receive full eligibility the service member must have served at least 36 months after September 11, 2001 (Post-9/11 GI Bill, 2017). For every decreased percentage, it is based on the number of months served after 9/11. If the number of months served after 9/11 is less than 36 months subsequently, the eligibility percentage decreases as well. So, for a student who is fully eligible for the GI Bill during the academic year of 2017-2018, this benefit pays approximately 23,000 dollars. These student can also receive extra funds through the *Yellow Ribbon Program* as long as they are not

currently active duty. Half of the funds are listed as gift aid by USD and this money is matched by the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA). (VA Benefits for Undergraduate Students Video, 2017).

For example, the GI Bill pays about 23,000 for the school year and then the *Yellow Ribbon Program* provides additional support. USD entered into an agreement with the VA to try and meet the uncovered tuition charges due to the high cost of tuition. For the 2017-18 academic school year, the *Yellow Ribbon* totals out to be about \$18,000 dollars for every student who has 100 % of their GI Bill benefits. USD subsidizes about \$9,000 and the VA matches the other \$9,000 to create the additional \$18,000 in addition to the original amount that the GI Bill gives of \$23,000. Due to high tuition prices, even with all of this extra support coming in undergraduate students are still left with a \$6,000 balance at the end of the spring semester. Many of them rely on various forms of financial aid to make up the difference (VA Benefits for Undergraduate Students Video, 2017). Although for attending a school with the price tag that is typically associated with USD, having a balance of only \$6,000 is a lot more manageable than the balances of some other students. As stated before, the Post-9/11 GI Bill does not pay for a student's study abroad program. The tuition will be paid for like an additional class but the program fee has to be paid for either out of pocket or through additional form of aid. However, the only exception to this rule is if a student is required to study abroad as part of their degree requirement. If the major requires an international experience, then it will pay for the program fees which consists of housing, excursions, and food in some cases.

For many of these students, going to the University of San Diego is a dream that is only attainable because of the GI Bill. This is especially true for those who went into to the military after having poor grades in high school. Jason, a student veteran remembers, "I remember the

night where I saw that admissions tab which means you got accepted, I think I cried actually. Just because I knew that I had reached the motherland,” (USD Gala Video, 2017). The ability to attend a private school and graduate debt free is both beneficial for the students and the school especially in a time where student debt is skyrocketing. These students automatically have a better return on investment especially as most of them use higher education as a stepping stone into the next career and new phase in life. Educational benefits like the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the supporting programs like the Yellow Ribbon have helped student veterans and their families around the nation achieve their dreams of pursuing higher education and making a better life for themselves.

### **Research Question**

Student veterans using their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits face multiple barriers in studying abroad with one significant barrier being financial concerns. Thus, the focus of my action research was to understand how I can develop a study abroad program for student veterans using their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits for little to no cost. Subsequently, I examined how the experience of studying abroad is different than serving abroad on a deployment. Also, what value does study abroad bring specifically to a student veteran’s collegiate experience? My research was aimed at understanding how to create a little to no cost educational opportunity for student veterans and how study abroad can help student veterans have a more holistic learning experience in college. Lastly, I want to explore the dynamic of how studying abroad is different than serving abroad especially as students are viewing cultures through a vastly different lens.

### **Methodology**

“Action Research is a form of enquiry that enables practitioners in every job and walk of life to investigate and evaluate their work,” (Mcniff, Whitehead, 2011 p. 7). Practitioners

everyday are enacting action research in their daily work, often without even realizing it. When people identify a problem, make inquiries on how to fix the problem, and make recommendations on how to fix what is happening they are using action research to solve issues that they might have in the workplace. Through using action research, I have been able to figure out how I as a practitioner can work creatively with structures in order to achieve more opportunities for my students. This creativity will help me in future endeavors and will show my students that there are always other options out there as long as one is willing to put in the work to find them. Within my action research I have been using Kolb's experiential learning specifically to guide my project. This theory is cyclical as it provides a "holistic perspective that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior," (Kolb, 1984 as cited in David, 2007). Within each cycle, there are four stages which consist of concrete experience followed by a reflective observation of the new experience, abstract conceptualization, and an active experimentation. To further expand, within concrete experience the participant is conscious of the activity that they are experiencing. Then, the participant reflects back on the experience that they just went through to come to the third stage of how the participant is trying to conceptualize what was observed and experienced. Lastly, the participant is taking what they have concluded and take what they have planned and actually experiment with it through this final stage. The information gained through these four steps was informative and was used as a foundation of knowledge for the next cycle of my action research project. The reflection of this action piece determined to be especially important as this helped determine what I had learned and what steps I needed to take for the next cycle especially as I anticipated that the data collected will not always go as planned.

As a practitioner, I firmly believe in experiential learning and by delving into an experience I can truly understand all of the facets of a problem. This epistemology is rooted in

the reasons of why I chose Kolb's Experiential Learning method to guide me through my research. Through the act of reflection, I was able to process not only my own thoughts in regards to the project but also the values, philosophies, and emotions of the students that I was working with. I was also able to learn more about this population through informational interviews from professionals and experts in this field. Their experience has informed my research significantly especially as I have limited time working with student veterans. Kolb created this model based off the belief that "knowledge is created through the transformation experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it," (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). This approach is a form of qualitative methodology therefore it is based upon a students' personal experience which on its own can have strengths but is hard to justify when trying to address an entire population of students. Within these cycles, I was able to gather a wide array of participants ranging from higher education professionals, student veterans, and people in prominent leadership positions within a nonprofit organization. I wanted to get the perspective of various people as I tried to piece together the importance of my research.

In my first cycle, I was able to interview higher education professionals from both a private and a public university which helped me understand how the institutions are similar and different when working with their students and approaching the topic of study abroad. My second cycle consisted of getting two student veterans who had already previously studied abroad and had two very diverse but impactful study abroad experiences. My third cycle consisted of presenting and discussing with the leadership team at the non-profit organization that I am partnering with. The perspective that these participants brought allowed me to think about the research on a systems level and how this partnership impacts multiple stakeholders involved. My fourth cycle revolved around getting the feedback of student veterans for this

potential program and their voices ranged from being very supportive to a healthy skepticism of how this class would benefit them in their future endeavors. All of my participants played critical roles in my research and truly shaped my project to how it is. Not to mention all of the informal conversations, feedback, advice, and recommendations that I received from individuals not directly related to the project. During all of my research, I wanted to protect the identity of all of the participants involved. From now on, all of those who participated in the study will be referred to by their pseudonym.

## **Cycles**

### **Cycle One**

For my first cycle, I talked to the subject matter experts within higher education. I interviewed professionals from the field of study abroad and within the veteran space. I believed that by talking to a few professionals within study abroad at the University of San Diego and San Diego State I would be able to better understand how these programs operate at two prominent higher education institutions within San Diego [see appendix A]. For this cycle, and all of the other cycles hereafter, I will be using pseudonyms for all of the participants involved in this research project to protect their identity. Keeping it close to home, I first spoke with Alexa from the University of San Diego's study abroad office. USD has created quite a reputation within the world of international education but specifically with study abroad. According to the USD website, the Institute for International Education's (IIE) 2017 Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange reported that USD ranks No. 2 for undergraduate participation in study abroad among the Top 40 Doctoral Granting Universities in the country (Blystone, 2017). The USD International Center offers a wide variety of study abroad programs to the general population of the school while mainly serving undergraduate students. One of the

barriers that student veterans come across when studying abroad is not being able to devote themselves to a six month or year-long program. I was interested to see how short-term programs operate at USD in particular. Due to USD's support of international education, students who take these programs actually get a break on tuition through their office. Alexa explained, "The university knows that students have to pay a program fee so they give us a break on tuition. They are so supportive of study abroad which is amazing." This can entice a lot of students as oftentimes; this subsidization can mean that the student is paying the same amount (sans travel) as they would be living in San Diego at the home campus.

Within the demographics of studying abroad, Alexa does not know who is a student veteran unless they self-disclose that information on their application or if they are using their benefits to help pay for a program. Within this past year, she worked with two student veterans who took part in a Semester at Sea program. Alexa and the student veterans were able to work alongside the program provider and ensure that everything was paid for. Luckily for these veterans, they were International Relations major so they had an international requirement that they had to complete. She said, "The two I was working with previously, I also had them loop in the veteran affairs office [Military & Veterans office] right away as well because without the veteran affairs office [Military & Veterans office] being in the loop and the know it wasn't going to happen so it had to be a collaborative effort." For those who cannot afford to take such long trips, short term programs seem to be the most ideal option. Students are still getting exposed to another culture without spending too much time away from responsibilities at home. Short term programs also usually have a faculty member leading the course and going with the students to another country. Although there are both positive and negative aspects of short term programs, it seems that the faculty interaction that is done on these types of trips cannot be beat. Alexa said,

“I think it’s a really neat bonding experience not only from student to student but student to professor. On campus, it’s a pretty distant relationship but when you are abroad, the professors are going on every excursion and you get to know each other much deeper than a student faculty relationship on campus.”

These are the bonds and the type of meaningful relationships that study abroad programs create because students and professors alike are getting out of their comfort zones leaving them exposed, vulnerable, and able to see each other as individuals who are going through a similar experience. Students find connections with their professors but also with the other students who are on the trip with them. Alexa shared, “I have heard a lot especially for transfer and some international students that it’s a chance to really get to know each other at USD.” The bonds that are created within study abroad programs is another added benefit, especially for those non-traditional students who may not feel like they connect or belong with the general population of students. Many student veterans feel disconnected from their peers but perhaps if they were to have experiences that bonded them together, they would be able to break down some of these barriers and relate to each more on an individual basis.

To get an additional perspective from a state-run institution, I decided to interview Katherine, a study abroad advisor from San Diego State University. She also worked at UC Santa Barbara and was willing to share some of her experiences there. About five years ago at UCSB, the student veteran population was starting to grow and the school hired a veterans’ coordinator. Katherine explained that their study abroad did a lot of outreach during orientation to explain to student veterans what types of programs that they could participate in for relatively low cost based off of their benefits. Many student veterans pushed back at the idea of studying abroad especially if they had already been deployed. She remembers one veteran in particular

when he said that he didn't want to go abroad with other traditional students, because he already experiences that here. He found community with other veterans who are his age and have gone through the same things. She remembers the veterans' coordinator at UCSB requesting shorter programs because that was a request that was expressed from many of the veterans who wanted to study abroad. At SDSU, students who are applying to study abroad are coded to show that they have the veteran tuition waiver called the CALVet fee waiver. This benefit waives tuition and fees at any California Community College, California State University, or University of California school. For many student veterans and dependents (spouses or children of a veteran) they pick a program that pays the tuition to San Diego State therefore, allowing them to use the CALVet fee waiver and get the tuition and fees paid for. From her experience, Katherine saw that student veterans as a whole were more attracted to faculty-led programs because of the structure they provide. They know that someone is planning the experience for them and that there are set dates that they know they have to pay. For many study abroad programs, the process is a little bit more ambiguous and Katherine said that student veterans in particular had a harder time with this lack of structure.

A constant theme that was prevalent during the first two interviews was the idea of a shorter-term study abroad program. As someone who was fortunate enough to attend a longer program, I was intrigued to see what types of students a short-term program attracts and why they are interested in going abroad for just a short amount of time. I interviewed Alaina, the Director of Faculty-Led Study Abroad Programs at San Diego State University to learn more about short-term study abroad programs. . Many students go through Alaina's office because the students she serves are studying abroad because it is required as part of their degree.

In fact, thirty-two majors at San Diego State require students to study abroad. This office is under the College of Extended Studies and the students sign up to go as part of a small group and get the unique experience of valuable one-on-one time with a faculty member. Held throughout the year, about eleven hundred students go through one of these faculty-led programs that range from one week to six weeks where students travel to different parts of the world. “Experts agree that one cause for the dramatic increase in the number of students who study abroad is the availability of shorter and less expensive programs” (Koernig, 2007, p. 210).

SDSU currently ranks number eight in the nation for all students studying abroad and Alaina believes that in the future it will be required for all students as long as there is financial support and more connections with the work force associated with this educational experience. This would entail crafting programs that meet the demands of specific industries and allow students to get work experience or globalized knowledge in a particular area. Due to the efforts of many universities putting these globalizing efforts at the forefront of education, these numbers will increase especially as international components are starting to become required by more academic programs.

As mentioned earlier, I am going to graduate school using my father’s Post-9/11 GI Bill. I was able to have an additional study abroad experience as a graduate student through the School of Leadership and Educational Sciences (SOLES) because it was required as part of my degree. Due to the fact that I had an international requirement, the GI Bill paid for my tuition of my course and all of the program fees associated with my study abroad program. Therefore, I was able to go to the International Leadership Association conference and travel to multiple countries for relatively free. Since international education is an integral component of the graduate programs at SOLES, the school has its own study abroad center. Therefore, I decided to

interview the SOLES global coordinator to see the dynamics of how this office works differently than the centralized office at the heart of campus.

Through our conversation, I learned that the International Center on the main campus works mainly with undergraduate students from a variety of majors while Thomas works primarily with master and PhD students that are all part of a degree program within SOLES. According to the USD website, “An international experience is required for every SOLES degree student, because classroom academics can’t replicate what happens when you cross borders-geographically, socioeconomically, or culturally” (International Requirement, 2018). An international student himself, Thomas sees how international education plays an important role in the professional world and preparing the graduate students that he works with for their future careers. He said, “When I came to this job I saw that this was another opportunity to help students with intercultural competencies in their profession. If you are going to be a teacher, how do you help different people from different cultural backgrounds? Most people are going to be working and living with people from different backgrounds and this is the reality of globalization. It is now a required competency in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” The professionals working in this industry understand how this work can change a student’s life in unimaginable ways. Thomas states this quite well when asked what the most rewarding part of his job was, “The most rewarding part is seeing people’s perspectives changed and [to hear them] say that it was a truly transformative experience. We have had some people want to go into international education and work with certain groups of people they would not have normally wanted to if they didn’t have this experience.”

Across higher education, it is often more typical for undergraduate students to study abroad because of a variety of different factors but oftentimes because they have the time to do

it. The majority of graduate students have jobs, families, and various obligations outside of school which is very similar to the same barriers that student veterans face. It is refreshing to see that the School of Educational and Leadership Sciences recognizes the importance of international education and how life changing these experiences can be no matter if a student is an undergraduate or on the doctoral level. Study abroad programs help students develop intercultural skills and understanding among students (Doyle, Gendall, Meyer, Hoek, Tait, Mckenzie, Loorparg, 2016) as well as knowledge, understanding, and skills needed after graduation (VandeBerg, 2007). Placing an emphasis on cultural competency and diversity will only strengthen a student's learning especially if they are working in professions that are looking to expand globally.

After some initial research with the Post-9/11 GI Bill, I found that it does not support study abroad programs unless study abroad is required by the degree program. For the vast majority of students at USD their programs do not have this international requirement. Therefore, I wanted to get some perspective on what options students are given if they decided to study abroad and have to pay for the program fees on their own. I decided to interview Noel, the School's Certifying Official (SCO). The SCO is in charge of certifying all of the benefits for the students who are using military affiliated educational benefits. The two most prominent educational benefits for student veterans are Vocational Rehabilitation and the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Noel is a liaison between USD and Veteran Affairs (VA) making sure that students receive their full benefit and that this benefit pays for the courses that they are registered in. The person in this position is the expert on all things related to VA policies and deals directly with how money is allocated to financial aid and student accounts-ensuring that student balances are maintained.

Through my interview with Noel, it solidified a lot of the knowledge that I already knew. Students could take out student loans, apply for various scholarships, or pay out of pocket to pay for the cost of the program fee. He said, “Right off the bat it’s important for the student to fill out a FAFSA for the university to allow for any type of assistance.” Those students who qualify for federal aid, the Pell Grant is an option and is considered “free money” because students do not have to pay it back but it could cover the additional costs of studying abroad. USD offers a trust loan for California residents who went to high school in California and allows students to take out money with 0% interest. On the federal level, he suggested students looking at the federal subsidized loans because there is no interest on these types of loans. There are a few specific study abroad scholarships for students but the majority of the ones listed on the International Center’s website are not associated with the institution. There is also not a guarantee that if students apply for the scholarships that they will receive any type of funding.

Student veterans have an advantage on other students because when they are applying for their FAFSA, the educational benefits are not counted towards their estimated family contributions (EFC). Therefore, students could be receiving their basic allowance for housing and also receiving scholarship money to cover the costs of the \$6,000 tuition debt that student veterans acquire during their spring semester because their GI Bill and the Yellow Ribbon program does not cover all of the costs. This debt on top of the additional program fee can make study abroad programs seem outside of their grasp. After further conversation with Noel around other forms of aid that students could look into, we started to discuss the idea of outside donors or organizations sponsoring student veterans to study abroad. Noel said, “If you know a veteran organization that would want to support students studying abroad, that’s an excellent way to cover the program fee.” Organizations like the American Legion or the Veterans of Foreign

Wars (VFW) were just two groups that were brought up during our conversation that might have resources they would considering giving to student veterans trying to have an international educational experience. Establishing a partnership of this kind would allow for the organization to invest back into veterans that they are trying to serve and would ultimately benefit the student.

### **Cycle One Findings**

Within this cycle, I gained a lot of information from the interviews I had with the five higher education professionals and got a first-hand look of their experiences, recommendations, and perspective of the importance of student veterans studying abroad. Although I spoke to five different professionals, many themes emerged from the results of my interviews and gave me a better perspective on what place student veterans have within the growing field of study abroad. “As colleges and universities place increased emphasis on internationalization efforts and productive global citizenship, numbers of American students studying abroad have been steadily and rapidly increasing” (Kutner, 2010, p. 767). The professionals within the international education field have seen this increase and are working harder than ever to be able to provide quality programs to a wide variety of students. One suggestion that many professionals can agree with is creating more short-term study abroad programs in order to expose students who have little to no international experience (Bruce, 2015). Short term study abroad programs are increasingly getting more popular because they cater to non-traditional students, they have a low time commitment, they are more affordable, and they allow students to participate in extracurricular activities (Gaia, 2015). Student veterans are ideally the perfect fit for shorter study abroad programs because they are still able to have an enhancing educational experience without spending too much time away from their obligations back home. Fortunately for international educators, short-term study abroad programs are gaining traction with a variety of

students and increasing study abroad participation in higher education. According to the *Open Doors* report published by the Institute of International Education (IIE), students who were studying abroad increased by five percent from 2013-2014 to 2014-2015 to approximately 304,467 students (United States hosts more than, 2017). Study abroad is only going to continue to increase as more students are interested in these academic opportunities. Hopefully, universities will continue to think of creative ways to respond with a variety of programs to meet the unique needs of students.

After carefully reviewing the notes that I kept from each other interviews I had, along with additional research I did, I found that study abroad offices could increase their outreach efforts to specific populations on campus that may not think study abroad is available to them. Student veterans are just one example, but there are others, for example if the study abroad office could hold a workshop on transfer orientation days explaining the variety of programs available, more transfer students might possibly seek out study abroad opportunities. For many students, the idea of study abroad is a pipe dream and it is the job of higher education professionals to expose all students to these programs if students are interested. By performing simple outreach and attending orientations for incoming, transfer, or other demographic of students this will reach those who did not believe that study abroad was even a possibility. These are the students who study abroad offices are trying to reach, especially as they are starting to offer different types of programs. However, it will be difficult to reach these students unless study abroad and other offices on campus are willing to collaborate to bring resources and knowledge to the students, not the other way around.

Lastly, if I were to develop a partnership with an outside organization to sponsor students studying abroad this would not only cover the program fee but would also establish a

relationship with the student veterans. This is typically a population that many organizations do not think to reach out to. Many veteran organizations tend to target working professionals or veterans who are in retirement age to participate in their programming. In my current role at TMF, I have been strategic in reaching out to student veterans because many of these students typically have more freedom and abilities to be a part of our foundation and be involved. I spoke previously about the need for student veterans to gain a new sense of identity, intimacy, and purpose in this new phase of life. By getting younger veterans involved in an organization with a cause that they are passionate about, it will lead these students to finding a sense of purpose that they might be lacking in their life.

I was fortunate enough that there were so many higher education professionals who were willing to give me their advice, input, and expertise on why studying abroad might be different for a student veteran than a traditional student. Their answers intrigued me so much that it led me to a desire to understand the value that student veterans put on studying abroad. I really wanted to see if this experience was impactful for them and if so, why? This question led me to my second cycle and new question: What does a study abroad experience mean for student veterans? I wanted to see if there was truly a difference between studying and serving abroad.

## **Cycle Two**

For cycle two, I wanted to talk to student veterans who had previously studied abroad to see if this experience made any type of impact on their collegiate experience. I wanted to see if studying abroad brought any value to their life or if it was just another way to travel the world. There are four undergraduate students who frequent the center and have studied abroad during their time at USD. For three out of the four students, it was a requirement for their major which allowed them to take advantage of the opportunity easier. At this point, all four students had at

least six months pass since they had their study abroad experience. Thus, I wanted to take the students to the *Lessons from Abroad Returnee Conference* up at Cal State Los Angeles in order to get them back in the study abroad headspace and to think about the ways that their study abroad experience made an impact on their life. This conference provides a space for all students-undergraduate, graduate, and PhD students who have previously studied abroad to process their experience and to make sense of it all. I was interested to get the students' perspective of the conference to see if it ultimately served the purpose of them getting back into the study abroad mindset. Other items that the conference provides is gaining a network of likeminded individuals, help with translation of skills acquired while studying abroad to a resume or job interview, and how to continue being a lifelong traveler whether that is through teaching, working, volunteer, traveling, or studying abroad again after graduation. The conference is held mainly for undergraduate students although it does seek to provide practioners within higher education opportunities for collaboration, professional development, and further research to be done within the field.

I ended up taking two out of the four student veterans who had previously studied abroad. Both of these students studied abroad through a faculty-led short-term study abroad program. I wanted the students to go through the entire conference and to try and unpack their study abroad experiences before interviewing them. I hoped that by being in this environment with other students who also studied abroad, it would help Jax and Nate to recall their own experience and what it meant for them. I was with both of the veterans for the entire day and took some observational notes as the conference progressed. Although I know that this was not something that either student would normally be a part of, I thought that it was interesting how they interacted throughout the conference. Jax was dressed in business casual attire whereas, Nate

was wearing khaki shorts and rainbow flip flops. Jax explained that he was trying to network and to learn more about potential career opportunities since he was majoring in international relations and a conference like this aligned more with his career goals after he graduates. Nate however, was studying engineering and at that point was already on the job hunt seven months before he was set to graduate. During the conference, Jax took advantage of networking opportunities that presented themselves whereas Nate tended to stick to himself and even skipped a few of the sessions altogether, choosing to stay outside instead. After the keynote speaker and the discussion that ensued, Nate voiced his concerns for the outlook that many of the students had in regard to their study abroad experience. He thought that the conference seemed more intent on convincing people to take advantage of more study abroad opportunities rather than actually unpacking what had already occurred in their previous study abroad experience. Nate said, “They focused more on the superficial aspects of it rather than the deep aspects.” I talked to Nate throughout the conference about his study abroad experience and he explained the transformative experience he had when he was abroad.

Nate studied abroad during the intersession of 2017 and went on a faculty led trip to India. Studying politics and religion in contemporary India, Nate spent three weeks while traveling to various cities within the country. For Nate, his study abroad experience made a transformative change within him. “I was doing something so bizarre that I never imagined I would do. Something about that [experience] made me feel really disconnected from the person that I was and it changed the outlook on who I want to become.” This is a common experience for students who attended study abroad. In fact, one of the many benefits that study abroad brings is a greater awareness of one’s self and this sense of connection to something that is

bigger than themselves. Nate has continued using travel as a means of exploration and has been to twenty five countries since that study abroad experience.

Jax, the other student who I took the conference also spent three weeks in a faculty-led program during the winter intercession and he studied in Morocco, Austria, and Spain. For Jax, studying abroad enhanced his college experience especially as he was able to see the differences between his experience of being deployed compared to his study abroad experience. He said, “Having the opportunity to study abroad, I didn’t think it would be that impactful but just visiting Morocco impacted me [because] I underestimated the country prior to going there. I thought, ‘Oh no this is going to be scary because it’s still a transitioning and developing country’ but I got to see that and experience it in person and it allowed me to tie that into real world relevant issues that we can all make a change.” He also mentioned how both being deployed and studying abroad helped him become more culturally aware as he navigated various countries and has helped him tremendously as he pursues his degree in international relations. Although the conference was not everything Nate thought it would be it did prove to be beneficial for Jax as he took more opportunities to network with various people there and inquire about what the future would look like in a field like this. Jax also prioritizes his family when looking at potential opportunities in this type of career path. However, his story is a perfect example of how going on a short-term faculty led study abroad program a student can still have an impactful international experience even with a family at home.

### **Cycle Two Findings**

After additional conversations with Nate and Jax, I was able tell the planning committee that our students wanted more facilitated opportunities to unpack their experiences of studying abroad. Since both students gained valuable skills through their international experiences; mainly

cultural and self-awareness. However, they were not given the opportunity to unpack the experiences, and to help the students speak to the skills gained through their study abroad experience which could easily be transferrable to other aspects of school or work.

Both students expressed the impact that study abroad had on them in terms of their personal development and it furthered my belief that this type of experience is valuable for all students but especially for student veterans. At this point, I wanted to try and find a partner organization that would cover the costs of the program fees so that students could study abroad for little to no cost at all. This would be the only way that more student veterans would take this opportunity especially if it was a short-term faculty led study abroad program. Many of the barriers that they have, one significant barrier being financial, would be eliminated if an organization would sponsor this type of program. During the time I was doing my research, I was hired to work for a veteran service organization that was already doing similar work for veterans. Therefore, as a result of the data I gathered from cycles I and II, I felt confident to propose a valuable opportunity for my organization. I decided to take advantage of this opportunity because student veterans are an untapped population that our organization had not worked with much in the past.

### **Cycle Three**

After gathering the data from cycles one and two, I realized that student veterans would be the most susceptible for participation in a short-term study abroad program and that these study abroad programs bring value to a student veterans collegiate experience as indicated by student veterans themselves. I then realized that I would have to find additional forms of funding to pay for the program fees that the Post-9/11 GI Bill would not cover. In this cycle, I identified where I would get this additional source of funding through the founding of a partnership. The

*Travis Manion Foundation* (TMF) is a non-profit veteran service organization that empowers veterans and family members of the fallen to strengthen character in future generations. We provide mentoring opportunities for veterans and survivors who are interested in specifically working with youth. In addition, TMF also offers other programs that support those two demographics as well as the general public. We hold 9/11 Heroes Run that are national 5k races held around the anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup> to honor the first responders, service members and civilians that have lost their lives on or after that day. We also hold veteran transition workshops and national weeks of community service where our volunteers go out into their communities and try to make a positive impact through acts of service. More importantly to this research, TMF currently holds survivor and veteran expeditions where participants will spend up to seven days building community, participating in a community service project, and experiencing a new culture. These expeditions are held domestically for veterans and both domestically and internationally for survivors. For survivors, these trips are empowerment programs that concentrate on how the surviving family member will continue to honor and carry on the legacy that their loved one left. The first veteran expedition was held this past year in Colorado where service members were encouraged to unpack their military experience and then to think of ways that they can continue to serve in different aspects within their communities and new phase of life.

I thought that in combination with my project, the current expeditions could be expanded so that student veterans from a university, would go on a veteran leadership expedition to be offered internationally. This is beneficial for all of the parties involved for a multitude of reasons but mainly because 1) USD could offer an additional study abroad program and get more student veterans involved, 2) TMF would be able to get more veterans participating in their

expeditions and give these veterans exposure to their foundation, and lastly, 3) the students get a free international experience. Through this study abroad program, undergraduate student veterans would take a leadership class through the Department of Leadership Studies in SOLES and then as part of the class, the students would study abroad for one week and TMF would cover the cost of the student veterans' study abroad expenses just like the organization does currently with the veteran expeditions. This time though, it would happen on an international level and the class/study abroad experience would be open to both student veterans and civilians. Needless to say, I was very excited about this potential partnership.

Within our work with the youth, the TMF curriculum is centered around character and leadership. The organization's mission is to try and educate the youth of the importance of being someone who lives a life with character. Oftentimes, those people who are living their life with these inherent values tend to make a positive impact in their communities which is something that our organization likes to encourage. We are consistently asking our middle to high school students how they are going to demonstrate this character trait and live their life by it. Since our model is associated with trait based leadership we have a lot of conversations with students of what leadership looks like and who can become a leader. Veterans are well versed in trait based leadership theory because it is used a lot in their training and is integrated throughout the military. Therefore, I wanted to create a course within SOLES so that student veterans would become more knowledgeable not only about trait based but also other leadership theories. It is important that we are equipping our facilitators working with our youth, with the academic side of leadership. Working within SOLES was a lot easier than trying to do this out of another university because as a current student, I have pre-established relationships with many faculty. I had a previous conversation with Cynthia, Director of the Leadership Minor before pitching my

presentation to TMF. I wanted to make sure that I would have the support of the minor since it would be a course specifically for undergraduate students and it would also be open to minor students. Fortunately, Cynthia was very supportive and gave her approval for me to put a syllabus together. Also, since SOLES has their own Global Center, and I had recently gone on my own study abroad trip, I knew how the process worked and I figured it would be easier to go through this office rather than the International Center at the main campus.

I went into this situation realizing a few things. First, the woman who runs these expeditions has been with TMF since the beginning and has been running the expeditions since their inception. Taylor is the manager of expeditions and is the expert on all things related to expeditions. She holds a lot of formal and informal authority within the organization because of her work in the expedition space and because she was the third employee to work with the foundation. Trying to get more background on her work style, I found out, through talking to others, that she is the expert on all items related to the expeditions and is used to working alone in this capacity. With those thoughts in mind, I was unsure how she would perceive this project or if she would view me as a potential threat encroaching into her area of expertise. I was not sure how receptive she would be since I do not work within the expedition space whatsoever and have limited knowledge of the pre-existing programs. I perceived that there might be a boundary since I would be treading into the space that she manages all by herself. This situation seemed especially precarious because my formal role within TMF is completely unrelated to her scope of work. I decided that in the interest of the project it would be best to tell my immediate supervisor about it first. My boss was very supportive of the project and gave me a lot of great feedback, ideas, and support to bring it to our Chief Operating Officer. Jason, the C.O.O. is the number three person in charge of the organization. I was nervous about asking for this meeting as I

battled my internal fears and understood the magnitude of asking for a meeting with someone who holds a significant amount of formal authority over the organization, whereas I was just a newly hired employee. With this in mind, I also recognized that I am holding my own informal authority as I am the researcher who designed this project and the subject matter expert. Yet, this being my first full time job, I have pretty high hopes that if I navigate the waters successfully that I could eventually expand the work that I am doing into a career. Therefore, I was quite nervous and I felt like I had a lot to prove especially as I was bringing in this new initiative.

I gave my initial presentation to Jason, the COO which included an overview of my Action Research project, the importance of study abroad, the details of the program and the benefits to all of the participants involved. After some discussion and a request for the budget of how much this type of program would cost, he gave the green light for me to present it again but this time wanted to expand the conversation to those more involved in the expedition space which would include the aforementioned manager of expeditions, the Vice President of the foundation, and the Director of National Engagement.

<b>Presentation 1 with Participants</b>	<b>Presentation 2 with Participants</b>
Andrea (the Researcher)	Andrea (the Researcher)
David (Immediate Supervisor)	David (Immediate Supervisor)
Jason (Chief Operating Officer)	Jason (Chief Operating Officer)
	Alexa (Vice President)
	Taylor (Senior Manager, Expeditions)
	Tatum (Senior Director, National Engagement)

After taking LEAD 550, I knew how important it was to make allies especially with the one person I would be working closely with if this project got approved. After gathering the availability of all participants involved and setting the meeting time, I sent an additional email that included an overview of the project to Amanda, the manager of the expeditions. I wanted her to be on the same page and have a clear understanding of what I would be proposing. After some initial emails, I called her so that we could talk more in-depth about what I would be proposing. I wanted to get her support and feedback on how we could move forward if the project got approved. It was a successful conversation but I was still cognizant of the boundaries and the roles that we were both upholding. I then, presented the project to the Vice President, the Chief Operating Officer, the Director of National Engagement and the Manager of Expeditions. I expanded upon my original presentation to include the cost of the program, the course overview, the value of study abroad from my cycle two interviews and why the partnership between the University of San Diego would be beneficial, and the TMF objectives that this program would meet. Ultimately, the project received approval and I was free to start creating the curriculum for the course and to figure out the logistics with Taylor. I was very appreciative of the opportunity to be able to present my idea to established leaders within the organization. In my opinion, this was the cycle that was going to make or break my entire project. A lot was riding on getting the approval from the leadership team to go ahead with this project because finding funding for this project was crucial. Unsurprisingly, I had a lot of relief at the conclusion of the proposal because this project received the green light and the reality that this idea might actually come to fruition did not hit me until that moment.

### **Cycle Three Reflection**

In this cycle, it was important for me to think about the relationships between all participants involved. This level of thought and reflection allowed for me to realize the positive and negative outcomes for all of the stakeholders and this level of thought provided more depth when came to me giving the proposal to the leadership team at TMF. I was able to justify why this program would be a mutually beneficial partnership for all of the stakeholders involved. For the student veterans, it is beneficial because they would be receiving a study abroad program for little to no cost and would be taking a class based around leadership. For USD, these non-traditional students would be diversifying the field of study abroad and would be additional participants added to their goals. Lastly, TMF would be getting engaged volunteers that would be going through their programming, a partnership with an established university, and would be diversifying their expedition options.

Because I had to present the proposal idea, I took a lot of time and thought about what questions people might have raised so I already had potential solutions or reasoning to a few of their concerns. I also realized how dependent I am on making sure we get the funding to be able to pay for the trip or else it could not happen. Lastly, I better understand the importance of making sure that this project is mutually beneficial for all parties involved. All of the leaders I spoke with indicated it was not enough for me to point out the benefits to them, rather they wanted to make sure that the program and participants aligned with their mission and values. This cycle showed that an organization like TMF will give a project like this approval as long as there is room in the budget and it helps them meet their goals of the organization. I knew that this would be the most challenging cycle of my research so I was really grateful that they were able to see how important and impactful this project would be. Now that I had approval from Cynthia at USD and the leadership team at TMF I wanted to bring my project back full circle. So, the

next step was to get the input of other student veterans to see if they would even want this kind of experience and if so, what they would want this course to look like.

#### **Cycle Four**

I collaborated with Adrienne, the new Veteran Student Services Coordinator and a student veteran to discern the best timing for a focus group. Collectively, we decided on a Friday since a lot of students do not have classes that day. I put up some flyers in the center and asked for it to be featured on some on the social media pages of the Military & Veteran Program [see appendix B]. Lastly, I sent emails out to some of the students I used to work with in the hopes that I could leverage some of my pre-existing relationships [see appendix B]. I also went to the Military & Veteran center a few days prior to the scheduled date in order to talk to some of the new student veterans who have frequented the center after I left. Even with these outreach efforts, three students participated in the Focus Group. The questions were designed to better understand a student veteran's interest in studying abroad, some challenges they might face, and how they view how studying abroad might be different than studying abroad. Additionally, I wanted to explore and get input of what this study abroad course should look like-including what countries they would be interested in going to and how the class would be set up [see appendix C]. Three students came to the focus group. I later learned after talking to some others that a lot of engineering students have classes on Fridays and the time frame of when I had the focus group coincided with their class. The three students who did come however, were able to stay to answer all of my questions and gave me a lot more insight into their perspective of studying abroad.

The three participants responded based on their prior military experience and their current lives at school and home. Therefore, to get some context of who I was speaking to, Daniel is an

engineering major, whereas the Chris and Aaron are business majors. Daniel and Chris are married with a child at home and Aaron does not have any kids but lives with his significant other and their dog. Daniel was in the Navy and Aaron was in the Marines but Chris is actually still a reservist in the Navy. There are reservists within USD who frequent the center but it is rare compared to the typical student veteran who completed their time commitment and then got out of the military. For this focus group, I wanted to get their perspective of the barriers they come across with studying abroad, if studying abroad would enhance their college experience, how studying abroad is different than being deployed, and ultimately, their thoughts about the course.

Although all three students seemed excited about the course, they also explained to me that when a student is over 12 credits the amount of credits after that full-time status does not matter because it is all still the same charge of tuition. Therefore, they were all curious as to how much work they would be taking on since it would be an additional course on top of their classes required for their major. Chris said, “As long as it doesn’t interfere with actually finishing my business undergrad. I’m totally down to do extra classes but keeping on the yellow brick road is priority number one.” Daniel appreciated the structure of the course but especially appreciated that it would be for little to no cost to him personally as he explained, “A lot of engineers like myself don’t get these opportunities because of monetary restrictions, family restrictions, etc., and even if one is able to give it up, like my family has encouraged me to study abroad but coming up with that extra money on top of paying for the bills is very difficult.” Oftentimes, study abroad has a negative stigma in that the students who are participating just want to go travel the world and party. Dedicated courses like this, is one way to combat this stigma especially with students who will take this educational opportunity a little more seriously as it is part of a class. Andy said, “I think that a veteran going abroad will have a respect for it on a

whole other level. I've been on deployment before and we weren't able to have these liberties or educational opportunities like we do now they [student veterans] are really going to soak in the experience and be grateful for it." Having a course specifically dedicated to leadership will also be impactful for the student veterans but then also the civilians taking the class. Many of the students will be minoring in leadership so they will bring potentially some prior knowledge to this course but then also to unpack how people personally view leadership, how the military views leadership and how different societies and cultures view leadership. When asked if leadership would be an interesting topic to learn about Chris said, "I think having a more academic approach would be valuable for veterans.... helping people who are indoctrinated into certain military cultures to unwind of that and to learn how to be a leader in the civilian world as well." I hope to be able to provide a course where student veterans can unpack their military experiences and how it relates to their own style of leadership alongside the civilian students who will be figuring out what leadership means to them as well.

Since I only had three participants for the first focus group, I decided to have another one in the afternoon to be accommodate for those students who had class in the morning. I was able to get two additional students to sit down with me for this second focus group. Both participants were student veterans and actively involved in the center and at USD. Ben is the President of the Student Veteran Organization, an engineering student, who was in the Coast Guard with a family at home. Jess is a work study student, a communications and economics major, who was in the Navy, with a family at home as well. Our conversations were very similar to that of the first focus group as the questions were the same. However, within this focus group Jess and Ben discussed the logistics related to marketing the course. They explained that when students first transfer into USD there is more flexibility with classes because often students are trying to find

classes just to make sure that they are full-time students. Ben said, “My first semester here, I struggled to find classes to fill my schedule to meet the full-time requirements and the school of engineering requirements.” Therefore, if I were to explain this program early on to students considering USD or freshly admitted, I could gather some interest early on and students could have plenty of time to build this course into their class schedule. This would ensure that I would not be adding more stress to a student’s schedule since they will already have a full course load on top of taking this class. Jess summarized this perfectly when she said, “I think a way to avoid that if it were to be offered to transfer students-to give in to them right away. If they complete the course early on then as they are progressing through their terms here it is easier to manage.” Informing students of this opportunity early on will be key if students are going to be able to include this course as they build out the next few years at USD.

#### **Cycle Four Findings**

Several themes emerged as a result of the focus group. I realized that the students who participated are all very excited about this opportunity given that it would work out with their course progression plan and family obligations at home. For all of the students involved, this seemed to be their major concern when discussing potentially being involved with this class. These participants grasped the idea that studying abroad would be different than their experience serving abroad and spoke of the impact that it would make on a student veteran’s collegiate experience specifically. They all asked when the course would be happening and seemed excited about the prospect of taking this course especially as this class would be designed to have influences of the military in it especially as we will address the trait-based leadership that they had exposure to in the military and go beyond that, speaking to other applicable leadership theories.

The student veterans who participated in these focus groups gave me a lot to think about as I was starting to design the syllabus for this course. From their conversations, I realize that I need to make this course intellectually stimulating without creating additional work and time outside of class that oftentimes student veterans do not have. Ultimately, I want to create a course that will make an impact on their educational experience here at USD and only to assign work for the sake of learning, not for the sake of doing.

### **Cycle Five**

With the awareness of all of the data I had collected, I needed to create a syllabus that incorporated various leadership theories, involved a service project component, had the study abroad experience, and create a space where students could address the military/non-military boundaries as well as explore their own view of leadership. I continue to work on the syllabus closely with Beth a Doctoral Graduate Assistant in Leadership Studies at USD. David, my supervisor and the appointed facilitator of the course has also been instrumental in assisting with the course structure and design [see appendix D]. Once the syllabus is completed, Cynthia will review it and then it will get passed to the department faculty for approval. The final step is to seek SOLES curriculum committee approval. With their approval, the course will be ready to go into effect and the pilot study abroad program will start (if all things go as planned) in the spring of 2019. With this project, I really wanted to walk away with something tangible and with the creation of the syllabus and this pilot program I think I might have done so.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study. Although often it was discouraging, I tried to concentrate on the data and look at the themes that presented themselves. During cycle two, my sample size of students who have previously studied abroad was very low. The cycle itself was a

big commitment for many of the student veterans. I was asking them to devote an entire Saturday to travel up to L.A. and be a part of a conference that they did not even know existed. Two of the four students could not attend because of scheduling conflicts therefore, only two students attended the conference. Although I still think that the cycle was beneficial, I am curious if the time commitment was not as long or if the conference was not as far away, I could have gotten the other two students to be a part of it. I appreciated the two students who were able to attend but I would have loved to get additional perspectives on how the conference was useful and the impact/value that studying abroad had on them.

For cycle three, I recognized that one limitation was the fact that I am trying to partner with a non-profit organization. Currently, our organization is looking at the budget for the next fiscal year and we often hear that budget cuts may need to be made, and this may impact our ability to move forward with the course of due to lack of funding. Since we are dependent upon the good will of others, I recognize that at any moment this study abroad portion for the veterans could not be funded by TMF due to needed budget cuts. This would severely impact my project so it is important to keep this in mind especially as I continue to look at more sustainable revenues of money if this study abroad program is going to continue in the future.

For cycle four, I was limited in my recruitment efforts because I do not work at the Military & Veterans Center anymore. When I went back a few days prior, there were a lot of new faces and I had not established the rapport with their students like I did with the students who were there when I was, therefore, they were less inclined to be interested in coming to the focus group. In the future, in order to avoid this issue, I think if I were to spend more time at the Military & Veteran Center and talk to more students about the project I would create more buy in and have more student participation. Also, reaching out to students individually could potentially

help as students would find it harder to say no if personally asked. I also ended up picking a day and time per a student veteran's recommendation but it ended up on a day and time when a lot of the engineering students had class. Therefore, I had to offer a second focus group in order to get additional student perspective but even with the second focus group I was still talking to students who I already previously knew. There weren't any new student veterans who I did not previously know involved in this project and I think that I might be limited in not hearing their voice or perspective. Also, the fact that I had two focus group was a limitation because I was not able to have students bounce ideas off of each other as much as I would have originally liked because the groups were so small. I also only got the perspective of five student veterans versus the hundreds that could potentially be interested in a course like this.

**Recommendations**

When looking at study abroad options specifically for student veterans, I have learned so much in what barriers they come across, what types of program would be easier for them to participate in, and what the experience would mean to them if they had the opportunity to take part.

- 1) My first recommendation for any program that is trying to provide more study abroad opportunities is to offer more short-term faculty-led study abroad programs because it is an affordable option for all students but specifically for student veterans. With faculty-led programs, the home university is in charge of making all of the arrangements and with the faculty member being present, it automatically adds structure to what the students will be doing in the other country. Structure is something that many student veterans have come to appreciate out of their time in the military. Also, because the course is shorter the expenses are not as high and for those students who have obligations at home, three weeks is a lot easier to do than six months.

- 2) My second recommendation would be to offer orientation outreach to student veterans during transfer days to let them know of their study abroad options. Many of these students when they hear about study abroad they automatically think that it is unattainable and more catered toward the traditional student. Most of them will not seek out other study abroad programs that might be more suited for them. Therefore, if representatives of the study abroad office were to come to the transfer days they would be able to reach a demographic of students who are typically not known for studying abroad. Oftentimes, offices claim to be student centered however they rely on the student to come to their office to receive resources and support but if offices started outreaching to students more would feel inclined to go to offices like this.
- 3) My third recommendation is to establish a partnership with an outside organization to cover the cost of the program fees. Within these partnership conversations, it is important to plainly state the expectations of both parties and make sure that certain needs are being met. Also, that the program fees/additional costs to be covered would be under the form of a scholarship for student veterans willing to meet the requirements of the organization. The scholarship allows a clean transaction between the organization and the school and it ensures that the organization is getting dedicated members who have bought into the organization after the course and the study abroad trip has concluded.
- 4) My fourth recommendation is designing the course so that it aligns with the organization but that it stays true to its academic mission. This course is about leadership for a multitude of reasons but one of those big reasons being because TMF teaches leadership to the youth and our facilitators must be knowledgeable about what they are talking about. Although TMF teaches specifically trait-based leadership, opening the class to

other leadership theories will strengthen student's understanding. Also, the student veterans taking this course are already taking a full schedule of classes so for many of these students, taking this class is just for fun. I would recommend designing the course more like a seminar style so that students can show up and the majority of the learning for the class is done together within the confines of the classroom.

- 5) For the GI Bill to pay for the tuition of the class, the course must be open to both student veterans and to civilians. The educational benefit will not pay for a class if the only students who are in the course are veterans. The class must be comprised of at least 20% of civilian students for it to count and to be paid for by the educational benefit. It is important that the school pays attention to the ratio of student veterans-civilians or else the tuition of the course will not be paid for.
- 6) Lastly, this course could be counted toward fulfilling a required class under the USD course curriculum that students have to take in order to meet their graduation requirement. If students were able to use this course to satisfy a requirement they already have, this would alleviate a lot of stress and worry of taking on additional coursework.

### **My Learning**

Throughout the course of this project, I have realized how important it is to be creative, especially when working around a confusing system like the Department of Veteran Affairs. For many professionals working with student veterans and for many veterans themselves, they have been too quick to let the barriers of study abroad inhibit them from taking advantage of this educational opportunity. I have seen the impact and the value that study abroad has on a person's professional and personal life and the willingness of outside organizations to help fund these types of experiences. It just takes people who believe in the power of study abroad to see that it

can be used for the enhancement of a student veteran's collegiate experience. When student veterans are transitioning out of the military and into higher education, they often use school as a way to gain more knowledge, skills, and training for their next career path. What student veterans might not anticipate is that when they are leaving the military system they can oftentimes lose their sense of identity, lose intimate relationships they have formed with their fellow service members, and lose a sense of purpose. Higher education is an opportunity for a new system to reengage with these students and to have conversations with students to explore who they are now, what they want out of life, and what groups they want to be a part of now. Many student veterans do not even know that they need to have these conversations which is what makes them especially important. Study abroad is one way that student veterans can engage in these conversations not only for personal reflection but for cultural awareness and to see that they are a part of something bigger than themselves.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Study Abroad Professionals**

1. What is the relationship between the Study Abroad office and the student veterans on campus?
2. Do you have a lot of interest from student veterans trying to study abroad?
3. What is the percentage of student veterans who have studied abroad?
4. What have student veterans taken away from studying abroad that might be different to a more traditional student?
5. What challenges have you seen with student veterans trying to study abroad?
6. How are faculty-led study abroad programs created and implemented?
7. What are the positive and negatives to faculty-led study abroad programs?
8. How do you think student veterans might benefit differently than a traditional student studying abroad?
9. How do you think a student veteran studying abroad might be different than them serving abroad (deployed)?

\*Follow up questions as needed

#### **School Certifying Official**

1. What are the financial aid options for students trying to study abroad?
2. What are the USD specific scholarships for studying abroad?
3. What is the criteria for eligibility for the Pell Grant?
4. Do students claim their Post 9/11 GI Bill educational benefit on their FAFSA?
5. What are the qualifications for merit based scholarships?
6. Have you ever seen organizations or outside scholarships pay for the program fees of a study abroad program?

\*Follow up questions as needed

#### **Students who went to the Lessons from Abroad Returnee Conference**

1. Where did you study abroad and what class did you take?
2. What were you hoping to get out of the conference and what was your actual takeaway?
3. How do you feel like you have changed after studying abroad?
4. What is the difference between studying abroad and serving abroad (being deployed)?
5. How do you think a student veteran benefits from studying abroad differently than a traditional student?
6. What are some barriers for student veterans trying to study abroad?
7. Do you think that the university makes studying abroad accessible for student veterans?
8. How do you think studying abroad has enhanced your college experience?

\*Follow up questions as needed

## Appendix B

### Email Announcement

Hi everyone,

I am writing this email to inform you of a research project that I am conducting to get student veterans more involved in study abroad opportunities. I am conducting a research project that will serve to understand student veterans' motives to study abroad and allow students the opportunity to give direct feedback of what they would want a military friendly study abroad program to look like.

This focus group is happening this Friday, March 16th from 10:30-11:30 am in UC 220. Please see the attached flyer.

Through, interviews, observations, a focus group, and creation of a course syllabus I will be tracking how other universities work with student veterans studying abroad as well as working alongside professionals and students at USD to design a study abroad program. If you would like to participate, please respond to this email that you are agreeing to this research study.

For more information or questions, please feel free to email me at [adame@san Diego.edu](mailto:adame@san Diego.edu).

Thank you,  
Andrea

### Flyer Announcement posted in the center



## Appendix C

### Focus Group Script

“Hello, thank you all for coming. The purpose of this focus group is to better understand the student veteran perspective in regards to studying abroad and to gain your feedback/suggestions of the study abroad program that I will be proposing. I will be asking a series of questions that each of you will answer individually, however discussion between responses is encouraged. As stated in the consent for you all signed, responses will be recorded however, the only people listening to the responses are myself and my advisor. To keep anonymity, you will be referred to with a pseudonym name after I transcribe the responses taken from this focus group. These responses will not be used as public knowledge therefore, I encourage you to be as honest as possible. Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

#### Focus Group Questions:

1. What is your interest in studying abroad and what are some motivating factors?
2. How would studying abroad enhance your college experience?
3. How do you think studying abroad, as a student, through the student lens be a different experience?
4. How do you think studying abroad for a student veteran might be different than studying abroad for a traditional student?
5. What are some barriers that student veterans have to studying abroad?
6. What entices you about the proposed study abroad program?
7. What changes would you make to the proposed study abroad program?
8. What countries would you be interested in visiting and learning about?
9. How interested are you in taking leadership as a class?
10. Part of the class, there will be requirements set by the Travis Manion Foundation-how willing do you think student veterans would be to adhere to those requirements set?

\*Follow up questions as needed

“Thank you all for sharing. As our focus group time comes to a close, does anyone else have anything else to share or final questions to ask to the group?”

“Thank you for being here today.”

## Appendix D

### Study Abroad Course Syllabus

This is a living document and is the syllabus for the study abroad course. It will be completed for Cheryl's review and the review of the Department of Leadership Studies for approval to become a course.

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**LEAD 179: Leadership in Action, 3-units**  
**University of San Diego**  
**School of Leadership and Education Sciences**  
**Spring 2019**

**Instructors:**

Derek Abbey, M.A.

Senior Director, West and Northwest Regions, Travis Manion Foundation  
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Andrea Dame, M.A.

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**Class Meeting Times & Location:**

Mondays & Wednesdays 4:00-5:20PM, MRH 211

**Office Hours:**

Mondays & Wednesdays at 2:00-3:30pm & By appointment

**Course Description**

This course acquaints undergraduate students with leadership theories and examines the nature of leadership within the contexts of self, others, and circumstances on a local and global scales. Students will engage with the facilitators and classmates around leadership dynamics while exploring how to successfully work across systemic and cultural boundaries. The course will include an international experience during which the students will participate in a service project and view the culture that they are immersed in through a leadership lens. Upon return from this international experience, students will reflect and explore how to build upon this experience through action within their own communities. Through readings, personal assessments, class presentations, an international experience and small group discussions, students will be challenged to continue to strengthen their leadership capacity toward influencing and affecting change at USD and the broader community.

**Course Learning Objectives**

Through this course students will:

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