

The Experiential Learning Impact of International and Domestic Study Tours: Class Excursions That Are More Than Field Trips

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Experiential education programs, such as international and domestic study tours, bridge the limitations of formal learning classroom by allowing students to experience reality in a new learning dimension. This mixed-methods study explores experiential learning during a domestic interior design study tour to New York City and an international fashion-merchandising study tour to China operated by the same fashion-merchandising and interior design department at a public university in the United States southeast region. Both study tours intended to prepare students for the workforce by expanding their understanding of business and the creative process. The tours' organization allows students to meet industry professionals and to investigate and analyze issues such as collaborative work, cultural differences in business and creativity, cultural and social identity in the environment, and personal development. This research explores students' perceptions of a domestic and an international study tour to analyze their effectiveness in achieving learning outcomes. Before and after the study tours, students completed a survey to gauge their perceived level of understanding and attitudes toward the study tours. Additional student feedback came from reflection journals documenting students' personal development, design expressions in the environment, and experiences.

Kolb (1984) defines learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38). In an attempt to provide students with the most engaging learning environments possible, higher education has sought to guide students through the continuous adaptation and transformation of experiential knowledge. Bruski (2011) suggests that these transformational experiences enhance creativity as new occurrences force students to compare and contrast prior events and construct new associations.

This study compares a new domestic study tour to New York City and a popular, established international study tour to China operated by the same fashion merchandising and interior design department at a public university in the United States southeast region. The study examined the domestic New York study tour because student participation has dwindled in the last few years while the international study tour to China has grown, and the tour is popular among students, especially fashion merchandising students.

The university used in this study has fashion merchandising and interior design programs that have a long tradition of incorporating student tours in their educational programs. This tradition grew from the awareness that students' learning experiences could be enriched by firsthand experience of the socio-cultural issues influencing design environments and the interconnected working processes of business and creative thinking. Study tours, as a form of experiential learning, became an integral part of the curricula. However, in recent years, several factors have resulted in fewer students participating in domestic and international study tours. Therefore, this research focused on exploring the important role that domestic and international student study groups can have in the

fashion merchandising and interior design curricula. This study explores students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the domestic and international study tours at achieving the desired learning outcomes, the relevance of course content to students' career aspirations, and students' understanding of cultural design expression and identification.

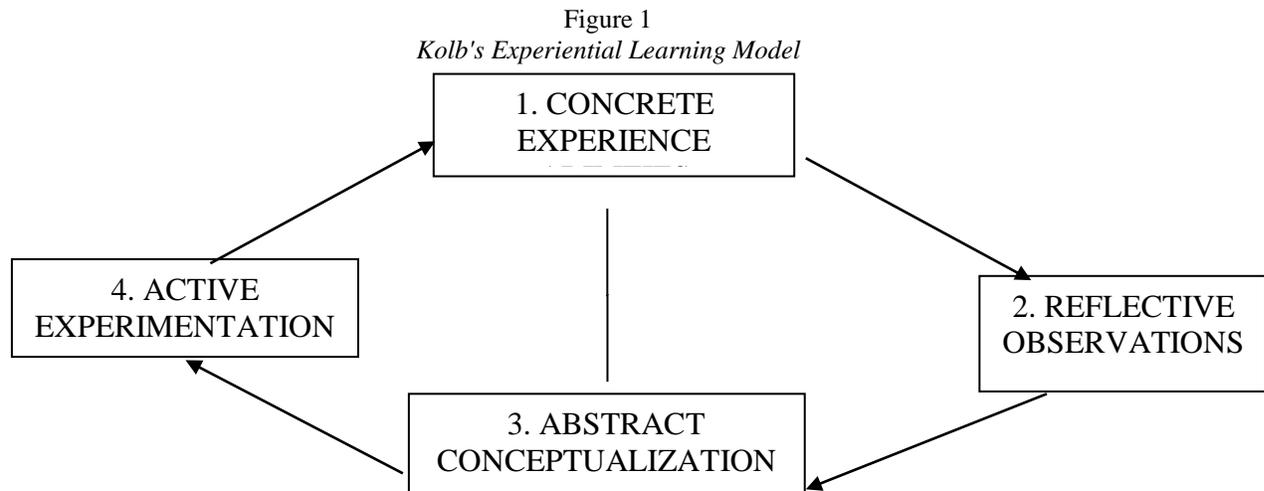
This research makes significant contributions because neither of these study tours has undergone an assessment in recent years. Therefore, this study provides student feedback for incremental improvements to the content and delivery of the tours.

Literature Review

Experiential Learning Theory

The roots of experiential learning lie in the work of Dewey (1897, 1938) and Kolb (1984). Both scholars gave a central role to experience in improving the processes of learning and human development. Dewey (1897, 1938) and Kolb (1984) shared the belief that learning is a dynamic, multi-linear, cyclical process as experiences constantly generate and modify ideas, attitudes, and interests. Learning is a major element of human adaptability and is present in human activities beyond the boundaries of the classroom—indeed, in all aspects of life (Kolb & Kolb, 2008). Experiential learning thus suggests a constructivist theory of learning in which the social and personal knowledge of students are continually and collectively adapted (Kolb & Kolb, 2008).

Most educators seeking to understand the processes of experiential learning, or learning by doing, as it is commonly known, refer to Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory and model. Kolb based his theory on



the belief that learning is a cyclical process in which knowledge is achieved through the transformation of experience, specifically, through the combination of grasping and transforming experiences (Kolb, 1984; McCarthy, 2010). The learner can begin at any stage but must complete all four stages of the experiential learning model. Kolb's model requires four student abilities for successful learning: concrete experience abilities, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984; McCarthy, 2010). The structure of the experiential learning model indicates the dual dialectics of the grasping experience (concrete experience abilities /abstract conceptualization) and the transformation experience (reflective observations / active experimentation) (Kolb, 1984; McCarthy, 2010).

According to Kolb (1984), to acquire knowledge students in the model's first phase, concrete experience abilities, have to be openly involved and without bias in new experiences. In other words, the learner gains knowledge by choosing to participate in the activity (McCarthy, 2010). The model's second phase, reflection, dictates that the student must be able to reflect on and observe their experiences from various points of view in order to approach different ways of executing an idea. The learner gains knowledge by observing others involved in an experience, reflects upon what is occurring, and applies the experience. Conversely, the learner can also develop knowledge through the model's third phase, abstract conceptualization, whereby the learner creates concepts by integrating their reflections, observations, and experiences into logically sound theories. Lastly, in the model's fourth phase, active experimentation, the student uses these new theories to make decisions on how to solve problems. Through grasping of theories

when immersed in a particular environment, the learner perceives and analyzes new information that is tangible and real (Kolb, 1984; McCarthy, 2010) (Figure 1). Kolb (1984) further suggests that in the process of learning, students at various times must move from actor to observer, as well as from specific involvement to generic detachment.

Experiential Learning in Practice

Experiential learning is a critical, positive element in the learning process in higher education (Harsell & O'Neil, 2010). For example, in research on political science students involved in exit polls for two local elections, Berry and Robinson (2012) found that engaging students in the design and analysis of the exit poll assignment helped them better connect theories and methodologies to the realities of local voting preferences. This experiential learning exercise also yielded the unexpected finding that the exit poll assignment proved to be a rewarding experience for students and faculty alike (Berry & Robinson, 2012).

In research by Ball (1995), students in a hotel and catering course found value in openly collaborating on real-world projects addressing the business needs of a real client. As well, Justo and DiBiasio (2006) found a relationship between experiential learning and lifelong learning among engineering students who saw significant improvements in their writing, critical thinking, and research skills while participating in an off-campus experiential activity. The study showed that independently led faculty team reviews found that study abroad students demonstrated higher performance levels on their final project reports than on-campus students. The researchers concluded that the engineering students participating in global programs

performed at higher levels because of the structure and nature of the off-campus experience.

Among the numerous ways of integrating experiential learning into curricula, the most common are work experience (Commander et al., 2012), field trips (Arcodia & Dickson, 2013), case studies (Howard & Gulawani, 2014), role playing (Ruhanen, 2005), gaming (Bowes & Johnson, 2008), and service learning (Pelco, Ball, & Lockeman, 2014). In particular, student study tours, as a form of field trips, have proven to be effective at bridging the gap between theory and practice in a short time. Study tours provide opportunities for students to understand the socio-cultural influences of the local environment, engage in personal and academic growth, and gain an expanded view of the realities of the world (Howard & Gulawani, 2014). Research conducted by Howard and Gulawani (2014) of a study tour to India found study tour faculty assessments corroborated survey results that indicate that the majority of study tour students were better able to achieve course learning outcomes because of their study tour participation to India. Howard and Gulawani (2014) concluded that well designed learning outcomes connected to course design and assessment increases the depth of student learning.

Research conducted by Allen and Young (1997) suggests that students on study tours learn because they participate in firsthand experiences, especially when all five senses—sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch—are engaged. This engagement gives students a much deeper understanding and appreciation of the culture and environment in which they are immersed (Allen & Young, 1997). Howard and Gulawani (2014) found that undergraduate business students participating in study tours learned, both personally and academically. Miao, Harris, and Sumner (2005/2006) suggest that effective learning occurs during study tours because it is achieved firsthand and takes place in more natural and less controlled environments than standard educational settings. Despite the similar learning and experiential outcomes of domestic and international study tours, literature appears focused on international study tours as effective learning experiences. The global marketplace's need for work-ready graduates who can work outside their known environment has encouraged the globalization of higher education (Di Iorio, Cerotti, & Richardson, 2009).

While the literature shows that active learning experiences through international study tours are worthwhile in any discipline, it is essential that educators not lose sight of the importance of providing both domestic and international study tours. Students in all disciplines need a strong understanding of theory, research, and practical skills. The combination of these three knowledge areas provides skill sets, work, expertise, and a knowledge base that a work-ready

graduate can use in diverse circumstances, both international and domestic. Consequently, this research study set out to explore three research questions pertaining to study tours. The first research question was whether domestic and international study tours equally promote student learning and general knowledge. The second research question explored whether the cultural engagement in domestic and international study tours equally enhance experiential learning. Lastly, the third research question looked at whether the use of daily reflection journals on domestic study and international study tours play a role in more in-depth learning.

Methodology

Study Tour Program Description

The purpose of both the domestic interior design study tour to New York City and the international fashion and merchandising study tour to China was to provide students with a deeper understanding of their disciplines, particularly significant issues in business, design, creative thought, and cultural environments. As such, providing opportunities to meet industry professionals, attend lectures, view collaborative work, and engage in personal growth. The New York study tour lasted six days and the study tour to China ten days. Both were composed of three phases. Phase 1 consisted of a series of pre-departure meetings during the preceding academic semester for participants to get to know each another and collaboratively plan the tour with faculty. Phase 2 consisted of field experiences in New York City and various cities in China. Both tours included a variety of learning activities such as showroom and museum visits, lectures, meetings with manufacturers and industry professionals, and visits to historical buildings and sites. Phase 3 included final assessments, review of the course, and analysis of pre- and post-tour surveys and student reflection journals.

Participants

To meet the inclusion criteria, students had to participate in either the New York or the China study tour and to be enrolled in the university's residential interior design or fashion merchandising program. Because factors such as age, gender, academic year, or grade point average had no bearing on the research questions, they were not considered. The researcher was the faculty chaperone for the interior design portion of the New York study tour. The research study occurred at a large, public higher education institution in the southeastern United States.

The New York study tour had 24 participants, including six interior design students and 18 fashion

merchandising students. Unlike earlier tours, the 2015 summer New York tour was sub-divided into two tours with their own chaperones: an interior design study tour and a fashion merchandising study tour. The 2015 summer China study tour had 18 students enrolled, all fashion merchandising students consisting of one graduate and 17 undergraduate students. The tour's chaperone was a fashion merchandising faculty member. Five of the six interior design students on the New York study tour participated in the research study, while none of the fashion merchandising students did. Even though the 18 students on the China study tour agreed to participate, only 12 undergraduate students completed the surveys.

Both study tours have always welcomed participants from the interior design and fashion merchandising programs in order to reach the minimum number of participants for the tours to be viable. However, two to three times more fashion merchandising students than interior design students have usually participated on both study tours. Consequently, over the years, tour activities have become geared primarily toward fashion merchandising students, leaving interior design students to become less interested in either study tour. Thus, fewer interior design students benefit from the rewarding experiential learning opportunities of the study tours.

Recognizing the importance of student exposure to experiential learning and seeking to encourage interior design students to become more engaged in the study tours, the college's leadership divided the 2015 New York study tour into an interior design portion and a fashion merchandising portion. As well, the interior design students were chaperoned by an interior design faculty member, who developed an itinerary with only interior design activities. The fashion merchandising portion of the study tour remained unchanged. As in the past, fashion merchandising students were chaperoned by a fashion merchandising instructor and followed an itinerary of fashion merchandising activities.

Conceptual Framework

To facilitate the comparison of international and domestic study tours in terms of the effectiveness of learning from concrete experiences in environments outside of the classroom, Kolb's experiential learning model served as the research study's conceptual framework (Kolb, 1984). Kolb's model supports the activities of study tours when it encourages students to interact with the subject material outside of the classroom while experiencing new cultural environments, consequently moving away from passive learning by hearing and seeing to active learning by doing and engaging with real world issues. Kolb's model framed the research questions around exploring the depth of transformational knowledge acquired from the concrete experiences, adaptability, and reflections from learning in new real world environments. The online survey questions revolved around the study tour's course objectives of exposing learners to design trends, industry standards, and principles, as well as the relationship of industry and a global design culture.

Study Tour Assessment

With neither study tour formally evaluated before, the researcher developed survey questions based on the New York study tour's course objectives. According to the China study tour instructor, historically the China study tour has not had any formal written course objectives, yet there is the perception that the educational content of both study tours is the same. That is, both study tours focus on students having exposure to industry professionals, business practices, design trends, and the interconnection between design and culture. Consequently, Table 1 presents the course objectives for the New York study tour.

Table 1
New York City Study Tour Course Objectives

Objective Number	Objective
1	Provide an introduction to New York's interior design industry
2	Provide insights into what it is like to work in New York as an interior designer by participating in structured visits to interior design firms and showrooms
3	Meet with interior design professionals to discuss the operations of an interior design firm and the factors that lead to a firm's success
4	Familiarize students with potential career options and expectations for knowledge and skills in interior design
5	Participate in the cultural and daily life of the city as students relate to interior design; visit relevant interior design spaces, museums, and exhibits

To determine the extent to which the study tours allowed students to connect theory and practice, the researcher created a survey with a five-point Likert scale for quantitative data collection purposes. No reliability test was conducted for survey questions 1 through 5 because they pertained to demographic information. However, for survey questions 6 through 22 the researcher performed three separate reliability tests. For survey questions 6 through 15, the reliability test found a Cronbach's alpha of 0.797 for the pre-study tour survey responses and 0.912 for the post-study tour survey responses, indicating that the construct is reliable in both surveys. For survey questions 16 through 20, the researcher found a Cronbach's alpha of 0.886 for the pre-study tour survey responses and 0.976 for the post-study tour survey responses, indicating that the construct was reliable for both surveys. A reliability test found survey questions 21 and 22 to measure the same construct. The researcher found a Cronbach's alpha of 0.905 for the pre-study tour survey and 0.955 for the post-study tour survey, which indicated that the construct was reliable for both surveys.

The researcher emailed participants a link to the surveys before the tours started. By administering the same survey before and after the study tours, the researcher could explore students' attitudes and perceptions of what they expected to learn from the study tour. In addition, the researcher could discern whether it helped students apply concepts learned in the classroom; understand the inter-connection of business practices, design creativity, and client needs; and learn about the impact of culture on business practices and design creativity and expression. The first section of the survey, questions 1 through 5, consisted of basic demographic questions. The second section, questions 6 through 22, consisted of closed-ended questions pertaining to learning experiences.

For qualitative data collection purposes, students on both tours were required to keep reflection journals which were made available to the researcher at the conclusion of both study tours. Students were required to write a minimum of one page daily and to include hand sketches and photographs of the items they saw. The reflection journals encouraged students to write about, and graphically express, their views of their tour experiences and what activities or items were engaging and beneficial. This reflection served to document design expressions in the environment and experiences that might have affected students' personal development and personal views of the industry. Ultimately, the reflection journals became libraries of the visual stimuli and experiences that adapted regenerated student knowledge.

Procedures

The researcher secured participants' consent to participate in the research the semester before the tours commenced in May 2015. Once students became study participants, the researcher shared links to the online pre- and post-tour surveys with them via email. However, due to time constraints, the China study tour participants completed a printed copy of the pre-tour survey which the tour instructor collected and returned to the researcher. The researcher entered the responses into the online service, SurveyMonkey®, so the data could be formatted and downloaded to Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 22 (SPSS 22). The pre-tour surveys were completed one week before the tours began, and the post-tour surveys were completed one week after the tours ended. Also, the researcher received the reflection journals one week after the tours ended. The weeklong New York tour took place the third week of May 2015 and the week-and-half-long China tour on the third and fourth weeks of May. Data analysis began in June 2015, after all the data were collected.

The researcher developed the survey using SurveyMonkey® so that participants could easily access the survey at their leisure and the researcher could format and download the collected data to SPSS 22 software for statistical analysis. The survey questions were based on exploring three research questions to assess participants' perceptions of the study tour learning experience. The 25 survey items included closed-ended questions measured with a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) *strongly agree* to (5) *strongly disagree* and open-ended questions that solicited additional information about participants' reasoning and best and worst tour experiences.

Analysis and Findings

This exploratory research study used a mixed-methods approach with both quantitative and qualitative elements. The quantitative phase consisted of processing and analyzing responses to an online survey developed by the researcher and administered twice: one week before and one week after the study tours. The survey allowed identifying the differences between participants in the New York and China study tours and examined their expectations for and perceptions of the study tour experience. The survey first presented basic demographic questions concerning participants' age, academic level, field of study, and chosen study tour program. In addition, an open-ended question asked participants to explain their reason for participating in their chosen study tour. Next, participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with closed-ended

Table 2
Pre-Study Tour Descriptive Group Statistics by Study Tour

Survey Questions	Study Tour Location	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Mann-Whitney Significance
I feel that I have an understanding of the business practices of firms in my field of study.	China	12	2.1667	0.83485	0.24100	
	New York	5	2.8000	0.44721	0.20000	
I feel that I have an understanding of the key trends impacting firms in my field of study.	China	12	1.8333	0.57735	0.16667	*
	New York	5	2.8000	0.83666	0.37417	
I feel that it is important to tour spaces that apply the concepts I have learned in the classroom.	China	12	1.2500	0.45227	0.13056	
	New York	5	1.6000	0.89443	0.40000	
I expect this trip to increase my understanding of the responsibilities expected of a professional in my industry.	China	12	1.5000	0.52223	0.15076	
	New York	5	1.6000	0.54772	0.24495	
I feel that touring showrooms enhances the application of classroom concepts.	China	12	1.5833	0.66856	0.19300	
	New York	5	1.2000	0.44721	0.20000	
I feel that I have an understanding of the key competencies necessary for a career in my field of study.	China	12	2.0833	0.79296	0.22891	
	New York	5	2.6000	0.89443	0.40000	
I feel that I have an understanding of the strategies firms use to be successful in my field of study.	China	12	2.5000	0.90453	0.26112	
	New York	5	3.0000	0.70711	0.31623	
I feel that I have an understanding of the various career opportunities offered in my field of study.	China	12	1.6667	0.65134	0.18803	
	New York	5	2.0000	0.00000	0.00000	
I expect this trip to help apply the concepts I have learned in the classroom.	China	12	1.3333	0.49237	0.14213	*
	New York	5	2.4000	0.89443	0.40000	
I expect this trip to help me relate classroom concepts to the real-world problems of a firm.	China	12	1.3333	0.49237	0.14213	*
	New York	5	2.0000	0.00000	0.00000	

* indicates a Mann-Whitney Exact p-value less than 0.05

survey questions using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* (1) to *strongly disagree* (5). The online quantitative data were entered into the SPSS 22 software program. The analysis used descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney tests to explore whether significant differences existed between the New York and China study tour participants.

The reflective journals provided data on participants' views of the tours' daily activities and the experience of being in an alternate learning environment. The researcher transcribed the data, noted, and coded by hand similar phrases and content. The researcher wrote a case study for each participant and then performed a cross-case comparative analysis of the data collected, following the procedure recommended by Patton (2002) for qualitative analysis. Next, the data were broken into topics and similar statements coded, leading to the identification of themes.

The researcher found regularities within the data that validated the accuracy of the themes and represented the most prominent components of themes which affected participants' experiences.

Quantitative Analysis

Research question 1: Do domestic and international study tours equally promote learning and general knowledge of the profession's practices and trends?

HO1: There are no significant differences between domestic and international study tours in how they promote learning and general knowledge of the profession's practices and trends.

HA1: There are significant differences between domestic and international study tours in how they

promote learning and general knowledge of the profession's practices and trends.

With survey questions pertaining to demographic information, survey questions 6 through 15 were used in the quantitative analysis seeking to answer research question 1. The researcher performed a reliability test to determine whether survey questions 6 through 15 measured the same construct. Descriptive statistics analyses were run to find the mean scores for the responses to both surveys. From these 10 items, the mean for the post-study tour survey was lower or equal than the mean of the pre-study survey, indicating that understanding increased for the combined

participants, and the combined had a more positive learning experience on the study tour than they expected before it.

Pre-Study Tour Findings

The mean for both study tour groups (Table 2) indicated that students generally had a positive perception of what they expected on the study tours. Lower mean scores indicate perceptions that are more favorable, while higher mean scores indicate less favorable perceptions. A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted because it is an appropriate test for ordinal data, which cannot have a normal distribution. The

Table 3
Post-Study Tour Descriptive Group Statistics by Study Tour

Survey Questions	Study Tour Location	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Mann-Whitney Significance
I feel that I have an understanding of the business practices of firms in my field of study.	China	12	1.4167	0.51493	0.14865	*
	New York	5	2.2000	0.44721	0.20000	
I feel that I have an understanding of the key trends impacting firms in my field of study.	China	12	1.2500	0.45227	0.13056	*
	New York	5	2.0000	0.00000	0.00000	
I feel that it is important to tour spaces that apply the concepts I have learned in the classroom.	China	12	1.3333	0.49237	0.14213	*
	New York	5	2.2000	0.44721	0.20000	
I expect this trip to increase my understanding of the responsibilities expected of a professional in my industry.	China	12	1.3333	0.49237	0.14213	*
	New York	5	2.0000	0.00000	0.00000	
I feel that touring showrooms enhances the application of classroom concepts.	China	12	1.4167	0.90034	0.25990	*
	New York	5	2.0000	0.00000	0.00000	
I feel that I have an understanding of the key competencies necessary for a career in my field of study.	China	12	1.3333	0.88763	0.25624	*
	New York	5	2.0000	0.00000	0.00000	
I feel that I have an understanding of the strategies firms use to be successful in my field of study.	China	12	1.0833	0.28868	0.08333	*
	New York	5	2.0000	0.00000	0.00000	
I feel that I have an understanding of the various career opportunities offered in my field of study.	China	12	1.0000	0.00000	0.00000	*
	New York	5	1.8000	0.44721	0.20000	
I expect this trip to help apply the concepts I have learned in the classroom.	China	12	1.0000	.000000 ^a	0.00000	*
	New York	5	2.0000	.000000 ^a	0.00000	
I expect this trip to help me relate classroom concepts to the real-world problems of a firm.	China	12	1.1667	0.38925	0.11237	*
	New York	5	2.0000	0.00000	0.00000	

* indicates a Mann-Whitney Exact p-value less than 0.05

Table 4
Pre-Study Tour Descriptive Group Statistics by Study Tour

Survey Questions	Study Tour Location	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Mann-Whitney Significance
I feel that it is important to experience the impact that an urban culture has on business strategies of a firm.	China	12	1.3333	0.49237	0.14213	*
	New York	5	2.0000	0.00000	0.00000	
I feel it is important that I experience the integration of culture and the concepts I learned in the classroom.	China	12	1.0833	0.28868	0.08333	*
	New York	5	2.0000	0.70711	0.31623	
I feel that experiencing cultural activities enhances my learning.	China	2	1.1667	0.38925	0.11237	*
	New York	5	2.0000	0.00000	0.00000	
I feel that I will be better able to explore concepts because of being immersed in a different culture.	China	12	1.1667	0.38925	0.11237	
	New York	5	1.8000	0.83666	0.37417	
I feel it is important that this trip expand my global perspective.	China	12	1.0833	0.28868	0.08333	
	New York	5	1.8000	0.83666	0.37417	

* indicates a Mann-Whitney Exact p-value less than 0.05

Mann-Whitney U test for the pre-study tour survey revealed that differences between domestic and international study tour participants were generally not statistically significant, with $p > 0.05$ in seven of 10 cases. However, p values were less than 0.05 or $p < 0.05$ for the three questions that focused on whether the trip helped apply classroom concepts and trends to the real world. This finding indicates that, before the study tours, students had significantly different expectations for how domestic and international study tours promote learning and general knowledge of the profession's practices and trends.

Post-Study Tour Findings

The low mean values suggest that participants had very positive experiences on both study tours (see Table 3). In all cases, the China study tour participants consistently had very positive expectations and perceptions before and after the study tour. As with the pre-study data, a Mann-Whitney U test that was conducted for the post-study data. The Mann-Whitney U test for the post-study tour survey revealed statistically significant differences between domestic and international study tour participants, with $p < 0.05$ in all cases. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that, after the study tours, students perceived a significant difference in how domestic and international study tours promote learning and general knowledge of the profession's practices and trends.

Research question 2: Does the cultural engagement in domestic and international study tours equally enhance experiential learning?

H02: There is no difference between international and domestic study tour students with respect to their perception of cultural engagement and enhancement of experiential learning.

HA2: There is a significant difference between international and domestic study tour students with respect to their perception of cultural engagement and enhancement of experiential learning.

Survey questions 16 through 20 were used in the quantitative analysis seeking to research question 2. To calculate the mean score for responses to both surveys, descriptive statistics were performed. The mean for the pre-study tour survey was higher than for the post-study survey, indicating that participants tended to perceive their future tour experiences were going to be negative. However, both groups of participants indicated a more positive learning experience after the study tours.

Pre-Study Tour Findings

Both study tour groups had low mean values, suggesting that they held favorable expectations for the educational and cultural opportunities and the expansion of their view of the profession and interconnections with other cultures on the tour (see Table 4). However, the China study tour participants consistently indicated the most positive expectations for their study tour experience. A Mann-Whitney U test revealed statistically significant differences between domestic and international study tour participants, with $p < 0.05$ in three out of five questions. Therefore, in three out of five cases null hypothesis is rejected,

Table 5
Post-Study Tour Descriptive Group Statistics per Study Tour

Survey Questions	Study Tour Location	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Mann-Whitney Significance
I feel that it is important to experience the impact that an urban culture has on a business strategies of a firm.	China	12	1.0000	0.00000	0.00000	*
	New York	5	1.8000	0.44721	0.20000	
I feel it is important that I experience the integration of culture and the concepts I learned in the classroom.	China	12	1.0000	0.00000 ^a	0.00000	*
	New York	5	2.0000	0.00000 ^a	0.00000	
I feel that experiencing cultural activities enhances my learning.	China	12	1.0000	0.00000	0.00000	*
	New York	5	1.8000	0.44721	0.20000	
I feel that I will be better able to explore concepts because of being immersed in a different culture.	China	12	1.0000	0.00000	0.00000	*
	New York	5	2.2000	0.83666	0.37417	
I feel it is important that this trip expand my global perspective.	China	12	1.0000	0.00000 ^a	0.00000	*
	New York	5	2.0000	0.00000 ^a	0.00000	

* indicates a Mann-Whitney Exact p-value less than 0.05

indicating that there is a statically significant difference in how cultural engagement enhances learning on domestic and international study tours.

Post-Study Tour Findings

The mean values suggest that both study tour groups viewed their experiences as extremely positive in terms of promoting learning and expanding their global perspective through exposure to culture (See Table 5). The extremely low mean values for both sets of study tour participants overwhelmingly supports that placing students in a different cultural context enhances learning. A Mann-Whitney U test that was conducted for the post-study tour survey revealed statistically significant differences between domestic and international study tour participants, with $p < 0.05$ for all items concerning whether cultural engagement enhances learning. The null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that cultural engagement in domestic and international study tours significantly enhances experiential learning.

Research question 3: Do daily reflection journals create a more in-depth learning experience on domestic study and international study tours?

H03: There is no difference between national and international study tour students with regard to reflection journals and the depth of the learning experience.

HA3: There is a significant difference between national and international study tour students with

regard to reflection journals and the depth of the learning experience.

Survey questions 21 and 22 were used in the quantitative analysis seeking to answer research question 3. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean scores. Of the responses to the two items, the mean was higher for the pre-study tour survey than the post-study survey, indicating that participants in both study tours expected a less favorable learning experience before the tour.

Pre-Study Tour Findings

The low mean values for both tour groups suggest that participants, especially those on the China tour, favorably viewed the future task of writing reflection journals and saw it as important to their learning rather than as a burden or arduous task (Table 6). In terms of reflection journal improving the understanding of classroom concepts a Mann-Whitney U test revealed statistically significant differences between domestic and international study tour participants, with $p < 0.05$. The null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that there is a significant difference between national and international study tour students with regard to reflection journals and the depth of improving the understanding of classroom concepts.

Post-Study Tour Findings

The mean values suggest that the New York and China study tour participants perceived writing in

Table 6
Pre-Study Tour Descriptive Group Statistics by Study Tour

Survey Questions	Tour Location	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Mann-Whitney Significance
I feel that reflecting on the day's activities helps improve my understanding of classroom concepts.	China	12	1.5000	0.67420	0.19462	*
	New York	5	2.2000	0.44721	0.20000	
I feel that keeping a daily reflection journal will give more meaning to my tour experiences.	China	12	1.5000	0.67420	0.19462	*
	New York	5	2.4000	0.54772	0.24495	

* indicates a Mann-Whitney Exact p-value less than 0.05

Table 7
Post-Study Tour Descriptive Group Statistics by Study Tour

Survey Question	Study Tour Location	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Mann-Whitney Significance
I feel that reflecting on the day's activities helps improve my understanding of classroom concepts.	China	12	1.2500	0.45227	0.13056	*
	New York	5	2.2000	0.44721	0.20000	
I feel that keeping a daily reflection journal will give more meaning to my tour experiences.	China	12	1.3333	0.65134	0.18803	*
	New York	5	2.4000	0.54772	0.24495	

* indicates a Mann-Whitney Exact p-value less than 0.05

reflection journals as an important tool for improving their understanding of classroom concepts and providing greater meaning to tour experiences (Table 7). A Mann-Whitney U test revealed statistically significant differences between domestic and international study tour participants, with $p < 0.05$ in all cases. The null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that there is a significant difference between national and international study tour students with regard to reflection journals and the depth of the learning experience.

Qualitative Analysis

The reflection journals provided a clearer, qualitative understanding of the overall learning experiences. Table 8 identifies the themes that emerged after reviewing the reflection journals by the China and New York study tour participants. The review uncovered five themes for the study tours.

All study tour participants overwhelmingly reported positive experiences throughout their reflection journals. The reported themes were developed from the journal accounts of study tour activities, such as meeting professionals, attending lectures, and touring offices and showrooms. In addition, the participants described the learning aspects

of experiencing a new culture, architecture, and sites in general. Overall, the study tours participants reported that they felt grateful to have participated and learned all that they had from their study tour experiences.

The theme of real-world application. This theme was a central component of the study tours. In addition to experiencing a new culture, the opportunity for meeting industry professionals attracted students to the study tours. Both sets of students perceived these meetings as pivotal in leading them to gain a deeper, richer, and expanded understanding of their future profession. In the case of the China study tour students, their meeting of world-renowned fashion designers was especially meaningful since the students had studied these individuals in class. Even though the New York City tour participants did not meet with world famous designers, the students meet with professionals that were highly knowledgeable with industry standards and trends. The following quotations offer a representative sample of participants' comments related to the real-world application theme:

- China study tour participant: "After lunch was the part that many of us were waiting for during this entire trip: we were going to meet world-famous fashion designer Gou Pei. She

Table 8
Theme by Study Tour

Theme	Number of Respondents: China Tour N=12	Number of Respondents: New York Tour N=5
Real-world application/	12	5
Integration of course concepts/visiting job sites	10	4
Experiencing new culture, architecture, and sites	12	5
Peer interaction	10	3
Personal growth	10	5

told us [that], as long as we are doing what we want to do, we will have a happy life. Right after talking to us, she headed over to a radio interview with the BBC. We were amazingly lucky to meet this very sweet and humble designer. It was a true pleasure.”

- A New York study tour participant: “Today was such a great day as a future interior designer. I loved the lighting designs of our breakfast restaurant. Then we went to the D & D building and looked at different showrooms. I loved them all. They each had so much information and products. Visiting the showrooms makes me want to intern in NYC.”

The theme of integration of course concepts.

Several participants reported that viewing and experiencing the different tour sites encouraged them to focus on interior design and fashion. For instance, one of the NYC tour participants revealed that because of visiting showrooms and experiencing different interior environments, they were able to connect the principles of history, furniture design and industry trends. Touring Chinese manufacturing plants offered students first hand insightful experiences into the relationship between the design and production of clothing, as well as also gaining an awareness of how production time and seasonal designs interrelate to one another. The New York City participants' tour of a high-end condominium under construction allowed them to experience a construction site while speaking to the contractor and interior designer in charge of the project. Furthermore, students learned about the regional differences in how interior designers work in New York City as opposed to their own local area. For the theme of integration of course concepts, study tour participants reported the following statements:

- China study tour participant: “Our first stop was a factory outside of Shenzhen where we got a tour of all the production processes. It was insightful and eye opening to see actual brands, such as Abercrombie & Fitch, being produced right before our eyes. We saw the different prints in the computer design room that they were making for the holiday season.”
- New York study tour participant: “I loved the history lesson on the furniture company and learning all about their iconic furniture pieces. While there, I also learned about commercial office design and how important it is to truly evaluate a workspace to make it work for the individual. Today, we saw and learned so much.”

Regarding the theme of experiencing new culture, architecture, and sites, the study tour participants overwhelmingly viewed experiencing the physical context of a new culture as an essential learning component of the study tours. Participants positively described the way different languages, customs, foods, architecture, and historical sites played important roles in learning about, and experiencing, a culture different from their own. Visiting landmarks that were culturally and historically significant supported the students learning two-fold. Visiting the landmarks not only consolidated architecture, design elements, and historical concepts, but they are served to expand awareness of how cultural values and beliefs over time impact the expression of the built environment.. The following samples are representative of participants' comments:

- China study tour participant: “Nothing could compare to how it would feel to actually be there in person, though, feeling the wind on top of the wall in the Chinese mountains, seeing a different

facial expression on each soldier, watching a garment being made. I was excited about all the new experiences I was about to have, as well as all the opportunities to learn about the culture and the politics and apply our classroom concepts I've learned (especially from Global Retailing) to the culture there."

- New York study tour participant: "It was interesting getting to see the historic architecture in person, rather than just on a slideshow. It was so awesome to be able to learn about the history of a building and view it."

The theme of peer interaction. Although the New York study tour participants interacted with each other throughout the tour, they did not view peer interaction as a strong contributor to the study tour experience. However, for the China study tour participants, peer interaction was an important element. They reported forming close social bonds and memories with fellow students, resulting in tour experiences with deeper meanings. The following sample is representative of participants' comments:

China study tour participant: "We all had a blast singing everything from NYSNC to Justin Bieber. Therefore, we sang every pop song that ever existed. It was the most professional karaoke I have ever been to. The girls and I are planning on doing a karaoke reunion when we get back to Athens."

The theme of personal growth. Both study tours participants reported they were grateful to have been part of the tours. For some participants, the study tour was life changing, while others were encouraged to seek an internship in New York City. The following quotations offer a representative sample of participants' comments related to theme of gratitude for participating in the study tour:

- China study tour participant: "I had two of the best weeks of my life which I will always remember, from the crazy food to the Great Wall and the factory tours. I experienced much as a 21 year old, that many people never get the opportunity to see. I feel extremely lucky and blessed to have gone on this trip."
- New York study tour participant: "This week has been incredible. We have seen and learned so much about our industry. I would recommend future students take this class because you learn, meet, and see what you need for all aspects of the industry."

Discussion

This research investigated the effectiveness of domestic and international study tours at accomplishing learning outcomes, such as awareness of the relevance of course content to understanding cultural design expression and identification. Both the quantitative and qualitative findings support the research by Commander and colleagues (2012), Jiusto, and DiBiasio (2006) showing that study tours are worthwhile learning arenas outside the classroom. The present research findings strongly suggest that both study tours not only provided participants with a positive academic learning environment, but also promoted cultural learning and expanded students' personal worldview, especially among the China study tour participants. For instance, the findings indicate that both sets of tour participants integrated classroom concepts into real-world challenges, gained understanding of the inner workings of their field of study, and acquired a new global perspective from exploring a culture different from their own. In the reflection journals, students reported that tour activities and social outings, such as meeting industry professionals, attending lectures, and touring showrooms and businesses, contributed to positive learning experiences.

Though the findings indicate that both New York and China study tour participants perceived their tour experiences as educational, the quantitative analysis also found statistically significant differences in how domestic and international study tours promote learning and general knowledge of the profession's practices and trends. The analysis suggests that the China study tour participants perceived their learning experiences as more meaningful and positive than the New York study tour participants did. This finding lends support to research by Arcodia and Dickson (2013) indicating that cultural immersion results in greater student learning. Though the New York study tour participants were immersed in a new culture, it was still an American environment with regional differences. In contrast, the China study tour immersed participants in a foreign culture.

The present study's findings also support Allen and Young's (1997) work suggesting that cultural immersion promotes experiential learning by integrating classroom concepts with real-world issues through the five senses. Allen and Young (1997) contended that if students can see, taste, feel, hear, and touch the objects or items in the study tour environment, then learning will have a greater and deeper meaning for students. For instance, in the present study participants reported how much they learned from going to showrooms, meeting professionals, and exploring building sites about which they had first learned in the classroom. In addition, participants from both study groups cited food,

conversations with locals, and personal explorations of the tour environment as additional elements in their learning of local culture.

The quantitative findings also indicated that before both study tours, participants expected that the cultural engagement during the tours would make no significant difference in enhancing experiential learning. However, after completing their study tours, participants' perceptions had undergone statistically significant changes, and they perceived the cultural engagement during domestic and international study tours as making a significant difference in enhancing experiential learning. Once again, the quantitative findings indicate that, before and after the study tours, the China study tour participants overwhelmingly had the most positive view of the experiential learning obtained from the study tour. Although the New York tour participants also held a positive attitude toward their experiential learning, their enthusiasm for the study tour was consistently less than that of their counterparts on the China study tour.

The qualitative analysis indicates that China study tour participants developed and valued close social bonds with fellow students, while the New York study tour participants placed less emphasis on creating such peer bonds. The China study tour participants' inability to understand the Chinese language, cultural customs, and beliefs could have encouraged them to form strong social strong bonds with their fellow students. The longer duration of the China study tour might have also played a role in promoting closer student bonds.

The reflection journals proved to be a useful educational tool for students' critical thinking skills and ensured that students observed and experienced the world around them. The journals encouraged students to write freely their thoughts on their daily experiences and to create a visual inventory that they can reference for future inspiration. The quantitative findings indicate that students, especially the China study tour participants, perceived reflection journals as a positive, significant assignment. The quantitative findings suggest that the China study tour participants, more so than the New York study tour participants, strongly perceived the reflection journals as contributing to their learning experiences.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the research study's findings indicate that both participants on domestic and international study tours benefit from the experiential learning opportunities. The findings indicate that course objectives are being met; however, findings also indicate that the China study tour participants perceived their study tour experiential learning as being more robust academically than New York study tour

participants did. In terms of cultural engagement enhancing experiential learning, the findings suggest that China's tour participants more so than the New York tour participants had a more positive outlook toward their international study tour. The reasons for this occurrence may lie in the following: participants' immersion in a foreign culture, the longer tour duration of the China study tour, social ties amongst participants that were forged due to a lack of foreign language skills, participation in a cultural study tour in a country few people experience, and exposure to global designers and industry leaders. Consequently, the study lends support to the idea that the cultural experiences of participants on international study tours tend to lead to more positive learning experiences than those of students who participate on domestic study tours.

Findings further support making reflection journals an integral part of experiential learning. The act of writing in detail the day's activities and experiences allowed constructive reflection, which through adaptation into new knowledge can serve as a base for future inspiration and creation of ideas. Overall, international study tour participants appeared to gain more appreciation for the learning experiences obtained on the study tour than domestic study tour participants did.

Even though the analysis suggests that the study tours are achieving course objectives, there are opportunities for improvement. The first area for improvement pertains to developing formal course objectives for the China study tour. The second area for improvement is setting up a yearly assessment process for both study tours that would allow for both student and faculty feedback. This is of particular importance because presently the study tours are not being reviewed or revised to respond to the constantly changing needs of students and faculty.

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Appendix
Survey Questions

Demographics:

1. Circle your age.
 - a) 18–21
 - b) 22–25
 - c) 26–29
 - d) 30 or older
2. Circle your academic level.
 - a) Sophomore
 - b) Junior
 - c) Senior
 - d) Graduate
3. Circle your academic major.
 - a) Fashion merchandising
 - b) Furnishings and interiors
 - c) Other
4. Circle your study tour program.
 - a) China
 - b) New York Fashion merchandising
 - c) New York Furnishings and interiors
5. Briefly describe why you chose to participate in the study program.
Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Agree agree (SA)	Neutral (A)	Disagree (N)	(D)	Strongly disagree (SD)
6. I feel that I have an understanding of business practices of firms in my field of study.	SA	A	N	D	SD
7. I feel that I have an understanding of the key trends impacting firms in my field of study.	SA	A	N	D	SD
8. I feel that it is important to tour spaces that apply the concepts I have learned in the classroom.	SA	A	N	D	SD
9. I expect this trip to increase my understanding of the responsibilities expected of a professional in my industry.	SA	A	N	D	SD
10. I feel that touring showrooms enhances the application of classroom concepts.	SA	A	N	D	SD
11. I feel that I have an understanding of the key competencies necessary for a career in my field of study.	SA	A	N	D	SD
12. I feel that I have an understanding of the strategies firms use to be successful in my field of study.	SA	A	N	D	SD
13. I feel that I have an understanding of the various career opportunities offered in my field of study.	SA	A	N	D	SD
14. I expect this trip to help apply the concepts I have	SA	A	N	D	SD

learned in the classroom.					
15. I expect this trip to help me relate classroom concepts to the real-world problems of a firm.	SA	A	N	D	SD
16. I feel that it is important to experience the impact that an urban culture has on the business strategies of a firm.	SA	A	N	D	SD
17. I feel it is important that I experience the integration of culture and the concepts I learned in the classroom.	SA	A	N	D	SD
18. I feel that experiencing cultural activities enhance my learning.	SA	A	N	D	SD
19. I feel that I will be better able to explore concepts because of being immersed in a different culture.	SA	A	N	D	SD
20. I feel it is important that this trip expand my global perspective.	SA	A	N	D	SD
21. I feel that reflecting on the day's activities helps improve my understanding of classroom concepts.	SA	A	N	D	SD
22. I feel that keeping a daily reflection journal will give more meaning to my tour experiences.	SA	A	N	D	SD