Study Abroad Participation, Time-to-Degree, and Degree Completion
at The University of Texas at Austin

The University of Texas at Austin consistently ranks among the top 10 universities in the U.S. for the number of students who study abroad. Each year, numerous faculty, staff, and administrators across campus play a key role in this success through efforts within the colleges and schools promoting international opportunities for our students. The climate at the university embraces study abroad as a valued educational opportunity, yet concerns persist regarding the effect of study abroad participation on important, concrete academic measures such as time-to-degree and degree completion. This study was designed to address those concerns by examining the degree completion and time-to-degree data for the entering cohort of 2002.

Population
The first-time-in-college (FTIC) cohort of 2002 consisted of 7,845 students. Of this total, 13.7% studied abroad (n=1,076), representing 17% of all students who graduated within four years of admission. An additional 3.6% applied to, but did not participate in a study abroad program (n=281), and 82.7% of students did not apply to or participate in study abroad (n=6,488).

Study abroad applicants were included in this research to serve as a proxy for the motivational factors which may distinguish participants from students who do not choose to study abroad. The applicant group helps to answer the question of whether observed differences in degree completion or time-to-degree arise as a result of differences in motivation or perseverance between participants and non-participants.

Key Findings
Timely degree completion among our students is a priority for the university, and one which study abroad participation supports. Key findings from this study include:

- Study abroad participants had a shorter average time-to-degree than non-participants (4.11 years versus 4.16 years). Study abroad participation did not predict the length of time students took to graduate from the university.
- Sixty percent (60%) of study abroad participants graduated in four years compared to 45% of non-participants. Graduation rates among participants were 20% higher than among non-participants at five and six years after admission.
- Study abroad participation predicted the likelihood that a student would graduate from UT. Participants were 46% more likely to graduate in 5 years, and 185% more likely to graduate in six years than their peers who did not study abroad. The retention effect of study abroad was strongest among academically at-risk students.
- Differences in the likelihood of graduating from UT were not attributable to motivational factors or differences in academic performance (GPA or SAT composite score). Students who applied to study abroad, but did not participate experienced the same graduation rates as non-participants.

Variables Included in the Model
Study abroad participation; gender; race/ethnicity; parents’ educational attainment; family annual income; GPA range at the point when the student achieved sophomore standing; SAT composite score range; interaction effects for study abroad participation and GPA range, SAT composite score range, and gender.