

Center for International Experience

Assessment Survey Report 2010

Experiences Abroad Term-Time 2009-2010 and Summer 2010

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Introduction:

The Center for International Experience (CIE), in its second year of gathering and analyzing student-reported outcomes assessment data, has refined its survey methodology to identify better some of the impacts of experiences abroad on Yale College students. To begin with, and as is often the human inclination, many students find themselves staying well within their comfort zones prior to going abroad despite the great diversity of people and of opportunities that surround them in New Haven let alone in the wider world. The survey results bear this out not only in the very basic concerns students indicate prior to departure overseas but also in the fundamental nature of the achievements they feel strongest about upon return.

This is not to say that students, at least not those surveyed here, are content staying in those comfort zones - they know, and are often driven by the fact, that they came to Yale to explore greater possibilities. But they often lack basic experience –and subsequent *confidence*– engaging with the world on its own terms far from parental or institutional safety nets.

The roadblocks that keep some students within their comfort levels often center on the logistical or the interpersonal, ranging from something as basic as “How would I exchange money in another country?” to something more complex such as “How would I connect with people using a non-native language in a culture I barely comprehend?” For students who lack ready answers to such logistical problems or for those who have few if any frames of reference for imagining themselves succeeding in a foreign environment far from home, the decision to study abroad is itself momentous. When students’ academic successes often come after careful cost-benefit analyses of how best to invest their time, the risks associated with spending time abroad seem high, particularly given what often appear to be uncertain outcomes. This report will help to define those outcomes so that student decisions, and CIE advising, regarding experience abroad are better informed.

Ultimately, these challenges have straightforward answers, starting with underscoring that to engage with the world, students simply must venture into it, and few experiences can be as positively turbulent as leaving New Haven for engaging, critically reflective experiences abroad. Students going overseas for substantive engagements learn about exchange rates and about keeping a budget. They make connections with people and with places quite different from where they started, often using a language they can hardly believe they now speak. They return with a heightened sense of the diverse people and opportunities available to them not only in countries far away but also back in New Haven, a place they often see now with new eyes.

Far from having wasted their time in failed attempts to understand themselves and the world at least a little better, experience abroad helps students to return to campus more capable of tapping into the richness of opportunity that is Yale College. Experience abroad further helps to produce graduates whose intellectual understanding of the human condition is better tempered against and empowered by the newfound logistical and interpersonal skills necessary to impact that condition positively. Experience abroad routinely produces the *confidence* students need in order to take more active, well-informed ownership over their futures.

In sum, well-structured experiences abroad are vital avenues for producing alumni with the mindset and the skills not just for successfully engaging the diverse people and places that make up the world but also for making contributions of lasting value to communities and, possibly, to entire societies here and abroad.

NOTE: With this report, I have sought to present data while offering advice on how CIE might help the next group of students maximize their opportunities abroad. I have also included an appendix containing most of the larger survey results to invite anyone reading this report, at least as far as this limited pool of data allows, to reach his or her own conclusions about the impact of these experiences abroad. Without doubt, that wider conversation would help CIE’s ongoing efforts to contribute positively to Yale College.

Kelly McLaughlin, December 2010

ANNOTATED CONTENTS

Critical Reflection:

- [Table 1, Page 4] ***“As a result of this experience, I feel more confident in dealing with unexpected situations”***: 89% of students Strongly Agree (45%) or Agree (44%).
- [Table 2, Page 5] ***“As a result of this experience, I am more confident in handling the next steps in my academic and/or professional path”***: 85% of students Strongly Agree (37%) or Agree (48%).
- [Table 3, Page 6] ***“As a result of this experience, I am more adept at solving problems on my own when the situation calls for it”***: 85% of students Strongly Agree (37%) or Agree (48%).
- [Table 4, Page 7] ***“As a result of this experience, I am more adept at utilizing the help of others to solve problems when it is appropriate to do so”***: 70% of students Strongly Agree (24%) or Agree (46%).
- [Table 5, Page 8] ***“As I reflect upon this experience, something that I am most proud of”***: 53% of students indicated Forging Relationships, Adapting To/Understanding Place/Culture, and Language Gains.
- [Table 6, Page 9] ***“Please describe one thing that you can do now as a result of this experience. Why is this important to you?”***: 53% of students indicated Language and Career/Academic Confidence.
- [Table 7, Page 10] ***“As I reflect upon this experience, something that I found particularly challenging”***: 50% of students indicated Connecting with Locals/Others, Balance/Maximizing (time), Language, and Host Country/Culture.
- [Table 8, Page 11] ***“As I reflect upon this experience, something I wish I had known”***: 50% of students indicated Handling/Budgeting Money, Packing/Weather, Language, Program Details/Intensity, and Host Country/Culture.

Sustainability and Experience Abroad:

- [Table 9, Page 13] ***“Did you observe or learn about behaviors or practices in your host community to conserve or preserve resources?”***: 54% of students indicated “Yes,” and 46% indicate “No.”
- [Table 10, Page 14] ***“Which of the following resources would have been most useful to you in thinking carefully about environmental issues prior to this experience?”***: 57% of students indicated that “Providing you specific examples of how students can get involved in sustainability and reduce their environmental impact before, during, and after being abroad” would be Very Useful (27%) or Moderately Useful (30%).
- [Table 11, Page 15] ***“During your program, did you act in a way that conserved resources or would be considered environmentally responsible at Yale?”***: 75% of students indicated Yes.

Conclusion:

- [Page 16] Page forty-six of the 2003 Yale University Report on Yale College Education recommended that CIE’s predecessors “expand the number and variety of international opportunities that [it] guide[s] students toward **and facilitate efforts to find the right fit**” (emphasis mine)...

Survey Background:

- **Methodology:** The survey contained 20 questions delivered on-line via Survey Monkey. The items were a mix of quickly-answered Likert Scale queries (“Strongly Agree,” “Disagree,” etc.) and a few open-ended questions designed to illicit critical reflection about the students’ worries going into these experiences abroad along with their sense of accomplishment afterward. While the results of Likert Scale questions can be readily summarized and turned into graphs, for instance, the only way to quantify open-ended answers is to “code” each reply, grouping answers thematically as much as possible. Not counting the additional comments students often left on Likert Scale questions, more than 2,400 open-ended answers were coded in this way, which led to several useful insights into student thinking.
- **Size and Supporting Offices:** The “Yale University Center for International Experience, 2010” survey was sent over summer 2010 to 1,317 students who had studied, worked, or researched abroad through the Center for International Experience (CIE) during summer 2010 or over the preceding 2009-2010 academic year. Of those, 628 completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 48%, including students supported by Yale Summer Session (28.5%, N=180), General Study Abroad (23.9%, N=151), the Light Fellowship Program (20.3%, N=128), Independent Activity or National Fellowships via the Office of Fellowship Programs and/or the MacMillan Center (14.4%, N=91), Undergraduate Career Services (11.9%, N=75), and the Yale-PKU Joint Program (1%, N=6). (Chart 16, Page 22)

Note: 759 students started the survey, but many students, as was allowed by the survey’s design, selectively skipped some questions. This report refers to all the data collected for each question, however, so total numbers reported for any given item will range between 496 and 639 student answers.

- **Class Year:** In order to lessen the time it takes to complete the survey, some biographical data, such as class year, were not gathered as the CIE survey data sets will be integrated with Banner records at a later date. However, class year data for the totality of students invited to take the survey indicates Class of 2009 (students who had already graduated and were abroad post-Yale) at 2%, Class of 2010 at 2%, Class of 2011 at 30%, Class of 2012 at 36%, and Class of 2013 at 30%. Graduate and Professional students accounted for 1% of the possible survey pool. (Chart 3, Page 18)
- **Majors:** The top five undergraduate majors indicated were History (9%, N=68), Political Science (7.6%, N=57), Economics (7.2%, N=54), Biology (6%, N=45), and Psychology (4.9%, N=37). The top five undergraduate second majors were International Studies (16.8%, N=57), Political Science (4.4%, N=15), Economics (3.5%, N=12), and East Asian Studies (3.2%, N=11). (Chart 1, Page 17)
- **Length and Location of Program:** 52.3% (N=391) of students indicated that their experiences were 8-11 weeks long; 31% (N=232) indicated 4-7 weeks; 7.8% (N=58) indicated one semester; 3.5% (N=26) indicated an academic year; 3.2% (N=24) indicated 1-3 weeks; 2.1% (N=16) indicated 12-15 weeks; and 0.1% (N=1) indicated 16+ weeks. 85.3% (N=637) of students’ experiences took place entirely outside of the United States while 14.3% (N=107) split time inside and outside of the United States, for example on a Yale Summer Session course that divides program time between New Haven and the site abroad.
- **Prior Study Abroad Experience:** When asked “*Was this your first study abroad / internship / research experience while at Yale?*” 69.8% (N=529) of respondents indicated “Yes,” and 30.2% (N=229) indicated “No.” Among those 229 students with previous experiences abroad, 58.2% (N=131) had one prior experience of four weeks or longer abroad, 20.4% (N=46) had two such prior experiences, and 21.3% (N=48) had three or more. Again, for the majority of students answering the survey (69.8%, N=529), this experience represented their first substantive time abroad. (Chart 4, Page 18)

CRITICAL REFLECTION

“As a result of this experience, I feel more confident in dealing with unexpected situations”

Table 1: 100%, N=634 (also see: Chart 15, Page 22)

STRONGLY AGREE	283	44.6%	89.1%
AGREE	282	44.5%	
NEUTRAL	63	10.0%	10.9%
DISAGREE	4	0.6%	
STRONGLY DISAGREE	2	0.3%	

One item of interest to CIE staff is whether or not experience abroad results in students’ returning to campus or going on to careers better able to handle challenges that come from unexpected directions? With 89% of students strongly agreeing or agreeing with this item, experience abroad seems to strongly correlate with raising students’ level of confidence in taking challenges as they come.

Representative student comments include:

- *“If traveling teaches one thing, it is PATIENCE. In the era of instant downloads and just-add-water meals, this is a dying virtue.”*
- *“Even though I thought I ‘expected the unexpected’, there were so many more bumps in the road than I expected! (From power outages in the National Library to having to move in the middle of the summer, there were quite a few adventures.) I got better at taking the unexpected occurrences in stride and spending my time productively no matter what.”*
- *“This is one of the most beneficial results of this experience for me. Prior to this summer, I would say that one of my greatest weaknesses was my inability to cope with the unexpected and to adapt to new situations as they arose. My experience traveling and researching alone necessitated that I learn to deal with unexpected situations and learn to problem solve on my own in the most uncomfortable situations.”*
- *“This is the key, certainly from my experience. Learning to deal with roadblocks.”*
- *“My confidence in general is much higher. On the flight to Beijing, I had NO idea what to expect (other than from the handy [Light Fellowship] Student Advisory Committee manual), and gained an incredible amount in the way of handling this uncertainty.”*
- *“I definitely didn’t expect the experience to challenge some of my core values, and I emerged from the experience more well informed about myself and how I interact with others.”*
- *“Having had to deal with many unexpected situations, as that is a common experience in studying abroad, I have become better at adapting to new situations.”*
- *“Being in a completely foreign city--linguistically, socially, culturally, economically--made me rely on my personal sense of strength.”*

➤ **Recommendation #1 for CIE:**

CIE has done a fair amount of work with its teams discussing “The Millennial Generation,” “entitlement,” and a feeling of periodic disconnect in communicating effectively with students “these days.” The results to this item suggest that students themselves often perceive the limitations that a culture of instant gratification places on their own capacities to deal with roadblocks and the unexpected. CIE has an opportunity to frame the value of study abroad in such terms: By engaging in opportunities abroad, often with few or minimal safety nets, students routinely return better able to handle the unscripted challenges that arise in life, particularly in adult life. Students want such preparation, and experience abroad is a clear way to achieve it.

“As a result of this experience, I am more confident in handling the next steps in my academic and/or professional path”

Table 2: 100%, N=639 (also see: Chart 12, Page 20)

STRONGLY AGREE	237	37.1%	85%
AGREE	306	47.9%	
NEUTRAL	79	12.4%	15%
DISAGREE	15	2.3%	
STRONGLY DISAGREE	2	0.3%	

As Table 2 illustrates, 85% of students strongly agreed or agreed that their experiences abroad brought them back to New Haven or onto their careers more confident about how to take the next steps in their lives. Students who indicated disagreement often did so by noting that their time abroad was impactful enough to cause them to rethink their majors or careers plans. In that sense, they often gained a better understanding that their goals and developing talents might be better leveraged in new directions.

In this way, experiences abroad help students to become more active drivers of their own educational and career aspirations. These students indicate not only greater awareness of the many opportunities available to them in Yale College and elsewhere, but they also return home better able to take concrete steps forward.

Representative student comments include:

- *“This past year was challenging but in the best of ways: a new language, a new culture and being intimately involved in the waxing and waning of carrying out a public health research project. I feel I have developed not only confidence in my abilities, but also a tool set, patience and perspective that will help me succeed in my future pursuits.”*
- *“Yalies are always so busy, running around, doing this, rushing that. I never had time to think! Taking a semester abroad meant that I had time to think about what was important to me, what I wanted to pursue--and reflection is important as I begin my journey out of Yale.”*
- *“It formed the basis of my senior thesis, and it convinced me that I want to get into development work in the future, and the manner in which I want to get into it (social entrepreneurship).”*
- *“My experience was excellent for reanalyzing my world view and deciding my future direction.”*
- *“Before, I was limited in my interests. This experience abroad has opened my mind to new possibilities and I've discovered passions I never knew I had.”*
- *“I learned that I am not very cut out for academic research. This information is invaluable for me given that I am about to graduate and pursue a career.”*

As with any attempt to gauge student development, one should bear in mind that a certain level of natural maturity is likely involved in many of the results discussed in this report. That said, the question itself asked “As a result of this experience...”, and the quotes above and throughout the report often make explicit references to time abroad.

➤ **Recommendation #2 for CIE:**

Not all (perhaps few) students are innately convinced that study, work, or research overseas is the best use of limited time. As such, CIE should explicitly answer the following question on its homepage and elsewhere: “Why Go Abroad?” For many students, that question is their (and their parents’) starting point, and the answers are not necessarily obvious. CIE can bring clarity to this question by underscoring in particular that students returning from abroad routinely report increased confidence in taking the next steps in their lives.

“As a result of this experience, I am more adept at solving problems on my own when the situation calls for it”

Table 3: 100%, N=636 (also see: Chart 13, Page 21)

STRONGLY AGREE	234	36.8%	85.3%
AGREE	308	48.5%	
NEUTRAL	88	13.8%	14.7%
DISAGREE	4	0.6%	
STRONGLY DISAGREE	2	0.3%	

This item was designed to weigh to what degree experience abroad helps students to feel more adept at solving problems on their own. The item on the next page moves from this independence marker to *interdependence*, or the ability to utilize the help of others when appropriate. The results of these two queries should be taken alongside each other to gain a broader understanding of how well students abroad are balanced between an “I can do everything on my own” mentality and the realization that success in life often requires working well with others.

With 85.3% of students strongly agreeing or agreeing with this item, one can say that experience abroad is fostering in students a greater facility in working through challenges on their own. To an extent, and as a quality assurance measure built into the survey’s design, this result confirms the data already presented where students indicated greater confidence in handling the next steps in their careers or in dealing better on their own with unexpected challenges. Experience abroad correlates very well with heightened self-sufficiency.

Representative student comments include:

- *“There were many times that I was in situations that didn't come with a handbook--and being able to pull through on my own was very important for me.”*
- *“I found myself occasionally overwhelmed by problems abroad, although there were other situations where I was able to handle things on my own, and, upon reflection, I can point to those situations as having built up my ability to solve problems on my own.”*
- *“I am more comfortable in dealing with people of diverse cultures and mindsets and feel that I am better prepared to bring my point across as well as see things from the perspective of others.”*
- *“I became much more self-sufficient during my travels through China.”*
- *“I was forced to rely on my own judgment because all of my friends and family were 12 hours away, and some of the problems needed to be solved immediately.”*
- *“Living alone and having to look after myself (cooking, cleaning, shopping etc) without anyone to help me taught me many important life skills.”*
- *“Going abroad was an experience in self-sufficiency for me as I had never been away from home for even close to this long. With the help of only my friends I made there, I had to rely on finding things out for myself a lot and solving a lot of my problems on my own.”*
- *“The experience abroad has made me a more confident and satisfied person.”*

➤ **Recommendation #3 for CIE:**

While attending college marks a profound phase in a young person’s development, CIE should keep a clear focus on how experiences abroad provide students with unrivaled opportunities to address challenges without many of the parental or institutional safety nets on which many students rely. When given the chance to overcome challenges on their own, in fact, students indicate not only increased confidence in taking the next steps in life but also, in some cases, increased personal *satisfaction*. Among the possible outcomes students might expect from experiences abroad, CIE should underscore this one.

“As a result of this experience, I am more adept at utilizing the help of others to solve problems when it is appropriate to do so”

Table 4: 100%, N=637 (also see: Chart 14, Page 21)

STRONGLY AGREE	155	24.3%	70%
AGREE	291	45.7%	
NEUTRAL	174	27.3%	30%
DISAGREE	17	2.7%	
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0	0%	

As the companion piece to the item on the previous page, 70% strong agreement or agreement on this query represents the weakest (although still clearly positive) correlation between experience abroad and a possible outcome, in this case feeling more adept at utilizing the help of others when appropriate.

Why the drop off on this measure of interdependence compared with students indicating a greater sense of independence after experience abroad? One possible answer comes with the potential bias in thinking of independence as positive trait while interdependence indicates a certain lack of self-sufficiency or ability. Another possibility is that students abroad find themselves more often simply needing to rely on themselves while opportunities to ask others for help are rarer or depend on language ability, among other obstacles. That said, these results are encouraging overall with 85% and 70% of students respectively indicating greater ability to solve problems either on their own and/or with the help of others as a result of experience abroad.

Representative student comments include:

- *“I have a better sense of what problems I'm able to solve on my own (which is quite a larger number than what I had previously thought) and what problems necessitate outside help-- and not to be shy about asking for it when I need it.”*
- *“Professors are the greatest sources. Even you think you can study and get good grade by yourself, it's always better to constantly get in touch with the professor and let him/her know that you're working hard.”*
- *“Nothing makes you more appreciative of the resources and people around you than does studying abroad and living abroad!”*
- *“I still struggle to ask for help but I am much more willing than before.”*
- *“Going abroad also helped me recognize better where to search for help when I need to.”*
- *“I learned that I cannot expect to handle everything alone--and one must make the distinction between gratuitous and necessary help.”*
- *“I understand this now and am less weary to ask for help. This has seriously affected my office hours attendance already so early into the semester.”*
- *“This is definitely the thing I should have done more. My trip was fairly complex and I found that I simply didn't have the time or energy to try to take the additional steps of making contacts and arranging meetings with architects or historians in the countries I was visiting. I probably would have benefited from this additional experience.”*

➤ **Recommendation #4 for CIE:**

CIE should underscore with students that experience abroad often provides a better sense of how to identify and take effective advantage of help from others. Many if not most major accomplishments in a person’s life will come as productive members of a diverse community that works together and relies on each other to achieve common goals. Thus, CIE should emphasize both the independent and *interdependent* nature of experience abroad as complementary modes that are vital to success in most any context, abroad or at home.

“As I reflect upon this experience, something that I am most proud of”

Table 5: Top 70% of Answers Shown, N=375 - All Respondents, N=546 (also see: Chart 10, Page 26)

LANGUAGE GAINS	145	27%	70%
ADAPTING TO/UNDERSTANDING PLACE/CULTURE	77	14%	
FORGING RELATIONSHIPS	64	12%	
MATURITY/INDEPENDENCE	52	10%	
GETTING WORK/RESEARCH DONE	37	7%	

Answers to this open-ended prompt were coded as belonging to thematic groups, the top 70% of which are listed above. Students were asked to indicate the *main* thing that they are most proud of as a result of this experience abroad. At first glance, one might find the top answer, Language Gains, over-representative of what one might have expected from a large group of students abroad, only a portion of whom set out on programs of formal language study or who were in non English-speaking countries. In fact, “language gains” here reflects a broad spectrum from the student who went abroad with no knowledge of the local language to the student who was already highly proficient. What unites these students, and many of those in between, is that language gains of any degree proved essential to their connecting better with their host country, whether that meant in casual exchanges at a bus stop or in writing an entire research paper in the language. Of course, students were often proud of relationships that they forged through English as well.

Language gain, then, influences many of the other items indicated above. For example, Adapting to and Understanding Place or Culture is clearly impacted for the better by achieving basic competency in the local language. The same may be said of Forging Relationships and even in Getting Work or Research done abroad.

Representative student comments for the most common sources of pride include:

- *“The fact that I was able to do research in French and then produce a 15 page paper in French!”*
- *“Being away from both my family and the rather sheltered Yale community, I was forced to mature and take greater responsibility for my decisions. I feel that this process would have taken much longer had I not taken part in this program.”*
- *“I developed a certain kind of strength that I wouldn't have found in the US. The experiences and circumstances I faced in Kenya forced me to become the kind of woman I aspired to be.”*
- *“My relationship with an Oxford professor, which I've been fortunate enough to continue upon my return to the states.”*
- *“Embracing Russian interpersonal experiences- taking the cultural attitudes at face value and withholding judgment, learning how to adapt one's expectations of social interactions.”*
- *“The relationships I forged. I now have good friends in Canada, Mexico, Greece, Poland, and Bulgaria, to name only a few countries, and I have learned more from them than I had ever imagined.”*
- *“I am comfortable engaging the emotional and underlying language of Korean, as opposed to an abstract understanding of their worldview.”*

➤ **Recommendation #5 for CIE:**

Less than 15% of CIE’s students go abroad to Australasia, Canada, or the United Kingdom – places where English is the assumed language. The remaining 85% should understand, therefore, the impact that language ability will have on virtually every aspect of their experiences abroad. And all students would benefit from seeing that experience abroad has the potential to help them define their futures while better connecting them with diverse places and people. Sharing such accomplishments with students who are considering or preparing for experiences abroad will help encourage them to think about their own goals abroad.

“Please describe one thing that you can do now as a result of this experience. Why is this important to you?”

Table 6: Top 5 Answers Shown, N=469 - All Respondents, N=559 (also see: Chart 11, Page 27)

CAREER/ACADEMIC CONFIDENCE	156	28%	77%
LANGUAGE	133	24%	
ABILITY TO TRAVEL/LIVE ABROAD	84	15%	
INTERCULTURAL/GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE	35	7%	
CONNECTION with FAMILY	19	3%	

Answers to this open-ended prompt were coded as belonging to thematic groups, the top 77% of which are listed above. Students were asked to indicate the *main* thing that they can do now as a result of this experience abroad. The top answer above does not, properly speaking, describe a skill set as much as a mindset – but it is a mindset of confidence about moving forward one’s academic and professional career.

The remaining items listed above share the theme of *connecting* better with people and places through a mix of heightened linguistic, geographic, and intercultural facility. In some cases, these connections include one’s own family. To a larger degree, then, even confidence in one’s academic and professional career entails building off this ability to connect better with others no matter the unfamiliarity with the people or the places that might be involved. Students envision themselves capably handling a wide range of unforeseen challenges, expanding their sense of what is possible in their futures despite the seemingly infinite unknowns involved when undertaking something bold or untried.

Representative student comments include:

- *“I can view my academic path with more clarity. I believe my experience away from Yale made me better appreciate this college, as well as critically analyze my experiences here.”*
- *“I think of my education more holistically now, understanding that various aspects of my learning can be integrated and applied creatively to each project I tackle.”*
- *“I now have a better understanding of myself, the country in which I was born and raised, and also my position as a global citizen. I can now think in broader terms, which is important for obvious reasons: narrow-mindedness is not a quality I wish to possess.”*
- *“The internship shifted my thinking from ‘what does the teacher want’ ‘what are the rules’ ‘am I doing it right’ kinds of questions to relying on myself and looking to my own inspiration.”*
- *“Travel is not simply just seeing new things; it is the relationships that one forms through that travel. Knowing this, I can feel confident upon going to a new place, that I have the power and potential not to be lonely, and to foster a new life.”*
- *“I plan to work in the international sector in the future, so I think learning how to communicate with foreigners is extremely important.”*
- *“I have forest research experience I couldn’t have gotten anywhere else.... I learned how to plan my own trips and live independently in a foreign country.”*

➤ **Recommendation #6 for CIE:**

The major outcomes in terms of the abilities gained from experience abroad center on the ability to make connections with others and to come away with a clearer, more confident view of one’s future. Students typically depart overseas with little to no consideration for goals beyond completing the program at hand, in large part because they are unaware of what larger goals might be possible. CIE advising should, therefore, continue helping students not only prepare for success in the upcoming time abroad but also to put that experience in the context of one’s larger development.

“As I reflect upon this experience, something that I found particularly challenging”

Table 7: Top 57% of Answers Shown, N=307 (All Respondents, N=536) (also see: Chart 9, Page 25)

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE	83	15%	57%
LANGUAGE/PLEDGE	82	15%	
BALANCE/MAXIMIZING (TIME)	62	12%	
CONNECTING WITH LOCALS/OTHERS	43	8%	
HOMESICKNESS/LONELINESS	37	7%	

Answers to this open-ended prompt were coded as belonging to thematic groups, the top 57% of which are listed above. Students were asked to indicate the *main* thing that they found particularly challenging. It is worth noting on the next page correlations between what students wished they had known prior to their overseas experiences and what they found “particularly challenging” abroad. “Host Country/Culture” and “Language,” appear at or near the top of both lists, suggesting a need for students to focus on these aspects well ahead of departure. Not appearing on the list above but evident on the next page includes more information about the program abroad, the weather (packing), and how to manage money. In place of those items, Table 7 above indicates issues like “balance” of time and “connecting” with others abroad.

Representative student comments include:

- *“I found the balance between spending time with fellow students at Yale and Japanese people to be very difficult. In retrospect, although I have created friendships that will last at Yale, I wish I had more aggressively pursued spending time with my Japanese friends.”*
- *“I found it particularly challenging to strike a balance between studying and explor[ing] the city!”*
- *“Getting over my own self-consciousness.”*
- *“I found it particularly challenging to adjust to life in a new country with very little language acquisition under my belt.”*
- *“Getting the locals to deal with me as though I was not just a tourist.”*
- *“Escaping from the American bubble we brought with us”*
- *“Being a woman in a Muslim country.”*
- *“I found it difficult to make close friends abroad, primarily because it was difficult to find the right circumstances to meet people and establish meaningful connections.”*
- *“Getting used to an environment where support structures were not as established and strong as they are at Yale.”*
- *“Living in a nation where there was no separation between church and state and then returning home and trying to understand how everyone lives so differently in the world.”*
- *“The loneliness of my first few weeks abroad (I direct enrolled).”*
- *“Keeping my anxiety level down, getting enough sleep, eating properly, and getting exercise.”*
- *“The different views of general economic principles held by Europeans compared to most Americans.”*
- *“How to gain acceptance among the locals.”*

➤ **Recommendation #7 for CIE:**

Students should be advised that gaining more knowledge of the host country and, as necessary, its language is essential to making the most of experience abroad. And in contrast to some of the more obvious items indicated on Table 8 (Page 11), students should realize that maximizing and balancing one’s time overseas will present a defining challenge, one that can be at least partially addressed with advance planning. Students should also understand that experience abroad often entails periods of loneliness or of yearning for the familiar, but these are necessary waypoints in a larger journey of personal growth. Understanding this arc of experience will help students to anticipate, overcome, and appreciate the challenges of life abroad.

“As I reflect upon this experience, something I wish I had known”

Table 8: Top 50% of Answers Shown, N=260 (All Respondents, N=514) (also see: Chart 8, Page 24)

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE	89	17%	50%
PROGRAM DETAILS/INTENSITY	66	13%	
LANGUAGE	38	7%	
PACKING/WEATHER	35	7%	
HANDLING/BUDGETING MONEY	32	6%	

Answers to this open-ended prompt were coded as belonging to thematic groups, the top 50% of which are listed above. One consideration in discussing results grouped this way is that students were asked to describe the *main* thing that they wished they had known prior to the experience, which is to say that students undoubtedly wished that they had known more about several things prior to departure, many of them listed on Chart 8 (Page 24). That said, for 50% (N=260) of students to name the small set of issues above indicates a student lack of preparedness on both basic issues, such as what to pack, and more demanding challenges such as language acquisition.

Representative student comments include:

- *“I wish I would have known that while in Siena, we would have a lot of unstructured time. This way, I could have gotten to fit a few more cultural excursions into my time.”*
- *“The politics of EU were confusing. I wish I had known more about European history, because it was very pertinent to my internship.”*
- *“I wish I had realized how much work the class would be.”*
- *“Was how demanding the experience would be, but also how much I would learn in so little time.”*
- *“I wish I had known what the weather would be like. I took the wrong clothing.”*
- *“How to speak colloquial Arabic in Jordan!”*
- *“How much money to allocate per week for food and sightseeing excursions.”*
- *“More about the history of China.”*
- *“That speaking English with Americans is a big detriment to learning a foreign language.”*
- *“I wish I had known that following the packing instructions for the program was actually very important.”*
- *“That culture shock seems to be something that occurs even in the UK.”*
- *“Notifying my bank that I would be traveling abroad.”*
- *“How expensive things are in the UK given the current exchange rate.”*
- *“I wish I had known more about politics, both Italian and American.”*
- *“Don’t underestimate the amount of work you have every day.”*
- *“That it was possible to buy commuter train passes in Tokyo as a student.”*

➤ **Recommendation #8 for CIE:**

As an illustration of their peers’ 20/20 hindsight, students should be shown these results in pre-departure meetings and at relevant moments in the post-decision phase. The goal is not necessarily for CIE to cover all this information itself (a near impossibility) but to demonstrate the typical blind spots that their peers have had, for example, in arriving in a new culture having done very little to understand it beforehand. CIE should, however, look at the full range of answers to this item and identify areas for improved support, particularly if the challenge is somewhat technical in nature, as it is with things like currency conversions, accessing money abroad, and the various fees often associated with such activity. Ultimately, lack of such preparation keeps students from making the most of their time abroad, particularly in the first days and weeks.

Introduction – Sustainability and Experience Abroad:

(by Kathryn Bell, Assistant Director, CIE)

“Challenge: The success of achieving the goals in the plan will require the active contribution of every member of the community. *Opportunity:* Inspire the entire campus to do their part in making Yale a model of sustainability, and educate all about practices that can benefit their lives beyond Yale.”-Yale Sustainability Strategic Plan, 2010-2013

The Center for International Experience (CIE) takes the directives introduced in the Yale Sustainability Strategic Plan seriously. In collaboration with the rest of the Yale community, CIE is committed to helping the institution achieve its goals for sustainability and the reduction of our institution’s environmental impact.

CIE is positioned as the gateway through which nearly all undergraduates pursue global experiences and is also responsible for ensuring that, once abroad, students continue to fulfill Yale’s institutional commitment to sustainability. CIE is responsible for helping to guide Yale College students towards international experiences that will enhance their sense of global citizenship, which includes an individual and collective commitment to protecting, preserving, and advancing sustainability. With over 1,300 undergraduate students pursuing experiences in every corner of the planet each year, CIE must take the opportunity to address the environmental issues facing host communities around the world. Our mission for sustainably abroad is best encapsulated in this statement from Yale’s Strategic Plan, released in October of 2010:

“For over a hundred years, Yale has been a leader in teaching and research about the environment, and our graduates have been conspicuous in environmental leadership, advocacy, policy, and science. Over the past ten years, Yale has been prominent in declaring that environmental citizenship must extend beyond the University’s academic enterprise and that Yale as an institution must adopt policies and practices that will contribute to a more sustainable planet.”

Through valued collaborations and partnerships, CIE has already begun to help Yale University achieve its goals for sustainability: CIE works in partnership with Yale’s Office of Sustainability on sustainability-themed study abroad programs and courses through the International Alliance of Research Universities, and on the Yale Sustainability Leaders Program initiative, including piloting the Green Workplace Certification. Yale University’s position as a leader in institutional sustainability has given CIE the good fortune to work closely with experts in the field of campus sustainability, and CIE will continue to value and nurture these collaborations. In partnership with a national association for international education professionals called the Forum on Education Abroad (which has taken on the task of creating sustainability standards for the international education field), CIE has begun to adopt these standards in the following areas: program design; curriculum design, student learning and outcomes assessment; promotion and marketing; and office operations and management. CIE has also taken on stewardship of the Green Passport Program, a national initiative conceived by leaders in the field of international education. The Green Passport uses social media to provide undergraduate students planning to go abroad with resources about minimizing their environmental impact while traveling internationally.

In its “Yale University Center for International Experience, 2010” survey, CIE gauged students’ level of awareness about environmental issues affecting their host communities abroad. This report illustrates CIE’s findings and provides valuable insight into the students’ ability to make connections between their international experiences and sustainability overall. Similar to Yale’s Sustainability Strategic Plan, these survey findings also present opportunities for CIE to engage further with students on one of the defining issues of this age and of many ages to come.

Kathryn Bell, December 2010

“Did you observe or learn about behaviors or practices in your host community to conserve or preserve resources?”

Table 9: 100%, N=619 (also see: Chart 17, Page 23)

YES	335	54.1%	100%
NO	284	45.9%	

The chart above indicates a clear distinction between students who were consciously aware of their host community’s effort, with 54% (N=335) of students noticing behaviors to conserve or preserve resources, but a still large number of respondents (nearly 46%, N=284) who observed no efforts to conserve resources. This survey does not indicate whether or not efforts to conserve or preserve resources did not exist and were not happening, only that nearly 46% of students did not notice that these efforts were taking place. The student comments below indicate that students who observed specific behaviors or practices in their host communities are also referring to the same countries. Some countries are mentioned multiple times, and several students commented on how far ahead of the United States these countries are in terms of preserving resources. Most of these comments focused on conservation (of water, energy), waste management (garbage, recycling, composting), and public transportation. Not all observations were positive, and many students observed that their host communities did little to conserve or preserve resources.

Representative student comments include:

- *“Europe is in general MUCH more environmentally conscious than the U.S. is, despite widespread activism here. This is obvious in everything: grocery stores that don't give out free bags, amazing gas mileage on cars, bottle return incentives, bathroom design and plumbing, and so on. They conserve energy and recycle. They also make sure they cook just the right amount of food for each meal, and buy at markets with comparable prices.”*
- *“Germany is fairly environmentally conscious, and two big things that stuck out were: 1. the enormous tax on bottled drinks that I suppose I should call a deposit to be gotten back when one takes the bottles to be recycled, and 2. The absolutely incredible public transportation system that I missed SO MUCH when I came back to the states.”*
- *“You can live perfectly well with a one meter tall fridge, life without AC's is actually more pleasant, going to work with a bicycle and using public transportation is a fun and relaxing experience.”*
- *“It was the LACK of conserving resources that was shocking. Russians do not recycle. They simply throw everything away. This was MOST DISTRESSING because Americans cannot drink the water in Russia and must rely on bottled water. I threw away so many bottles because there was no place to recycle them!!! In addition, most people smoke and air quality in the city is very poor. During my time in Russia, I did not see any evidence of concern about the environment or people's effect on it.”*

➤ **Recommendation #9 for CIE:**

Yale’s Office of Sustainability and its Student Taskforce for Environmental Partnership work to educate Yale students by raising awareness about why sustainability and environmental responsibility is important. CIE can work more closely with these organizations to ensure that the matter of student travel abroad takes a defined space in that larger discussion. Absent such efforts, CIE’s opportunities abroad might too readily be seen as activities that happen “over there” seemingly disconnected from environmental discussions in New Haven. As the next page makes clear, students have some basic sense of how best they would like to be educated in this regard, and CIE should use those findings to begin mapping out possible additions to the resources it offers its students who are preparing for experiences abroad.

“Which of the following resources would have been most useful to you in thinking carefully about environmental issues prior to this experience?”

Table 10: 100%, N=609, 610, 611, and 612 (also see: Chart 18, Page 22)

ANSWER OPTIONS	Very Useful	Moderately Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not Useful	TOTAL (100%)
Encouraging you to take a pledge, stating that you will travel and live abroad as sustainably as possible.	38 (6.2%)	130 (21.3%)	191 (31.3%)	251 (41.4%)	610
Providing you specific examples of how students can get involved in sustainability and reduce their environmental impact before, during, and after being abroad.	165 (27%)	185 (30.3%)	172 (28.2%)	89 14.6%	611
Connecting you with international students from those countries, in order to learn more about the environmental issues affecting the countries.	163 (26.6%)	188 (30.7%)	156 (25.5%)	105 17.2%	612
Partnering you with student organizations such as the Student Taskforce for Environmental Partnership and the Yale Student Environmental Coalition in order to help raise awareness about sustainable travel before students go abroad.	51 (8.4%)	154 (25.3%)	230 (37.8%)	174 (28.6%)	609

What information and resources can the Center for International Experience provide about sustainability and sustainable travel that would be most useful to students? As the results indicate, students want specific information about how they can reduce their impact as well as about connecting with international students from these countries in order to learn more about the issues affecting their host communities. The majority of students do not, however, wish to take a pledge that commits them to living abroad sustainably possible. Just as revealing were student comments, which indicate that students often compartmentalize the idea of acting in an environmentally responsible manner when traveling abroad.

Representative student comments include:

- *“I ... don't think that this is the forum to bring in the issue of environmental awareness. We are always told by Yale to be sustainable and aware of environmental issues. One should definitely be respectful of other countries, but it should be assumed that a student will be environmentally friendly. I would have been insulted and felt berated if these "encouragements" and partnering were forced upon.”*
- *“It seems to me that the simple act of taking an AIRPLANE across the Atlantic would negate any positive impact I could possibly have by re-using a water bottle...”*
- *“Sustainable travel would be a very neat aspect to study abroad that I have never thought about.”*
- *“I did not go abroad in order to learn about sustainability. Shoehorning that into every experience a person has at this university ends up making the whole incredibly complex environmental challenge we face as a species seem shallow and silly... If the CIE makes "sustainability" the focus of study abroad, they will risk sending students to other countries without allowing them to see how American discussions of local food and composting are not necessarily as relevant and morally imperative to other people as they are to us.”*

➤ **Recommendation #10 for CIE:**

These comments can be used as the start of a dialogue with students about living as a visitor among other communities and about the individual and collective impact of our decisions. In seeking to engage students who are planning to go abroad with the idea of traveling as sustainably as possible, CIE should use these results in talking with students and with Yale’s Office of Sustainability. Currently there is no clear sense that sustainability and experience abroad are connected, when certainly they are in several obvious ways.

“During your program, did you act in a way that conserved resources or would be considered environmentally responsible at Yale?”

Table 11: 100%, N=496

YES	354	71.3%	100%
NO	142	28.7%	

Do students abroad behave in a way that would preserve or conserve resources? Most students (75%) did report acting in an environmentally responsible manner, while 30% of respondents either could not or did not choose to conserve or preserve resources. In many cases, students followed the examples set in their host countries, and other students made either additional efforts or no effort at all to conserve resources.

Representative student comments, who answered “Yes” include:

- *“Yes, I tried to buy the biggest water bottles possible so I wouldn't have to buy multiple bottles. Even though a lot of people there threw trash wherever, I did not follow suit. I treated the country as I would treat my home country, with respect.”*
- *“To my best ability I conserved resources but the infrastructure in China is nowhere near as sustainable as Yale's so this led to difficulties (ex. no ability to recycle)”*
- *“Utensil-less eating, definitely less trash, trading in every bottle you got so it could be refilled for another customer, taking extremely short showers with a spurt of water at the start and again at the end, or 'showering' out of a bucket, definitely sustainable, with more scarcity, people live more sustainable lives”*
- *“I am usually fairly conscious of this and especially as a foreigner this is something important in terms of respecting the country you are visiting”*
- *“I followed the rules of trash separation and also used heat and air conditioning as little as possible. It may have been good to learn more about what else we could have done...”*

Representative student comments, who answered “No” include:

- *“I believe flying to and from my host country far outweighed any environmentally beneficial actions I did or could have taken in-country...”*
- *“I hadn't considered it. I lived as the community does here but I should try and serve as a model for them, not just follow their habits.”*
- *“I didn't try. I had no desire to conserve resources or act environmentally responsible, if it meant infringing upon my own comfort.”*
- *“I made no special efforts to conserve or behave "environmentally responsible". I am not a wasteful person...but I made no changes to my lifestyle based on so-called 'environmental concerns'. I don't make any such special accommodations at home or Yale either.”*
- *“[I] didn't consciously act to be environmentally responsible. Studying abroad is not a time where I've ever been in a strong position to make changes to my lifestyle...--I'm focused on doing the polite, diplomatic thing and playing by house rules. Isn't that the more important point of studying abroad?”*

➤ **Recommendation #11 for CIE:**

Most students (75%) feel that they acted in a way that would be considered environmentally responsible at Yale, though it is clear that many students followed the examples and expectations established by their host communities. Some students alluded to feeling powerless about conserving resources while living abroad, and other students did not see a link between environmental issues affecting the natural world, and the impact on their host communities. CIE’s most important work in this regard, again, is in establishing a link between experience abroad and Yale’s larger sustainability initiatives. Few campuses have made this connection explicit, so innovation in this space will be largely experimental yet capable of shaping student opinion regarding sustainability in formative ways that underscore the global nature of this challenge.

Conclusion:

(by Kelly McLaughlin, Director of Outcomes Assessment / Light Fellowship, CIE)

Page forty-six of the 2003 Yale University Report on Yale College Education recommended that CIE's predecessors "expand the number and variety of international opportunities that [it] guide[s] students toward **and facilitate efforts to find the right fit**" (emphasis mine). Whereas some 1,300 Yale College students now go abroad each year through CIE, this number stood at 550¹ at the time of the CYCE report. Thanks to Yale University's commitment to such opportunities, therefore, the success story in terms of the number of students going abroad on a variety of experiences is clear.

How well, then, is CIE facilitating the *right fit* between students, who have varied or minimally-defined goals, and opportunities abroad, which likewise posit varied or only implicit outcomes? Based on the survey results reported here, one sees several encouraging signs that students are returning from experiences abroad with newfound confidence, newfound abilities, and newfound understanding of the larger world. Certainly, in addition to the dedication and talent of the students themselves, this is a testament to CIE's advising and commitment to program quality. That said, finding the right fit for individuals across varied experiences in locations around the world is a complex endeavor, and assessment efforts that go further in defining what typical outcomes result when particular students participate in particular programs for particular lengths of time will no doubt prove of tremendous value to students and administrators alike.

CIE is already developing its assessment along such lines. For example, what of the student who has previously been abroad on a Yale program for whom this is a first time experience? In what ways can CIE's advising and program management better account for such factors? There are, in fact, often significant differences in outcomes between those students who were going abroad for the first time on a Yale program (69.8% of survey respondents) and those who had been abroad before on a Yale program (30.2%). For example, a typical source of pride for a student going abroad for the first time is the ability to travel around a foreign city successfully while veteran students abroad often signal pride in "making a contribution" of some kind. Broadly speaking, then, the first experience abroad is often that of visitors looking to gain some fundamental skills in travel and intercultural exposure while subsequent experiences focus much more on becoming, to the extent possible, productive members of a new society.

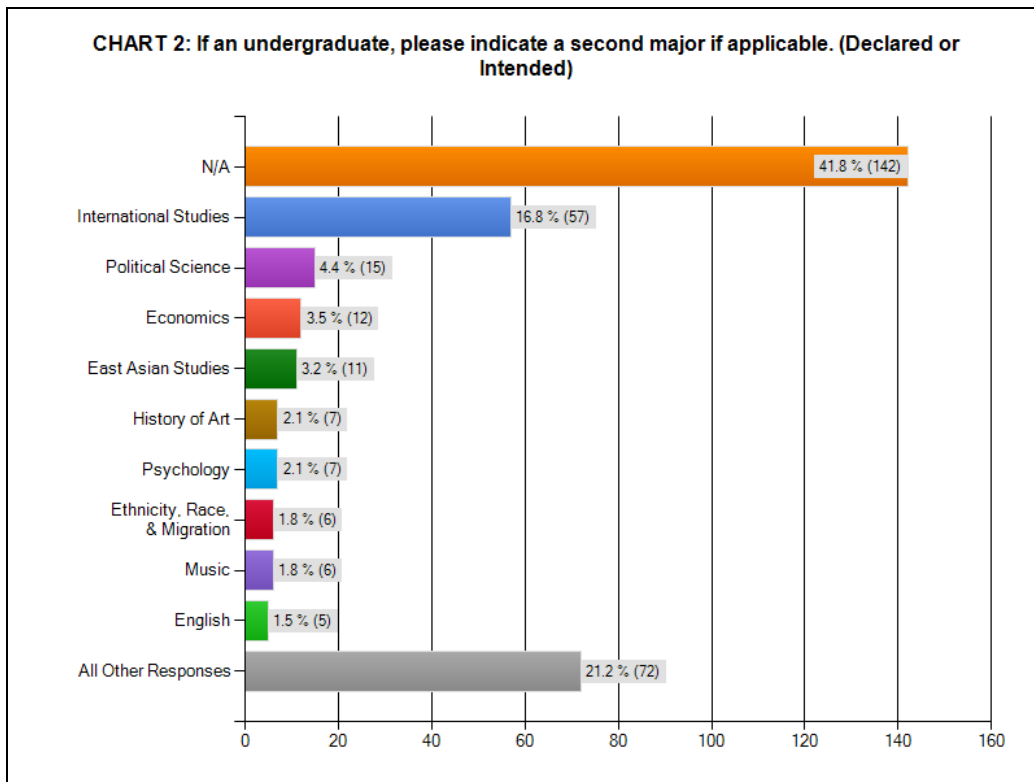
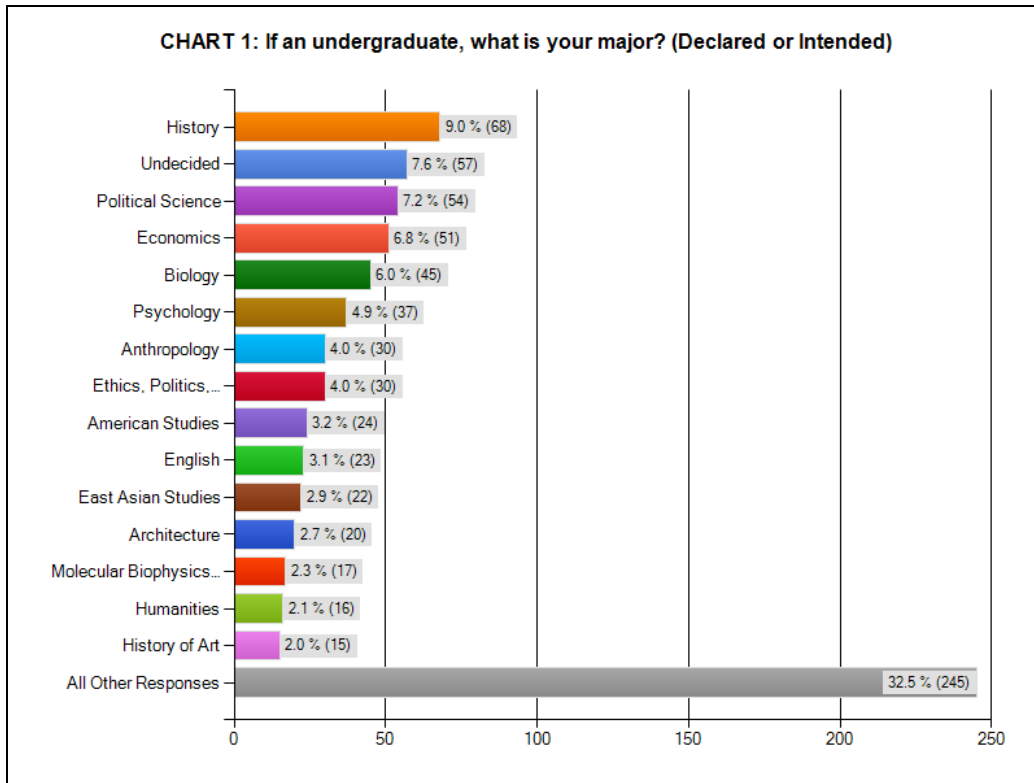
Accomplishments at both ends of this spectrum are significant in their own right, not least of which because they are complementary (one must first have the ability to travel and to encounter difference before he or she can function as a capable member of global society); but such findings offer useful insights into how a single experience abroad is likely to bring a student only some of the larger skills and the larger world view that Yale College hopes its students will gain before graduation.

That said, the challenges of sending students abroad for even one substantive engagement overseas cannot be overlooked, so maximizing the gains students make on *any* opportunity through CIE requires constant diligence and adept advising. Assessment efforts offer the promise of pinpointing the kinds of preparation and self-reflection that can help students succeed overseas, culminating in their integrating the lessons they learned abroad into their larger academic and developmental aims. Experience abroad is not best approached as a "checkbox" activity that is finished and filed away. Rather, experience abroad offers a unique opportunity to foster in students a more confident, more purposeful ownership over their own "first-hand experience of foreign cultures [that is] crucial training for citizens of the global future."²

¹ Center for International Experience 2009-2010 Annual Report, page 3.

² Yale University Report on Yale College Education, page 42.

APPENDIX



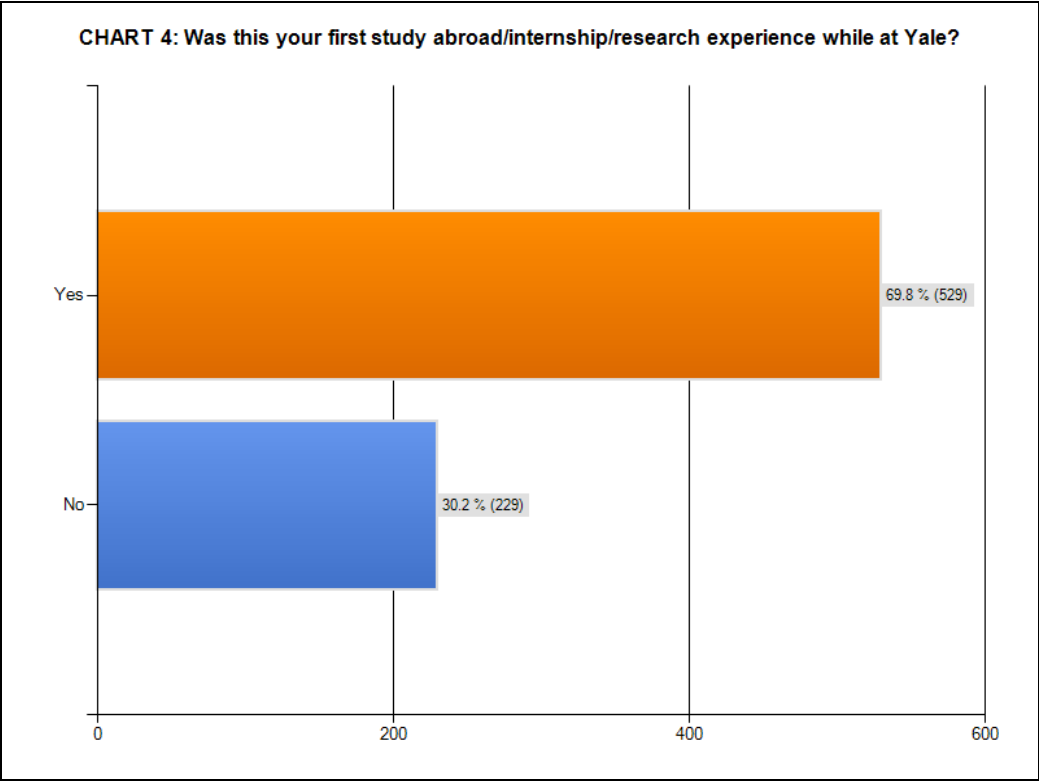
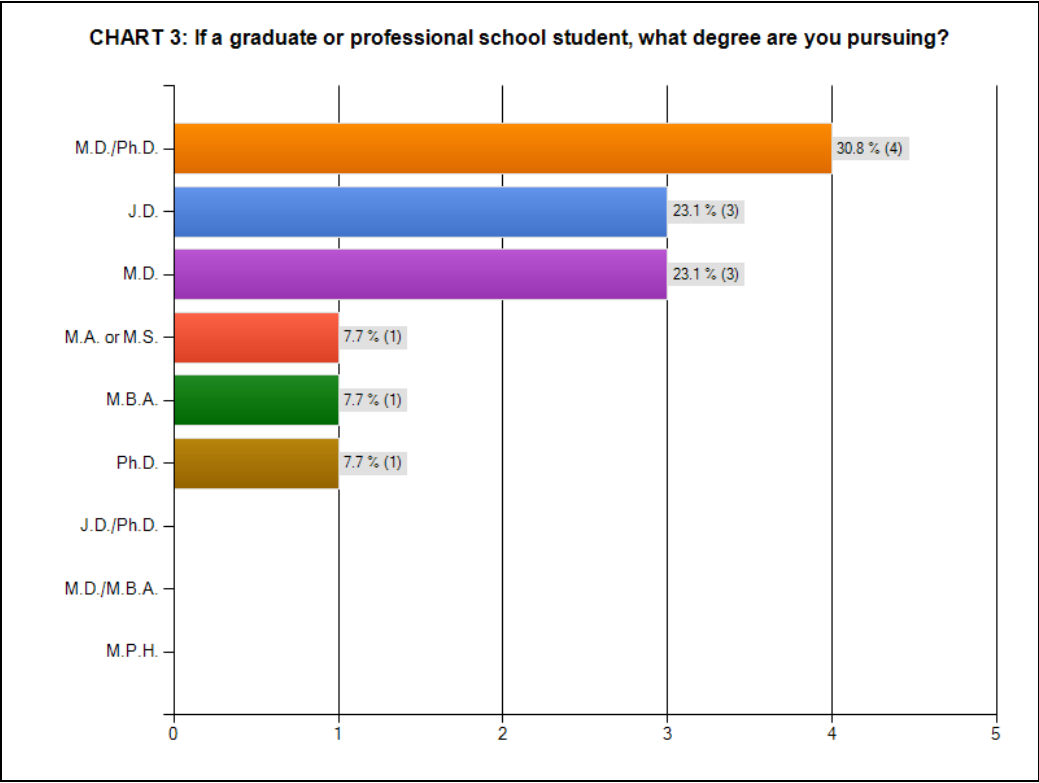


CHART 5: How many substantive (4 weeks or longer) study abroad/internship/research experiences had you undertaken while in college PRIOR to this one?

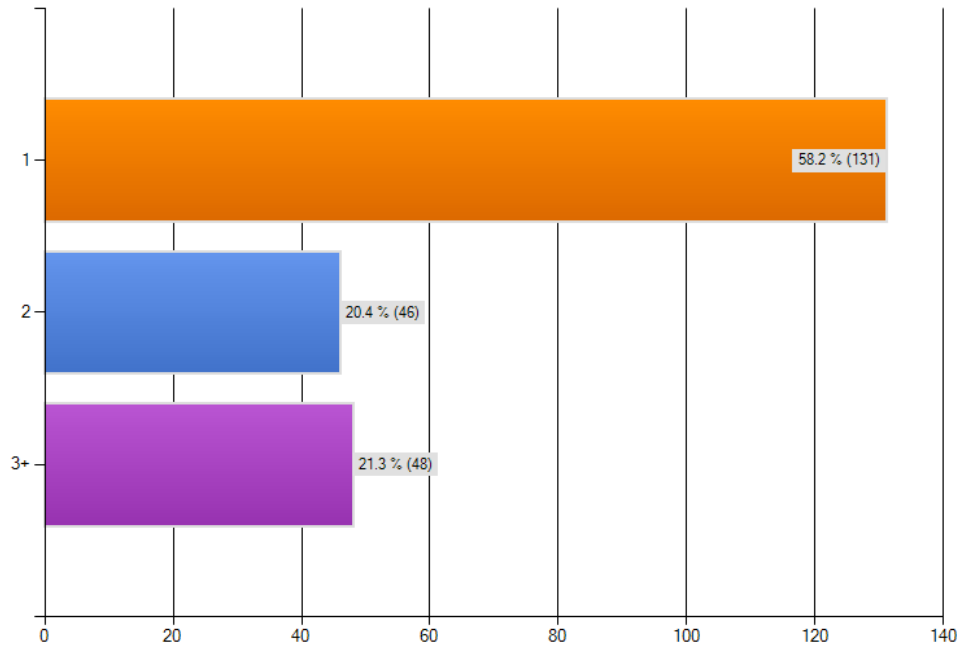


CHART 6: How many weeks was this experience that you just returned from (do not include personal travel, etc.)?

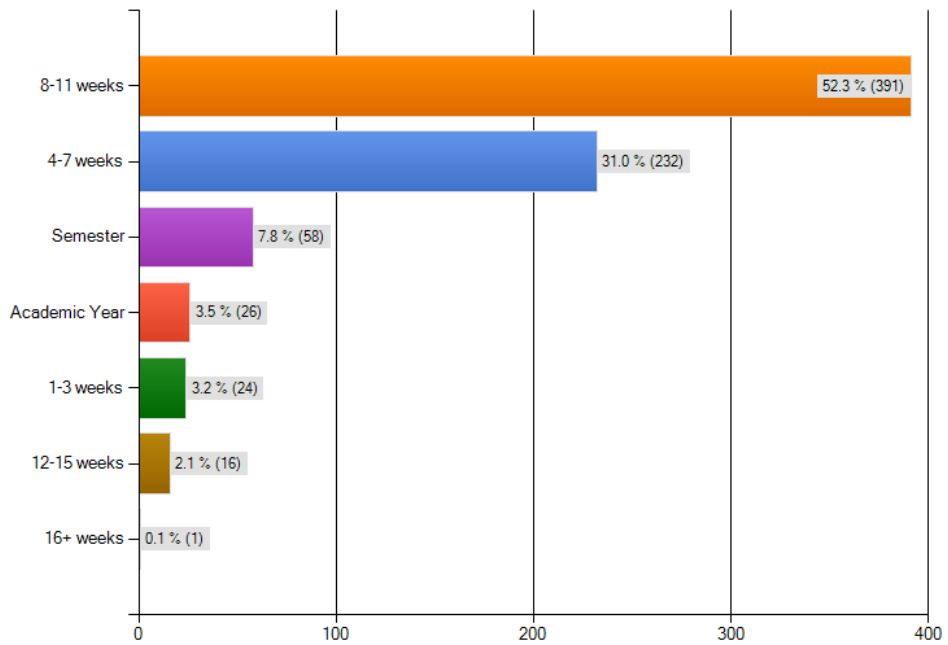


CHART 7: Did this experience take place inside the United States, outside the United States, or both?

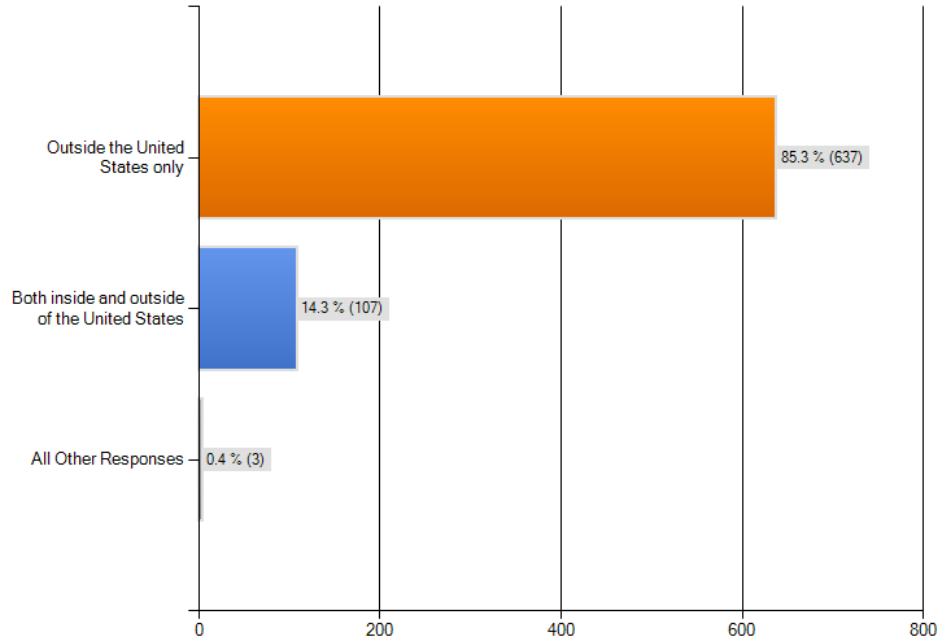


CHART 12: As a result of this experience, I am more confident in handling the next steps in my academic and/or professional path.

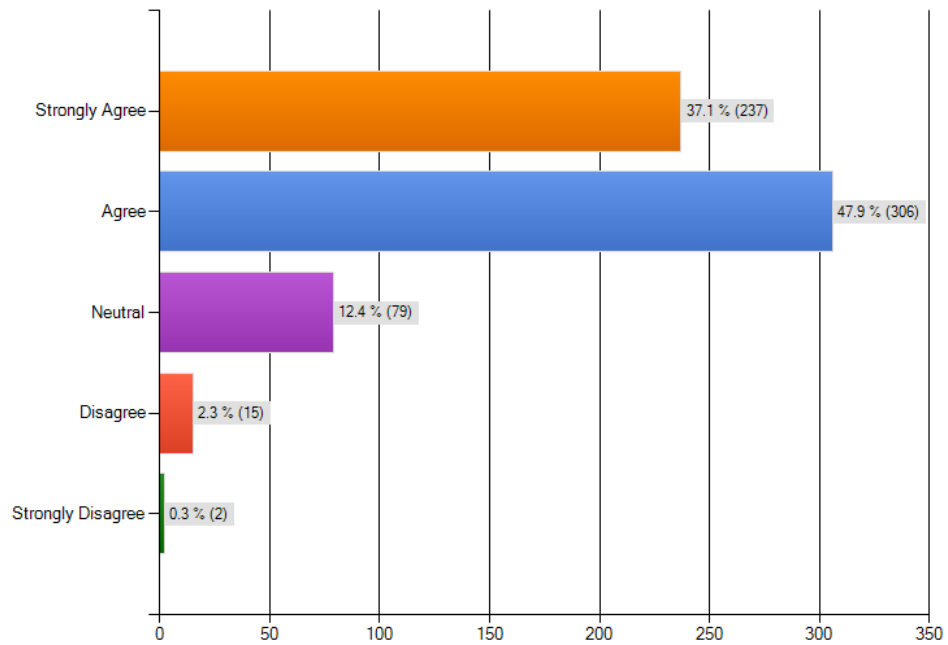


CHART 13: As a result of this experience, I am more adept at solving problems on my own when the situation calls for it.

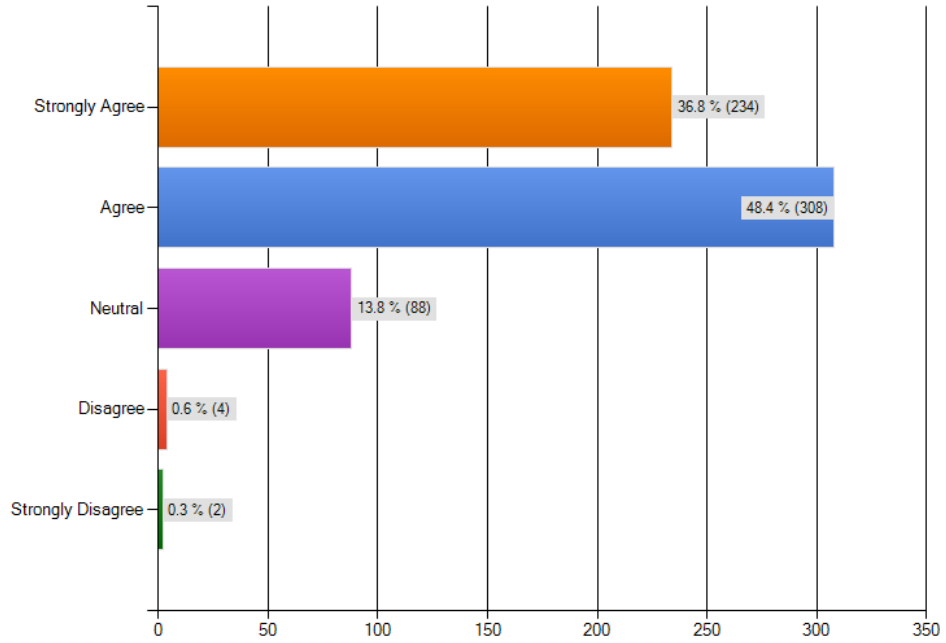


CHART 14: As a result of this experience, I am more adept at utilizing the help of others to solve problems when it is appropriate to do so.

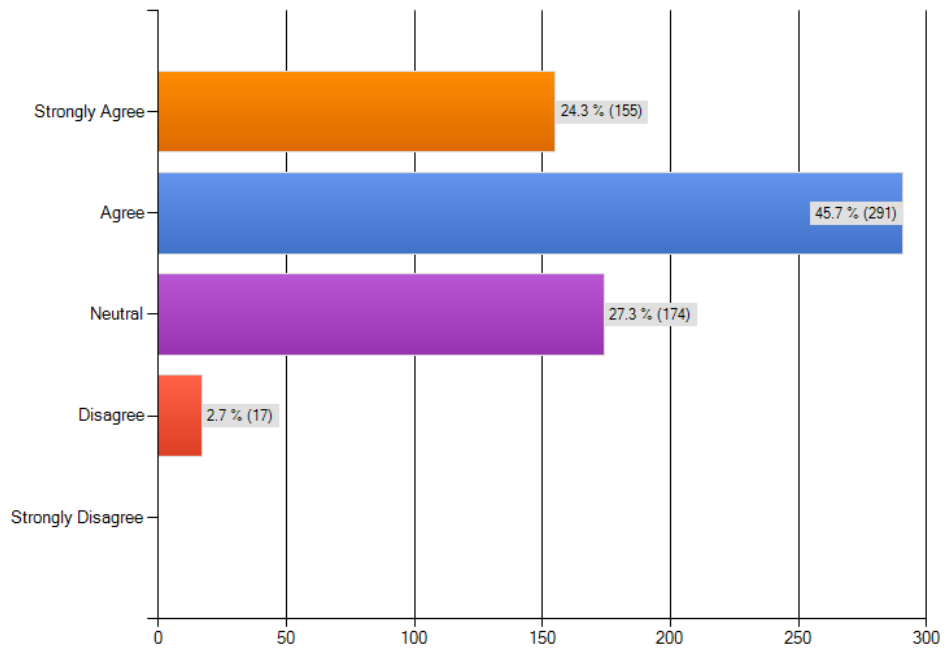


CHART 15: As a result of this experience, I feel more confident in dealing with unexpected situations.

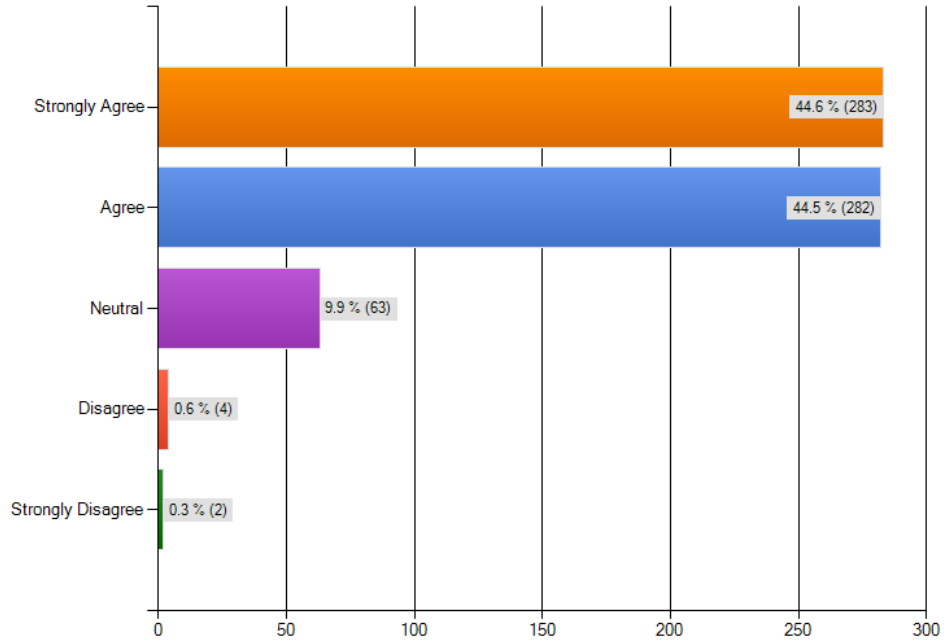


CHART 16: Please indicate which office at Yale primarily helped you to have this experience.

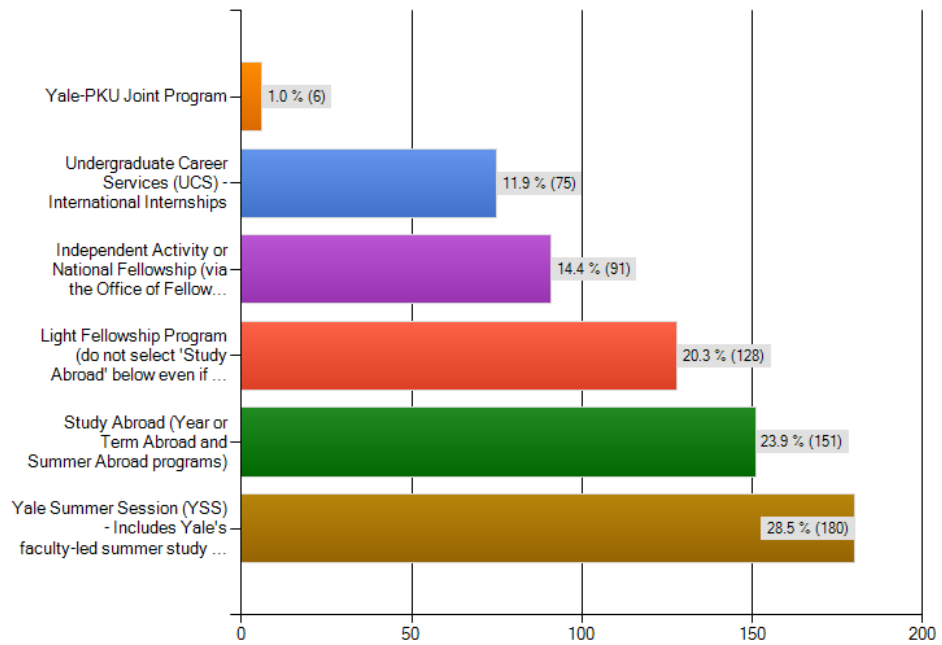


CHART 17: Did you observe or learn about behaviors or practices in your host community to conserve or preserve resources?

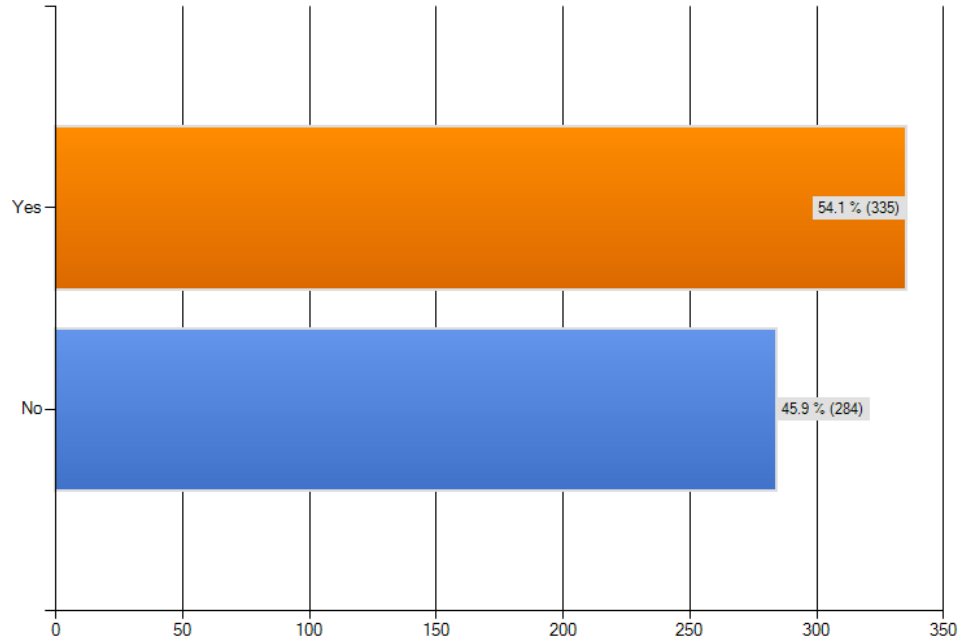


CHART 18: Which of the following resources would have been most useful to you in thinking carefully about environmental issues prior to this experience?

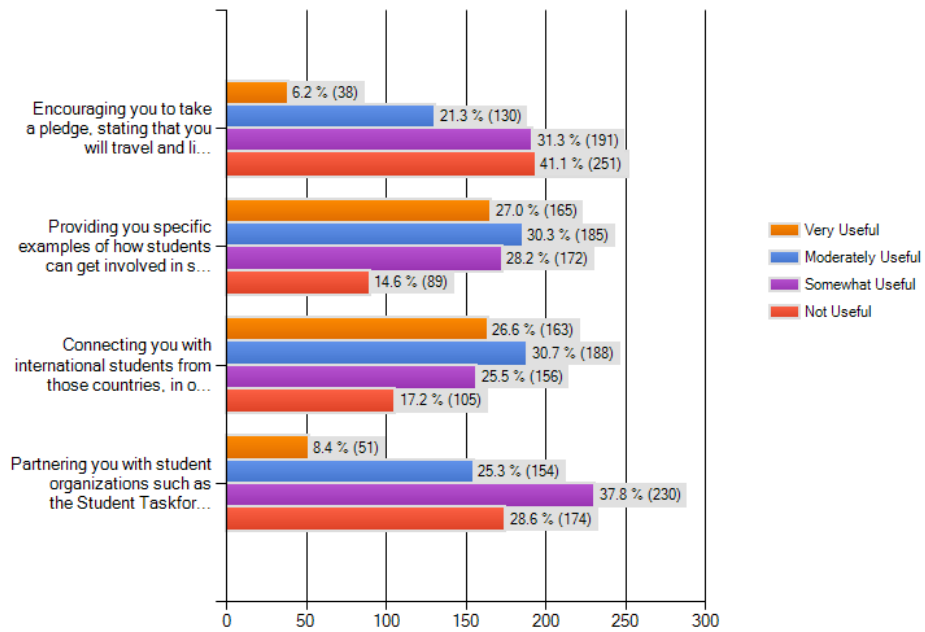


CHART 8: CIE Survey, 2010: Top Answers
"As I reflect upon this experience, something I wish I had known:"
(N=514 : Student's Main Item Only)

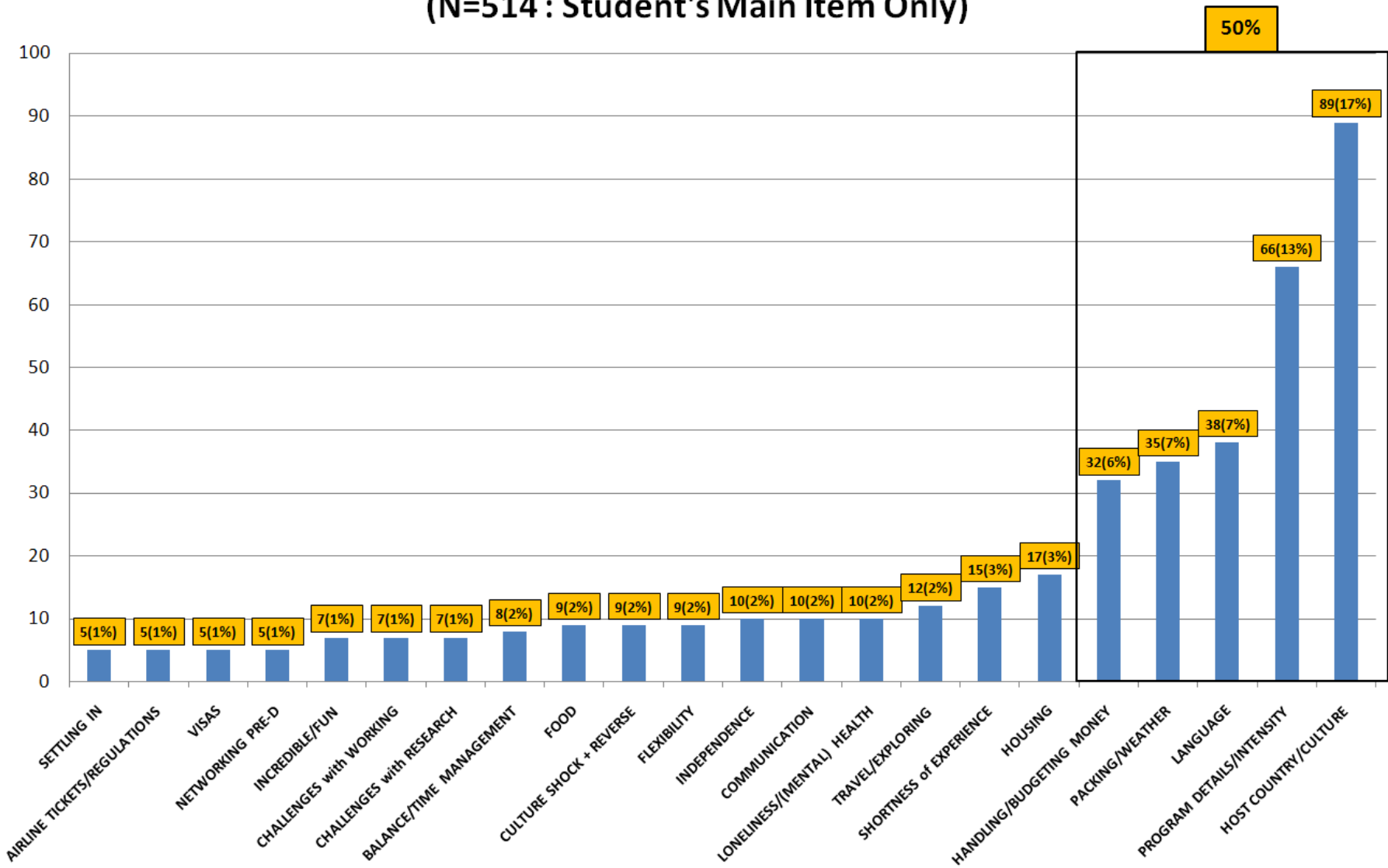


CHART 9: CIE Survey, 2010: Top Answers
"As I reflect upon this experience, something that I found particularly challenging:" (N=536 : Student's Main Item Only)

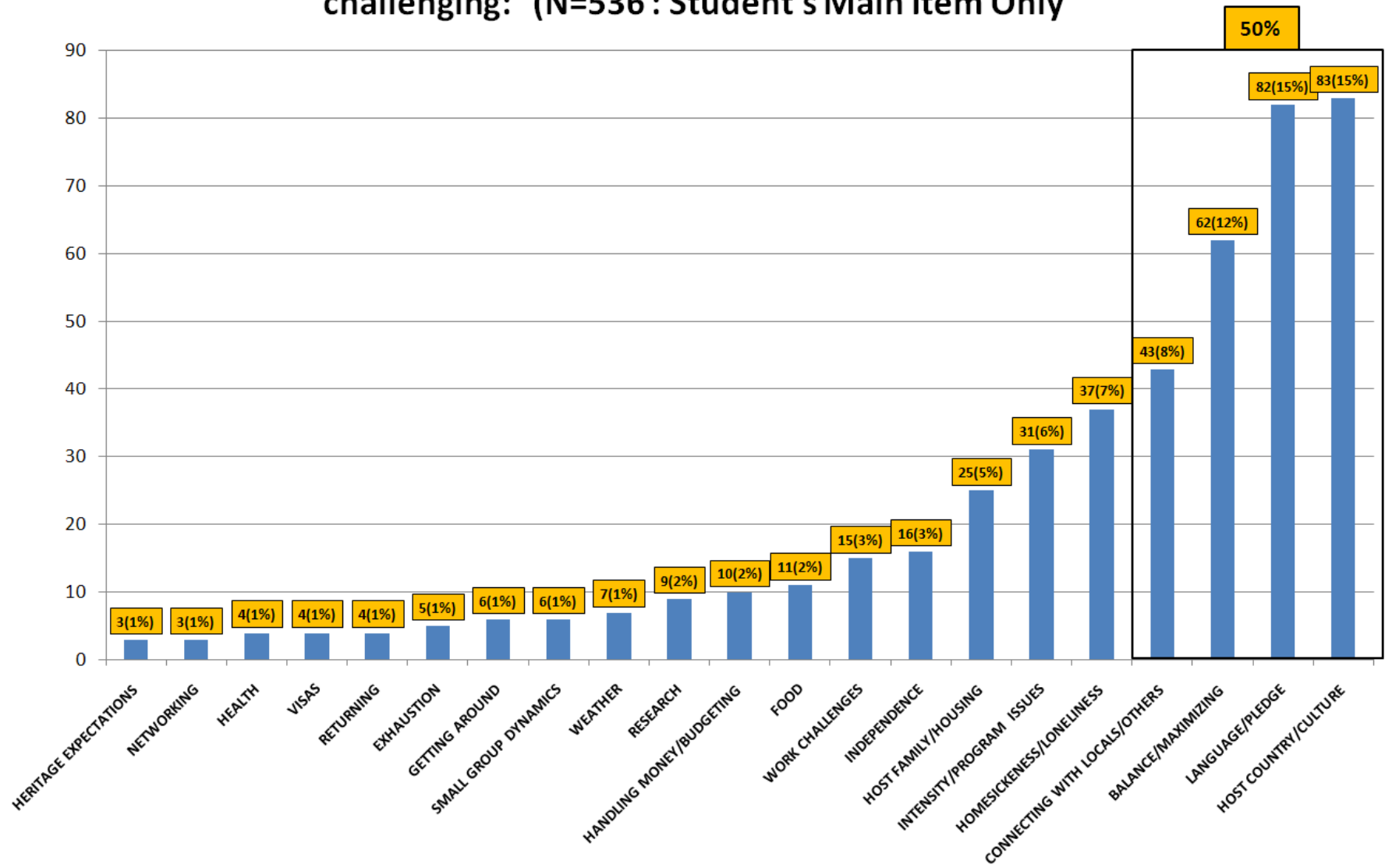


CHART 10: CIE Survey, 2010: Top Answers
"As I reflect upon this experience, something I am most proud of:"
(N=546 : Student's Main Item Only)

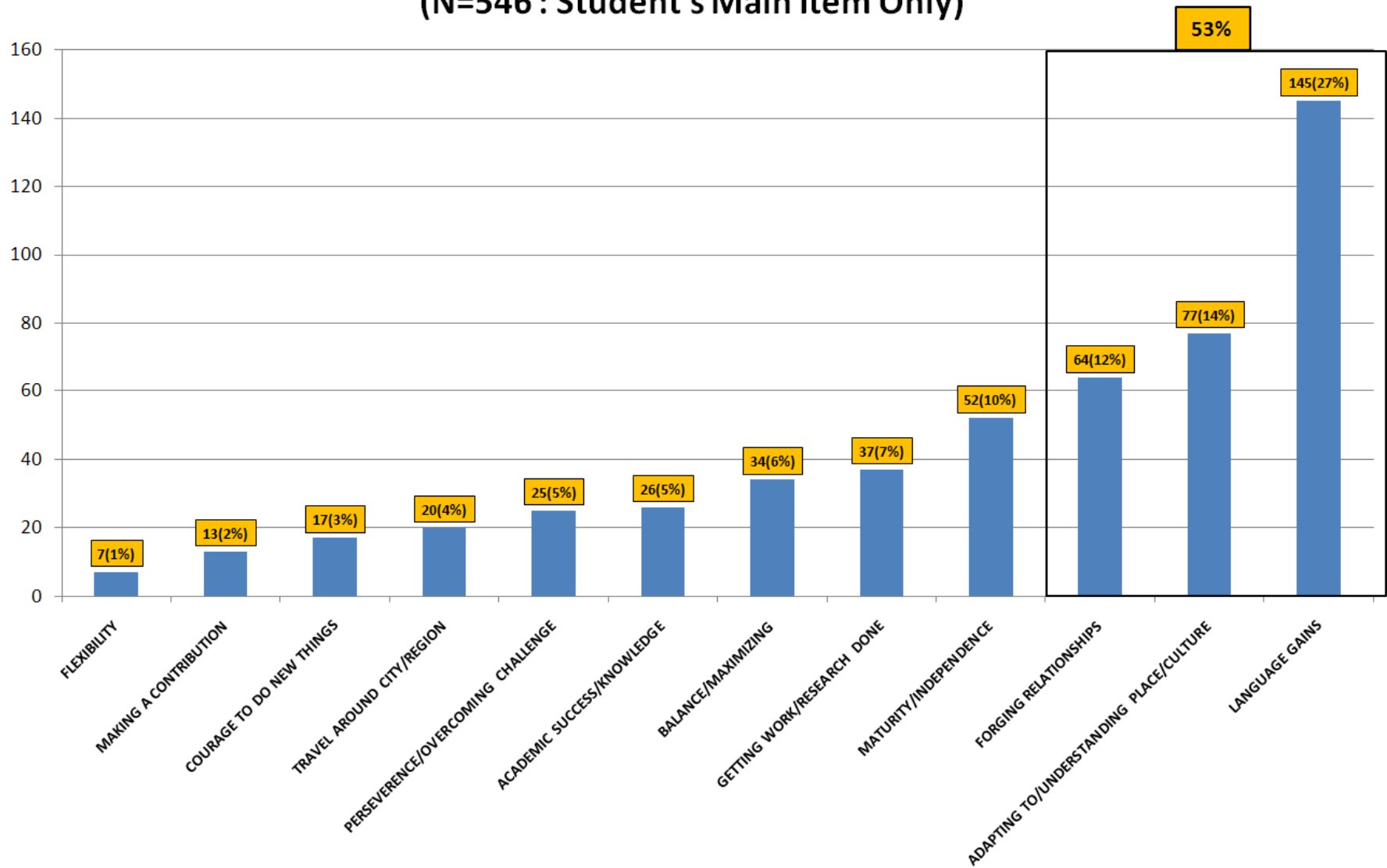


CHART 11: CIE Survey, 2010: Top Answers
"Please describe one thing that you can do now as a result of this experience. Why is this important to you?"
(N=559 : Students' Main Item Only)

