

International Service Learning in the Health Professions: Perceived Value of the Student Experience

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Introduction

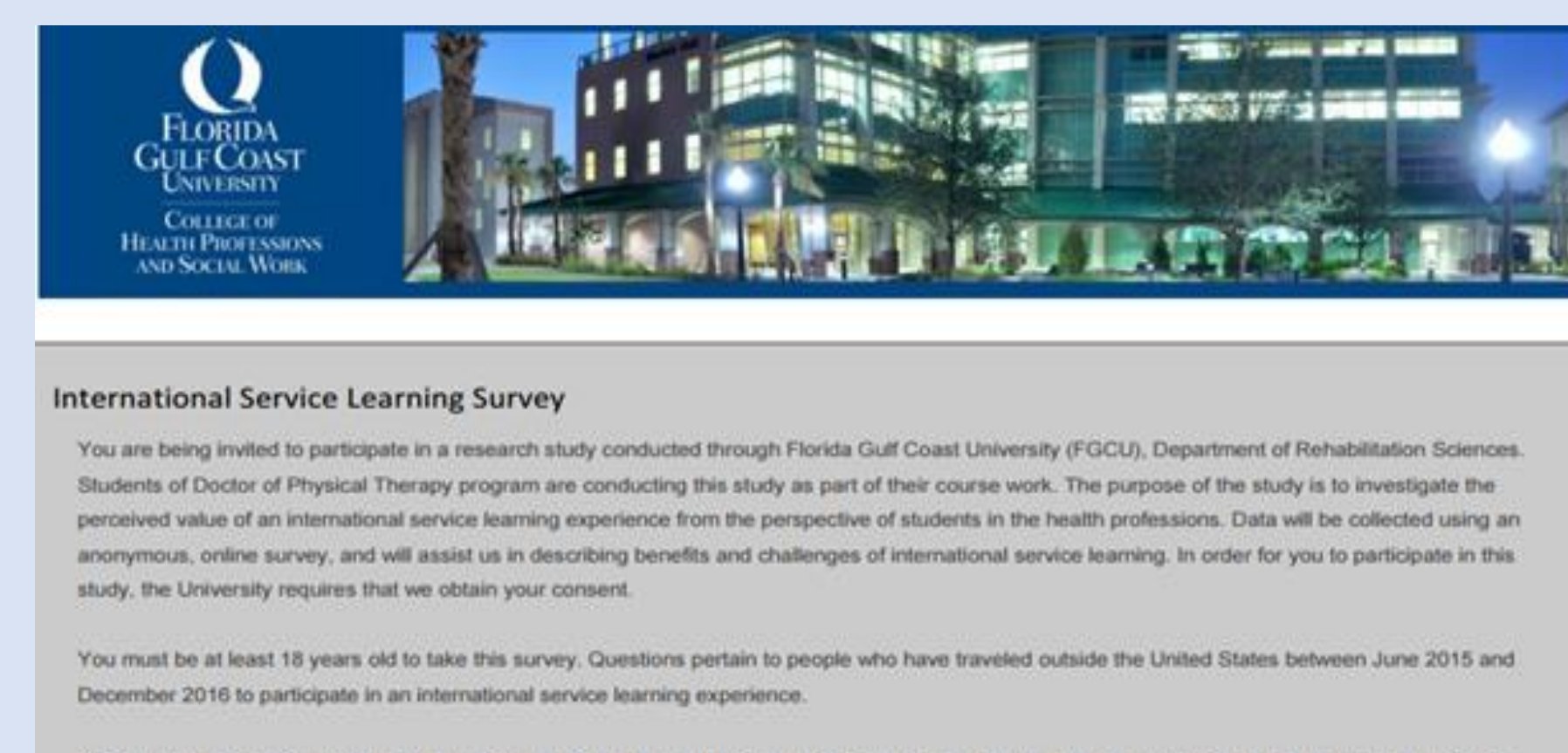
Although current ISL literature exists for fields such as occupation therapy, medical doctors, physical therapy, and nursing, gaps in knowledge continue to exist regarding the perceived value of the ISL experience and how it relates to health care students' career and school success.

The aim of this study was to use qualitative inquiry using open ended survey questions to investigate student's perceived value of ISL experience on their career and academic success to captured the lived experience of the participants.

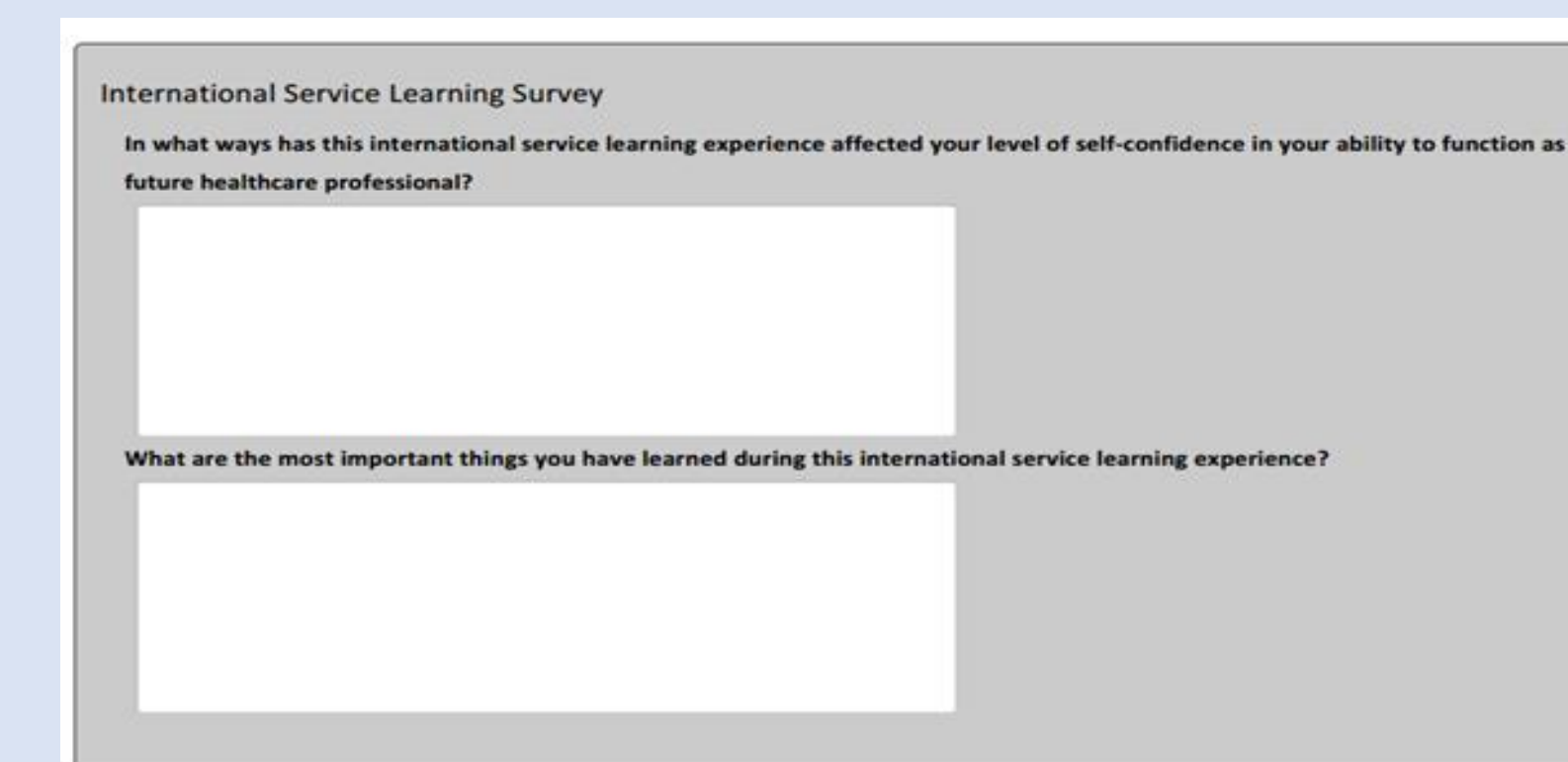


Methods

Surveys were distributed electronically via checkbox preserving anonymity and to screen for inclusion criteria. A total of 15 responses were analyzed in Excel to elucidate emerging themes from the data. A total of 12 themes were captured including predetermined categories pulled from research.



Checkbox®



Results

A total of 18 responses were analyzed in Excel to elucidate emerging themes from the data (Table 1). A total of 12 themes were captured including predetermined categories pulled from research (Table 2). Participants travelled to a total of nine countries (Table 3). Questions in the survey fell into predetermined categories of motivation, career goals, self-confidence, and healthcare policies in other countries (Table 2).

Table 1.
Fields of study of survey participants

Major	Frequency
PREMED	2
DPT	5
NSG	4
DDS	2
OT	4
PH	1

Table 2.
Themes present in participant responses

Theme	Frequency
Academic Success	4
Cultural Competence	29
Country Policies	7
Career Relevance	31
Interest in Travel	2
Philanthropy	13
New perspective	27
Self Discovery	7
Team Building	12
Desire for more travel	6
Trust	1

Table 3.
Countries visited by survey participants

Country	Frequency
Nicaragua	1
Dominican Republic	4
Turkey	1
Costa Rica	3
Ecuador	2
Thailand	1
Guatemala	1
Ghana	2
Haiti	2

Discussion

- Most studies investigating ISL experiences and students focus on cultural competency and students intrinsic/extrinsic motivations. This study took an additional step in connecting the perceived connection between student's participation in ISL and its effect on their career.
- Students reported they enjoyed the experience because it allowed hands-on-experience; observation of techniques, development of writing, speaking, confidence in the field, and a more critical questioning of general assumptions which are consistent with the literature (Goldberg, Richburg, & Wood, 2006).
- Students who have participated in ISL tend to be more confident, socially adept, and versatile in applying creative solutions to complex problems. Results coincide with the body of literature surrounding ISL and how it affects students (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Service learning can increase self-esteem, social competency, and self-confidence (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Switzer et al., 1995; Osborne, Hammerich, & Hensley, 1998).
- The data suggest that ISL can be a valuable tool in the learning process for students and that students perceived service learning to be of great value to their success and potential success upon entering their fields of study by improving integration of important and relevant information and by improving the retention of information.

References

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