# SIT Study Abroad Alumni Long-Term Impacts and Outcomes Survey: Health-themed program outcomes

Since 1982, SIT Study Abroad has offered programs that address issues of global health, public health, and community health, under different permutations and in diverse geographic locations. The responses from alumni of these programs were analyzed and compared to the overall responses on the recent alumni long-term outcomes survey, yielding encouraging findings. Alumni of health programs make up 12 percent of the survey respondents.

* Alumni of health programs respond in significantly higher numbers to the question “to what extent did your experience with SIT Study Abroad influence your career choice?” responding positively at 78 percent as compared to the 72 percent average.
* When alumni of health programs were asked to indicate the field in which they are currently working, the health fields dominate the sample at 39 percent, closely followed by education which is at 30 percent.

It is interesting to note that public health and medicine/healthcare were among the top fields of employment for all SIT Study Abroad alumni (see Table 1), since this is not a typically expected outcome of study abroad programs. Data demonstrating that study abroad as an undergraduate can indirectly or directly contribute constructively to a career in the medical field or health sciences may help to undermine prevailing perceptions that “the typical participant still is a white woman in the humanities or social sciences” (Fischer, 2010) and to combat perceptions that pre-med students should not or cannot study abroad.

Also, though the most popular undergraduate major for SIT Study Abroad participants was international affairs/studies/relations, the most commonly reported foci for advanced degrees are the health and medical fields, representing 18 percent of all responses (see Table 2). This is true even though only twelve percent of alumni studied on health-related programs. Alumni of the health programs also went on after college to pursue health- and medical-related advanced degrees, (including M.D. and M.P.H. degrees) at a higher rate than any other advanced degree- even though the undergraduate major most represented for alumni of health-themed programs was international relations/studies/affairs. Also, it appears that 99 percent of alumni of health programs have pursued or achieved an advanced degree at this point, a very high number.

The Independent Study Project (ISP), an undergraduate research project that is one of the hallmarks of SIT’s programming, has been referenced often by alumni as one of the program components that had a high impact in terms of career and academic benefits. Alumni report gaining valuable and applicable skills from the experience, and report that the research project is valuable on a resume and in interviews. Alumni of the health programs are no exception:

*Quotes from participants of health programs:*

*“My ISP was a life-changing experience. Not only was I able to develop my own research question, but I had learned the tools to collect and report findings. I used my new language skills, although rudimentary, to interview people in the community, health care providers, and other relevant stakeholders. Studying the practice of rural health on Samos set the stage for my interest in pursuing Public Health as an occupation, particularly around community and economic development.”(SIT Study Abroad Greece 1998 alumnus)*

*“I worked for the health department there on a study on mosquito behavior. It helped solidify my plans to go into public health and helped in interviews.” (SIT Study Abroad Australia alumnus, 2007)*

*“I applied to SIT to get a cultural immersion experience but what I realized during my ISP which was on obesity in northern Chile is that a whole field of global health exists. After I graduated I spent time in Ecuador volunteering, completed my MPH and have just returned to the US after working on global health projects in Guatemala for the past two years.”(SIT Study Abroad Chile 2010 alumna)*

*“My study abroad experience in Chile with the Public Health, Traditional Medicine and Community Empowerment program very much helped me obtain a research assistantship position because they were looking for someone who spoke Spanish and [had experience] working on community health. My ISP looking at vulnerable populations' access to health care in Arica was the first tangible step in preparing me to do the community research I do today as part of my PhD program. I think that what I did and learned during my study abroad experience convinced my committee to hire me as a research assistant and accept me into their graduate studies program.”( SIT Study Abroad Chile 2010 alumna)*

*“The field study experience has been incredibly helpful in pursuing a research degree and has led me to HIV prevention research” (SIT Study Abroad Kenya 2005 alumna)*

**Table 1**

In response to the question: In which career sector do you work (or have you worked)? The top responses (from all alumni) were:

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| --- | --- |
| 33% | Higher Education instructor, administration, or research |
| 25% | Education (Pre-K-12) |
| 25% | Public health or Medicine/healthcare |
| 19% | Student |
| 19% | Nonprofit management |
| 15% | Community and Social Services |
| 15% | International Development |

**Table 2**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Field of Advanced Degree** | **Count** | **Percent of total** |
| Health/Medicine | 241 | 17.5% |
| International/Intercultural | 203 | 14.7% |
| Education | 174 | 12.6% |
| JD or other law-related degree | 107 | 7.8% |
| Environmental Science, Conservation, or Ecology- related | 95 | 6.9% |
| Liberal Arts | 82 | 6.0% |
| MPA, MPP or nonprofit mgmt. | 73 | 5.3% |
| Social Science (not Anthropology) | 69 | 5.0% |
| Business or MBA | 62 | 4.5% |
| Arts | 54 | 3.9% |
| Anthropology | 45 | 3.3% |
| MSW | 44 | 3.2% |
| Psychology/Counseling | 35 | 2.5% |
| General science | 34 | 2.5% |
| Peacebuilding | 19 | 1.4% |