

RUNNING HEAD: . . . And Then What Happened?

CAPSTONE Thesis

. . . And Then What Happened?  
A Narrative Study of the Perceived Effects  
of London's West End Live  
Theatre Productions  
on SUU Study Abroad Students

A Thesis submitted to Southern Utah University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in professional Communication

Thesis Committee:  
Kevin Stein, Ph.D.  
Chair

Melissa Funk  
**Southern Utah University**  
September 6, 2018

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Abstract	5
Introduction and Justification	6
Literature Review	7
Narrative Theory	7
The Value of Live Theatre	8
Interviews: Benefits of Theatre in London/ Value of Study Abroad Programs	11
Peter Sham	11
Jeb Branin	12
Patrick Clarke	14
Research Questions	16
Rationale	16
Methodology	17
Results	18
Questionnaire Results	18
Interview Results	19
Discussion	20
General Attitude Towards the Performances	20
Changes to Students' Attitudes, Opinions, and Behaviors Toward Social Issues	21
Narrative Fidelity in the Productions	24
Research Questions Answered	30
RQ1	30
RQ2	31
RQ3	31
Benefits to Study Abroad Faculty	32
Limitations	33
Future Research	33
Conclusion	33
Sources	35
Appendix I	37
Appendix II	38

### **Acknowledgements**

Studying the perceived effects of the plays and musicals of London's West End Theatre District on SUU in London Study Abroad students has been an interesting and educational experience. I enjoyed reading the responses of the students and their thoughts on the productions we saw in London as well as talking with them during the interviews. Although we all had similar experiences in London, each person had their own perspective of the trip.

I appreciate the help, guidance, and patience I received from Kevin Stein, my capstone chair, in this project, and to him I extend my many thanks. He directed me to some of the interesting, concrete, and functional aspects of the study. He, along with Matt Barton, asked that I research the value of watching the plays in London over watching the same plays in the U.S. They also asked that I include asking the students the value they saw in including the theatre productions on the study abroad trip. These two questions gave the students deeper concepts to consider as they reflected on their experiences over the nine days we were in London. I thank Peter Sham, Jeb Branin, and Patrick Clarke for the experience and insights they provided as to the value of theatre, and to the value of both watching the plays in London and in adding the productions to the trip.

I thank the SUU in London faculty and staff who lead the trip, including Jeb Branin, Pam Branin, Patrick Clarke, Joy Sterrantino, Rachel Parker, and Luke Johnson. Individually and cumulatively, they have an extensive amount of time and experience in leading students to countries outside the students' comfort zone. Their knowledge of the myriad cultures found in London as well as their familiarity with the city confirmed the groups sense of comfort and trust as they explored a world far beyond that of Cedar City, Utah.

I thank the students and non-student adults on the trip for allowing me to be amongst them as they discovered the beauties of London. They included me in their conversations and travels throughout the city and invited me to hang out with them on different occasions. I particularly thank those who chose to participate in this study. I appreciate their candid and frank answers to my questions and for giving their honest opinions and input. Each person who participated in the post-trip interviews seemed happy to relive their experiences as we discussed the plays, musicals, and other aspects of the trip.

I would like to thank the faculty of the Communication Department at Southern Utah University, including Art Challis, Kevin Stein, Jon Smith, Lijie Zhou, Gavin Feller, and Mindy Benson for their individual direction in helping me understand how to research a subject and put it in writing in a professional manner.

Lastly, I would like to thank my husband, Tiger Funk, for supporting me through this degree program and for encouraging me to go to London to gather this information. I would also like to thank my daughter, Sara Funk, for believing in me when my confidence wore thin. You both have meant so much to me. Thank you!

Thank you,  
Melissa Funk

### **Abstract**

The present research is a study of London's West End Theatre productions and the perceived effects they have on SUU in London Study Abroad students. The research took place in London from May 9, 2018 to May 19, 2018 and consisted of viewing six plays and musicals including *Matilda*, *Mousetrap*, *Wicked*, *Young Frankenstein*, *Hamlet*, and *A Comedy About a Bank Robbery*. Each participant was given a questionnaire consisting of three questions relating to their thoughts and feelings about the productions. These questionnaires were submitted to me within 12 hours of seeing the play so that the responses would be immediate, fresh, and accurate. The participants were asked to not identify themselves in order to elicit more honest responses. Post-trip interviews were held two to three weeks after our return from London in order to assess the latent effects of the plays on the participants. The topics discussed were similar to those on the questionnaire but more detailed in nature.

Keywords: attitudes, opinions, behaviors, ethics, morals, plays, musicals, students, London

## **Introduction and Justification**

### *Introduction*

The theatre is an exciting venue for an evening of fun and merriment and awe and inspiration. One of the world's treasured cities is home to scores of theatres that energize, mesmerize, and cause patrons to ponder. London's West End Theatre District is scattered with theatres that house plays and musicals of myriad styles and genres. This study will focus on the perceived effects of London's West End live productions on SUU in London study abroad students, the value of including theatrical performances in the study abroad experience, and the value of watching these performances in London versus watching them in the U.S.

Walter Fisher's Narrative Theory denotes life as one story after another that, in the end, form the tale of our lives. Narrative theory focuses on two main themes: coherence and fidelity. Narrative coherence depicts the truthfulness of a story. It evaluates the probability of the events happening in reality. Narrative coherence shows how a story "hangs together" and whether or not it contradicts itself (Hobart, 2013, p. 90). Narrative fidelity is explained by Fisher as "the 'truth qualities' of the story, the degree to which it accords with the logic of good reasons: the soundness of its reasoning and the value of its values" (Hobart, 2013, p. 90). Narrative fidelity will be the focus of the current study, researching how deeply the stories on stage resonate with the study abroad students. Through this lens, I will collect the thoughts of the students on how well the events on stage resounded within each of them, and from there what, if any, changes they will have made to their attitudes, opinions and behavior, as well as whether or not viewing these productions has made them more interested in seeking out live theatre in the future.

This research will also demonstrate the value of watching theatrical productions in London as opposed to watching the same plays and musicals in the U.S., as well as what value the performances have on a study abroad trip as opposed to a study abroad experience without watching the productions. The information found in these elements of the research will be shared with Jeb Branin where they can be implemented in future study abroad trips at his discretion.

### *Justification*

Although, theatrical productions are entertaining, they can also be educational, poignant, and inspiring. Audience members often recognize personal behaviors in the characters on stage and can be led to strengthen their positive habits or banish their negative conduct accordingly. They also recognize the behavior of others and can relate to their own similar behaviors. Through this means, the effects of the productions can change the attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of the students on the study abroad trip. This gives cause for the present study.

Fisher's Narrative theory will be used to view the perceived effects of the plot and setting, and to observe the actions of the characters. Through narrative fidelity, I will demonstrate how the students relate to the events that unfold on the stage, and in the end, note whether they were motivated to change any of their attitudes, opinions, or behaviors; whether they are motivated to seek out live theatre in the future; how the students value the inclusion of the West End productions; and how they value the experience in a foreign country.

## **Literature Review**

### *Narrative Theory*

Storytelling is one of the soothing agents to life's abrasive realities. From bedtime stories to comedic anecdotes to fishtales to scenes on the stage and screen, stories transport our

consciousness to lands of calm, laughter, awe, and inspiration. Stories, both fiction and nonfiction, are some of the driving forces of our self-governance.

In an explanation of narration, Walter Fisher, most notably associated with Narrative Theory, borrows a description of humans as “storytelling animals” (Fisher, 1984, p. 1). By nature of our daily actions, our lives are a narrative of our very existence. Because they consist of “sequence and meaning” (Fisher, 1984, p. 2) our lives become our narrative to the world, or more concisely, to anyone interested in giving attention to our lives. Fisher clarifies our understanding of the Narrative Theory as one that covers multiple disciplines, incorporating all genres of life, and that it interprets the happenings in life (Fisher, 1985, p. 347).

### *The Value of Live Theatre*

The happenings in our lives are cleverly portrayed on the stage. Live theatre is generally viewed as an entertainment venue, however it can also be educational (Dill-Shackleford, K.E. Green, M.C., Scharrer, E., Wetterer, C., & Shackleford, L.E., 2015). Dill-Shackleford, et al. demonstrated that audiences can learn more about relationship issues and become less accepting of social myths, identifying the stage as a means of social awareness and personal change (Dill-Shackleford et al., 2015). By this means, we become more self-aware through theatrical productions. To quote Pablo Picasso, “Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth” (Dill-Shackleford, et al., 2015). How fitting, the audience is entertained as the mirror of life is unveiled on the stage. We see ourselves in the characters on stage, and the progressive mind watching from the house seats might adjust her daily habits after recognizing herself on that stage, for “Theatre is about ourselves . . . It represents our own truth” (Grainger, p. 147).



In theatre productions, those mirrors reflect messages that are constantly being sent and received, and as this interaction transpires, the human psyche is affected. Ruth Hahn stated in 1956, “The theatre is an interpretation of life; and as an avenue of communication, its effects are far-reaching” (as cited in Hahn, 1956). Certainly, the effects of live theatre are far-reaching, as is indicated in a medical study conducted by Shoda, Adachi, and Umeda (2016). The results of this study showed that audience members watching a live piano performance were led to a state of “relaxation or a reduction of anxiety” (Shoda, et al., 2016).

From relaxation and reduced anxiety to the concept that the stage can educate and influence, questions concerning the effects of the theatre on audiences have long been on the minds of researchers. For instance, these questions were pondered in 1965, “Does the strength of the theatre lie in its ability to change attitudes? . . . Are certain styles of drama more influential than others? . . . Are changes in attitudes as a result of a theatrical performance fairly permanent or only transitory?” (Hansen, B.K., Phillips, G.M., & Arnold, W.E., 1965). These questions weigh on the minds of researchers today, as well. As subsequent generations experience the theatre, are they affected by the messages portrayed on the stage?

The writings of Debilal Mishra offer an answer to this question. In her paper *Theatre and Communication: Exploring the Process of Life*, Mishra shares her findings on the significance of theatre in its role as a vehicle of communication. She states that the theatre envelopes certain elements of communication including “logic, emotion, familiarity, background, understanding and movement” (Mishra, 2013). She continues, “The theatre communication is a powerful one as it appeals to the human understanding directly by being more personal and intimate in approach” (Mishra, 2013). Mishra defines the benefit of learning through theatrical performances,

It is not just about effectively communicating a message for information, entertainment or expansion of self; rather, it is more about reflecting life and letting others experience its various facets by bringing together the pleasure and the truth through the different frames of feelings and cognition. That is to say, communication in the theatre is all about inspiring the minds by way of seeking inspiration from them.

Today's theatre-goers often seek an escape through humor, mystery, or song and dance. Each of these motives are a worthy cause to purchase a ticket, however, greater worth can be attained through this mirror of life when attendees contemplate the messages portrayed and then take action according to their personal inspiration.

Inspiration can be found in both recorded and live performances. Live theatre, movies, television programs, even advertisements can inspire, but the value of live performances has a need for further research. Matthew Reason supports the fact that research on the effects of performances on audiences, whether live or recorded, has been neglected. (Reason, 2004). He specifically states that "the experiential impact of liveness on actual audiences, by its nature something elusive and difficult to access, remains an under-researched area (Reason, 2004).

This subject may be under-researched, but it is not un-researched. A study at the University of Arkansas (Greene, J.P., Erickson, H. H., Watson A. R., and Beck, M.I., 2017). illustrates in their EDRE working paper, the intellectual effect live theatre has on students during a field trip to the theatre. The researchers found that these students showed an increase in tolerance, content knowledge, plot, and vocabulary (Greene, et al., 2017). Greene stated that "Going on a field trip to see live theater produces benefits that cannot be produced by watching a movie instead". (Greene, et al., 2017). The students in this study ranged in grade from 4th to 12th, with the mean being 9th grade students (Greene, et al., 2017). This is an encouraging study, however the participants were much younger than those who will be involved in the current

study, they being university students. In researching this age group, I anticipate adding to this field of study and to the benefits it will bring to the education and study abroad industries.

*Interviews on the Benefits of Theatre in London and the Value of Study Abroad Programs*

**Peter Sham**

In an interview at Southern Utah University, Associate Professor of Theatre Arts Peter Sham stated that three of the vital elements of life are food, shelter, and storytelling, echoing Maslow's hierarchy of needs. He reminded me that storytelling has been an important element in life since the beginning of mankind. We've seen this in ancient cave drawings, through folklore handed down from generation to generation, and we enjoy the thrill of a story still today, whether its purpose is to entertain or to educate. Sham stated that storytelling is mentally healthy. People often seek storytelling through movies, television, and theatre to either escape their daily responsibilities or to get a good laugh. As they say, laughter is the best medicine.

According to Sham, London is a mecca in many ways, including theatre in the English speaking world. He asserted that England is the birthplace of English theatre. As highly as Americans might esteem Broadway in New York City to be the highest level of theatrical performance in the states, we must remember that it all began in England, and still continues to draw crowds there today. The very definition of a playwright, that being William Shakespeare, heralds from England. Some of the benefits of theatre in London over theatre in the U.S. are that it is more affordable. Sham stated that theatre in England is subsidized by the government, relieving the acting company from feeling driven for financial gain. This allows for better acting, a better experience for the theatre-goer and offers the opportunity for more people to see the productions. Sham stated that West End actors are more interactive with their audiences than

what he has seen in America. He also shared that compared to the U.S., there are more theatres in London than in any one city across America, again, offering the theatre experience to more people.

The fact that theatre in London is so condensed, geographically, makes for more connectivity amongst theatre-goers and the actors. Sham voiced that theatre in the U.S. is more regional than in London. The theatre world is more spread out in the states which results in more divided attitudes in audiences across America, whereas, the London mix is more unified. Sham expressed that theatre, in and of itself, can be a unifying experience for audiences. They experience the same storylines, twists of plot, emotional draws, and finally leave the theatre with similar thoughts and feelings on a given subject. In this way, the theatre is more unifying for society as a whole.

In our discussion, Sham and I reiterated the gathering effect of theatre in a study abroad setting. When students travel to another country, whether studying theatre or not, a theatrical experience can bind not only the study abroad group, but it can connect the traveling students with the local population, granting an appreciation and respect between foreigner and native (Sham).

### **Jeb Branin**

In an interview with Jeb Branin, Associate Dean of Southern Utah University's School of Integrative and Engaged Learning, and Study Abroad Faculty member focusing on the theatre experience, he shared the fact that we are a global community and as such, traveling abroad expands our globalization and our understanding of the world in which we live. This has an effect on both the individual and the group. He stated that American products are consumed

worldwide and to an extent, this makes some Americans feel like a global citizen even though they've never left the country. Jeb continued, stating the importance of experiencing other cultures as a global citizen. Becoming enveloped by another culture simply by walking down the street, making purchases, and communicating with housing personnel, along with the many other opportunities to interact with the locals cannot be matched outside of that country.

According to Branin, interacting with the native culture can be expounded upon through the arts. The arts offer a more intimate exchange with their audience portraying life through the artist's eyes. In Branin's Theatre in London study abroad trip, he takes the students to myriad museums which complements the multiple West End productions on the itinerary. Even walking down the street in London is, in a sense, a museum. The architecture of the buildings, whose ages range from present day to centuries old, even millennia, can be educational, particularly to students whose developed homeland is a mere few hundred years old. Entering the museums in London is free to the public which allows for more venue availability and therefore a more comprehensive education for study abroad students. In these no cost museums, students will see one of a kind, world renowned artifacts such as the Rosetta Stone, Shakespeare's first folio, original musical compositions by Mozart, Handel, and Debussy, along with early lyric notes of some of the Beatles songs, to name only a few. These are once in a lifetime opportunities for some students. Similar exhibits can be found in American museums, at a cost. To enjoy 11 museums in one city at no cost, and more where desired at a cost, is an opportunity few SUU students are offered and one in which even fewer partake. The combination of the museums and the plays is remarkable. Branin echoed Peter Sham in stating that the plays in London are less expensive than those in the states. Branin has travelled extensively to London and has taken in a

theatre production each time he is there. He stated that four days in New York City is roughly the same cost as two weeks in London for equivalent events in both cities.

Branin's reasons for taking students on an educational trip to London are threefold: the global element, the of a lack language barrier, and the availability of the West End productions. Students are immersed in a different country and culture without having trouble understanding the language, and they have the opportunity to see world class plays and musicals. In London, if one play or musical is not available during their stay, a myriad of other plays are at the ready, giving this city an advantage over other theatre-happy cities. Branin's hope is that his students will gain a better education of live theatre and the benefits it has to offer. His hope is that they will be better audience members and consumers of live theatre, and that by watching world-class, live theatre his students will be encouraged to seek out live theatre in the future, becoming lifelong learners (Branin).

### **Patrick Clarke**

Patrick Clarke is the Dean of The School of Integrated and Engaged Learning at Southern Utah University and joined the SUU in London trip as a faculty member. Clarke taught a class on the vast architectural styles peppered throughout London and accompanied the study abroad group to the plays and museums. The two words he used to describe the effects of the trip were *Awareness* and *Efficacy*. Clarke stated that travelling to a different country expands one's awareness of his or her personal identity in a large context. He described people as being a part of a school, a town, and a global member of our world. Clarke proposed the concept that with the countless number of nationalities, cultures, and religions found amongst the people of London, students often realize what a small part of the world they are while developing a greater

understanding of the world in which they live, thereby becoming a larger part of the successful globalization of the world. Through the experience of leaving their homeland and witnessing firsthand the myriad peoples of the world, the SUU in London students were given the opportunity to become self-aware in a world much larger than their individual local communities, and by this means, become more aware of their world as a whole. Clarke shared his joy in watching the students progress from needing the faculty to lead them through the underground system and around the city in the first few days to becoming the leaders and enjoying their independence as the trip drew on. After the first few days of the trip the students could find their way to any place on the itinerary, should they become lost or disconnected from the group, and by the end of the trip each student had become quite independent in navigating the city. Their self-efficacy was evident. Free time is built into the itinerary which offers the students their autonomy to take in the museums at their leisure and leave at their discretion, allowing each student time to discover the city at their will.

Clarke also shared the fact that, although the language is not new to the students, the currency is different and most students learn to translate money exchanges and become proficient in making purchases and handling their finances by mid trip. Clarke stated another benefit to traveling outside the U.S. as being a guest in another city and country. An American student can travel to other cities in the U.S. and have a learning experience, but they are still in their native country, whereas, spending time in a different country promotes an understanding of the collective pride of a different people. An SUU student visiting New York City, Miami, Dallas, or Los Angeles will be exposed to a different region of the country with their cultures, history, and norms, but these cities are still exhibit American pride. On a trip to London,

American students will not experience American pride, but will experience British pride and nationalism. The history of the very land is distinctly different from that of America. While America is over 200 years old, England has a wealth of history dating to times B.C. (New World Encyclopedia, 2017).

Addressing the theatre aspect of the study abroad trip, Clarke stated that he is a casual theatre-goer, not having the theatre background as Sham and Branin. Even with his limited theatrical experience, Clarke noted that “theatre is a large part of the ethos of London. It’s part of the identity of London” (Clarke, 2018). He stated that in the same way a vacationer will look for palm trees on a trip to Miami, tourists look for the theatre in London. Seeing a play or musical is one of the highlights of a trip to London, as is seeing Big Ben, Buckingham Palace, and Piccadilly Circus. According to Clarke, going to the theatre completes the London experience.

### *Research Questions*

**RQ1: Does watching London’s West End Theatre productions inspire SUU in London study abroad students to change their attitudes, opinions or behaviors on social issues?**

**RQ2: What is the value of watching theatrical productions in London over watching the same productions in the U.S., and how can this information benefit study abroad faculty?**

**RQ3: What is the value of including theatrical productions on a study abroad excursion, and how can this information benefit study abroad faculty?**

### **Rationale**

Although the effects of live performances has been studied, prior to this study the perceived effects of London’s West End theatre productions on SUU study abroad students had not been addressed, and would prove to be a benefit not only to the students but also to the study



abroad faculty as they prepare and enhance their curriculum for this event in future years. To answer this question, the students were given a questionnaire - asking if their attitudes, opinions, or behaviors have changed after watching the productions. Jeb Branin requested that I ask the students if after seeing these live productions, do the students anticipate seeking live performance events in the future. The three faculty and staff interview responses and requests add to and secure the rationale for this research.

### **Methodology**

In collecting data, questionnaires were completed by the students and an interview was held with most of the participants two to three weeks after the end of the study abroad trip. I was interested in the immediate reaction of the students to the plays. What were their initial thoughts and opinions of the productions? Did the plays simply provide an evening of entertainment, which is perfectly acceptable because this is often the purpose of going to the theatre, or did the messages in the plays have a more thought provoking and long-lasting effect on the students? To determine this, the participating students were required to complete the questionnaires within 12 hours of viewing the plays. Thoughts of the plays likely lingered in the students' minds following the plays, through the entire study abroad experience, and over the few weeks following the experiences which allowed me to acquire the latent effects of the plays on the willing participants in the post-trip interviews.

In essence, this narrative approach involved collecting the data and illustrating the students experiences of watching the staged productions and the association they felt with the narrative fidelity of the plays, in other words, how strongly did the events taking place on stage resound with the students, and how fully did they understand the messages that were presented in

the plays. By studying multiple participants, more varied, realistic, and accurate data was collected.

This study demonstrated, through the faculty and staff interviews, by their knowledge and experience, the value of including the theatre element on the trip and the value of watching theatre in London as opposed to staying in the states to view the productions. Along with these interviews, questions concerning these values were discussed in the one-on-one interviews with the students two weeks after the trip to London.

## **Results**

### *Questionnaire Results*

A total of 21 students and two non-student adults went on the study abroad trip to London, along with five faculty and staff members, and me. The faculty and staff were not asked to participate in the research. The students were not required to participate in this research nor were the students compensated by me for their responses. Joy Sterrantino, the English faculty member, gave extra credit to any of her students who participated in the research. Sixteen attendees signed the consent form. Of those 16 participants, one was a non-student adult and one student initialled one section of the form but did not sign the form. Fourteen students submitted their completed questionnaires. The number of submitted questionnaires for each production are as follows: *Matilda* - 14, *Mousetrap* - 13, *Wicked* - 4, *Young Frankenstein* - 4, *Hamlet* - 2, *A Comedy About a Bank Robbery* - 2. Each questionnaire was labeled with a student identification number and the students were instructed to not write their name on the questionnaires in order to encourage a more frank and open response to each production. The questionnaire consisted of

three questions driving the concept of how the plays affected each student on a personal level.

Participants will be referred to as Participant 1 - Participant 14 (P1- P14).

At the beginning of the trip, all of the students who were interested in participating in the research submitted their first questionnaire. However, as time progressed, fewer and fewer students submitted questionnaires. The students were instructed to hand in their questionnaires at the end of each morning's play discussion. Due to scheduling changes on the itinerary, no discussions were held after *Hamlet* and *A Comedy About a Bank Robbery* which contributed to the low number of these questionnaires being submitted.

### *Interview Results*

Of the 14 students who chose to participate in this research, nine responded to the invitation to interview. The interviews were conducted either in person at the SUU library, by facebook messenger, by email, or by phone. The students who chose to take part in the post-trip, one-on-one interview were free and open with their responses and seemed interested to talk about the trip and their experiences again. The interview consisted of 10 questions, some of which served to open the conversation, put the participant at ease, and bring to mind their experiences with each production after having acclimated back to their American lifestyle for two to three weeks. Because I communicated one-on-one with these participants their identities were not anonymous to me as they were on the questionnaire portion of the research. To keep student identities and their responses anonymous, the interview forms were given a new identification number. They will be identified in the following sections as Interviewee 1-10 (I1-I10).

## Discussion

### *General Attitude Toward the Performances*

The students seemed to enjoy the plays and musicals they attended in London. Most students shared more positive reactions to the musicals than negative. The musicals were an extravaganza on stage: visually and audibly stimulating and entertaining. The two straight plays were much less of a spectacle. When asked what they liked about the productions, answers ranged from P22 stating “Matilda’s persistent encouragement, along with self-confidence and belief never to give up . . .” and P11’s reaction to *Wicked*, “The story was deep and connected and beautiful. Love, betrayal, heartbreak, victory. All of it”, to the following two responses to *Mousetrap*, “Much of the play was dull. The lead actor was dreadful”, shared by P16, and P1 stated, “. . . I’m ashamed. I fell asleep a lot”. As the trip progressed and the group saw more and more productions, *Matilda*, *Wicked*, and *A Comedy About a Bank Robbery* became favorites among the participants, while the two straight plays, *Hamlet* and *Mousetrap*, although not unanimous, were the least favorite productions. Due to their subject matter, *Matilda*, *Mousetrap*, and *Wicked* were the most thought-provoking productions. During the interview, I-7 said of *Matilda*, “It was so bright, colorful, and full of imagination, and yet it dealt with dark themes of abuse and isolation”, and though *Mousetrap* was one of the least enjoyed plays, it also caused students to think more deeply as they searched for clues from the murderer. The ‘whodunnit’ aspect kept many participants engaged in this play, at least to a certain degree. One of the participants, a study abroad student from China, loved the excitement of *Matilda* and *Wicked*, but stated that she enjoyed *Mousetrap* more because she could understand the words better. The songs in the musicals were difficult for her to hear and comprehend. *A Comedy About a Bank*

*Robbery* was the favorite of Interviewee 7. “It was the play I was most excited to tell my mom an sister about”. This slapstick, silly, and visually clever play was set in America and comments after the play illustrated the students thrill in listening to the English actors use an American accent.

#### *Changes to Students’ Attitudes, Opinions, and Behaviors Toward Social Issues*

After taking part in each morning’s play discussion and reading the responses to the questionnaires, it was not surprising that many students had similar impressions of the plays. It was impressive, however, that many students felt comfortable to disagree in the discussion and to state their opposing views of the script, the scenery, costumes, and the acting. The students were not afraid to give a negative critique along with any positive notations of the productions. The productions had much less of an effect of change to students’ attitude, opinion, and behavior than was anticipated at the onset of this research. However, students did notice social issues that struck a chord with them. It was noted that, for the most part, only students who stated a change in their attitude, opinion or behavior were graduate students. They seemed to have deeper thoughts than the undergraduates. When asked if there were ethical or moral elements in the productions that caused them to question their attitudes, opinions or behaviors on social issues, P22 stated about *Matilda*, “Feminism. The girls could do like boys, even better”. P18 noticed, “Matilda’s phrase, ‘But that’s not right!’ And how some people look the other way when they see injustice while others take action to promote more equity in the world”. Admirably, P22 and P18 connected with the equality and integrity found in this musical. P12 took the message of *Matilda* more personally, “I think I questioned the way that I speak and treat children . . . I think

children should not be spoken down to”. These students were able to see through the pageantry on stage and find messages in the musical that touched them personally.

*Mousetrap* challenged many of the students’ patience and attention, yet others were attentive to the social issues depicted in the play. P2 found a personal issue, “Maybe just the fact that they got married so fast. Even though it’s not a super popular topic it is in my life and I am glad I was raised to get to know a person well before I make a decision like that “. Although P2 did not have a change in opinion, it seems that her personal compass was strengthened. Other responses included, “Everyone immediately believed that Trotter was an actual officer. It makes me question my natural trust for law enforcement” (P9). With law enforcement in today’s critical view, a message from 66 years ago resonated with this student. “I think that this story underlies the issues of the misunderstanding of mental health. The murderer obviously had some mental issues, and a lot of the stigmas were present in the plot that are still prevalent today” (P12). This student, too, noticed issues that still exist roughly 66 years after the writing of the mystery. These comments illustrate that the students are mindful that mental issues, so prevalent in 2018, existed in previous generations. The students demonstrated their compassion for those who suffer from this condition and they seemed to disapprove of how it was handled according to this play which premiered in London in 1952. Some students noticed interpersonal challenges: “Moments of the characters so easily being convinced that one of the others was the culprit resonated in that others can mold our thoughts & opinions good or bad if we’re not careful” (P20) and “It made me aware of how quick-to-judge people we can be, how defensive we can get when someone accuses us. It also made me consider the longer-lasting effects of childhood trauma and mental health” (P18). Although, not a favorite by the majority of the students, *Mousetrap* did cause

students to think through some of their own attitudes, opinions, and behaviors concerning social issues.

The *Wicked the Musical* website states that this musical has “won over 100 major international awards” (Wicked, 2018a and Wicked, 2018b) since its opening night in 2003. The responses by the students to this musical are aligned with this statement, as was noted by P11, who exclaimed, “I LOVE THIS MUSICAL . . . I love it all!” However, assessing one’s attitudes and opinions demands deeper thought. P1 stated, “. . . I did think about the trials people are born with. The physical trials seem to draw the most attention & it’s mostly of the negative kind”. P11 said, “. . . it added to the idea that you shouldn’t judge people by how they look! Everyone has potential and should have the chance to show it”. Delving even deeper, P23 said, “The allegory of animals losing their ability to speak applies to so many social problems . . . I thought a lot about the parallels”. The spectacle that *Wicked* is can be overstimulating. The colors, the wardrobes, the set pieces, the music, the character personalities, not to mention following the plot of the story, can all be mesmerizing and overpowering. The ideas in the students’ responses were impressive. They imply that the students were cognizant of the social issues presented in the play and looked beyond the extravaganza on stage. Their responses show that they felt the harsh treatment that is sometimes delivered when people look only on the outer, physical aspect of another person along with certain populations not having a voice on social issues. Clearly, these college-aged audience members enjoyed the play, but also saw past the glamour of the production and their morals seemed to have been reinforced by this musical.

The students’ morals were tested in *Young Frankenstein* wherein sexual innuendos were rampant. The jokes and body language were well received by some, “I thought the show was

funny, but that was also because I didn't mind the crude sexual humor " (P21), but unappreciated by others: "The way they casually use language . . . didn't really help change my behavior towards those sensitive topics" (P10). When asked if they liked *Young Frankenstein*, P1 replied, "My favorite song was 'don't touch me'" which repeatedly referred female body parts. On the other hand, multiple students stated that they "didn't need" the sexual parts. Interviewee 9 noted, "Humor masks a lot of things we may not allow if it was presented in a more serious setting". Another student noticed the bond that grew between the monster and his female captive. This student said, "I did think it was strange that the woman who was raped by the monster got stockholm syndrome. It was a little uncomfortable how inappropriate some parts were, but usually I found it hilarious" (P1). This student noticed the dichotomy within the production, feeling uncomfortable at times, but enjoying the humor at other times. That this student referred to Stockholm Syndrome conveyed an educated view of the musical.

#### *Narrative Fidelity in the Productions*

A narrative of any kind will be scrutinized for its coherence and fidelity: does the story seem plausible and can the audience relate to what is taking place on stage?

One student's response to *Matilda* concerning narrative fidelity was, "I could not relate to the need for a loving home I grew up in the happiest of homes!" (P1). That this student could not relate to a lack of love in the home was somewhat narrow-minded and self-focused. By the time one is in college, one would have likely encountered others who grew up in undesirable circumstances of some kind. This student may need more time to develop compassion towards those less fortunate than him/her. Similarly, another student stated, "I don't particularly relate to any characters - I wasn't aware of or influenced by bullies or feeling different, mis-fit, etc."



(P20). Hopefully, these students have more experience than can be shared in a short questionnaire paragraph. Being treated kindly and fairly is the optimal expectation for a growing child, but is not always realized. Hopefully, upon reflection, these students might have thoughts and convictions toward the mistreatment of others, even if their growing up years were admirable and free of abuse. These responses were the exception, however. The following responses show a more understanding to the hardships of childhood: “I can definitely relate to people saying girls can’t amount to anything cause living in a small town that happened a lot” (P2), and “Everyone who wants to be an adult is a child but it’s not as great as they might think” (P11). The next responses show a more poignant mindset toward dealing with neglect and abuse: “I like the fact that she was forgiving her parents for the way she got treated But was willing defend her friend. That’s me I’ll forgive what you have done to me But don’t miss treat the people I care about” (P10). This musical brought to the surface this student’s passion for friends. Another student empathized with the hardships Matilda faced, “The spirit of overcoming the difficulties. I should learn from her because I study abroad . . . There are many problems coming to my study and life. If I can self-confidence and overcome myself who is timid, I will be better day by day” (P22). These students appear to have an intrinsic relation to the messages of *Matilda*. P22’s mention of being a study abroad student illustrates the value of the program and how, for this student, there are difficulties but gaining self-confidence through the study abroad program will elevate his/her life experience, which was resonated by *Matilda*. Another student noticed the Stockholm Syndrome again, “It was a consistent & realistic portrayal of the way in which a person somehow can’t leave their abuser . . . an abused kid seeking validation from parents”. Stockholm Syndrome encompasses captors and their captives, the bond that forms

between the two, and the compliancy that the captives develop to their captors (Vecchi, 2009).

Social issues, again, are at the focus. The students are aware of the incidents and of their attitudes toward the behaviors.

*Mousetrap* displayed ethics and morals that might make a person ponder how he or she would handle similar situations. A murder mystery entails suspense and accusations, and the students analyzed the actions of the characters with a keen eye to the secrets being held and the judgements being cast throughout the play. The following responses illustrate the skeptical eye in which some students watched this mystery: P9 replied, “I couldn’t relate to everyone’s decision to not say anything. Several characters knew the truth and even some knew each other yet nobody said a word”, P23 added, “People often keep their biggest secrets from those they care about in order to protect self or others”. P11’s final sentiment illustrates a completed thought by saying, “Throughout the play everyone had something they were hiding. You never know everything about a person”. On another note, P10 connected with the manipulation that one character used on another, “Having other people cloud your judgement is very easy to relate to. Hearing what others think about someone can cloud and change the way you think about them”, and P2 found that the quick courtship between two of the characters resounded with him/her at this point his/her life, “I am beginning to think about getting married and have been criticized many times for how ‘soon’ it is since we’ve been dating”. Whether watching theatrical productions actually changes attitudes and opinions or not, it appears that students are brought to a more thoughtful and personal level on some subjects due to the scenes they saw in these productions.

Frustrations in life are plentiful, and *Wicked* portrays these feelings to a degree that resounded with many of the students on the trip. Elements of the play that the students could relate to included “Being judged and how attitudes can change with the power of one powerful person.” (P10). P11 understood the challenge of being more than what meets the eye but not being noticed for it. “I’m a lot more than I look”, (P11). This student wishes that people would start realizing this fact. One student understood the plight of both Elphaba and Glinda. P1 sided with Elphaba saying, “There have been times I have felt I was in the right & everyone else is wrong and stood up for myself”. Feeling for Glinda, P1 shared, “. . . I have given in to the selfish desires for the worldly power, recognition”. P23 appreciates the desire to be accepted and loved, and the power of friendship and forgiveness. P23 also stated he/she relates to “. . . saying ‘screw it’ when everything continually goes wrong, despite best efforts”. These statements demonstrate the narrative fidelity the students found in *Wicked*. They illustrate the connection to life that theatrical productions bring to an audience and the benefit that including theatre in a study abroad trip can afford.

The students’ connection to *Young Frankenstein* were on the surface. Responses ranged from enjoying the “jokes about ‘cliché horror films’” (P10) to noticing the few differences between the movie and the play, and that the stage ensemble was weak (P21). That the priest in the play wanted a companion in life so he would have someone to love and not be lonely resounded with P10. P4’s statement was the most thoughtful on this musical. P4 recognized Dr. Frankenstein’s identity crisis, stating “Frederick’s initial awareness of his personal identity or someone who wouldn’t go around stealing corpses, then his end acceptance of his new identity as a Frankenstein (pronounced traditionally) . . . I’ve gone through similar identity shifts”. This

student recognized the evolution a person might go through in accepting who he is and his station in life.

When asked if students shifted their attitudes due to something they saw on stage, most of the undergraduate students said no. The graduate students put more thought into the question. Interviewee 6 stated, “Yes, I would say that I became more self-aware of my actions and behavior after watching *Matilda*”. She added that she would like to emulate Matilda’s behavior in standing up against injustice. Interviewee 7 watched *Red*, an additional play that she saw on her free day. She demonstrated the power the theatre can have on changing one’s behavior after applying a lesson she learned from the play to her experience in an art museum. She felt enriched by her experiences both at the play and in the museum. Interviewee 8, an undergraduate, stated that the choreography in the musicals unexpectedly “provoked emotions” which she had not experienced before. Her opinion of the importance of expression through dance increased through these productions, and she stated that watching the musicals live made a difference.

Had the study abroad experience not included the West End theatrical productions, many students would not have enjoyed the trip as much. The museums were many and the time allotted for them was plentiful. Some students seemed to be on a mission to cover every inch of every museum, while others grew tired of the monotony of the venues. Responses to the idea of not seeing the West End productions demonstrated this division. Interviewees 2 and 5 both said the plays were the most enjoyable part of the trip. I-5 stated that for her the plays were “100% of the entertainment portion of our study abroad”, and that they gave her some down time, otherwise, “I’m sure the experience would have been too stressful to have its full effect”. Interviewee 8 also noticed that this would have been an interesting historical trip, but part of London would’ve

been missed. Interviewee 1 liked the century old theatres and the fact that during intermission ice cream was sold in the auditorium; she didn't have to leave her seat to get a refreshment which is different than the American theatre protocol. Interviewee 9 said that the plays immersed her more fully in the culture. She also stated that "As students, advocates, and connoisseurs of art, it only made sense for us to be involved in experiencing production work!". In agreeance with many of the students, I-9 said the trip would have been "bland" without the plays. This being a cohort of theatre and arts enthusiasts, including the productions is one of the main reasons for the trip, as one of the faculty laughed out loud when asked about the value of including theatre in this study abroad trip. On the other hand, interviewee 7, an Arts Administration student, felt stressed by having to leave the museums in time to meet for the next play, although she appreciated the entertainment the plays provided. Each student felt that the plays and musicals were a major part of the trip, however, and not surprisingly, some enjoyed them more than others.

Many of the interview participants said the cultural experience in London was another highlight of the trip and that the experience would not have been the same if the group watched the productions in the U.S. Interviewee 4 has seen multiple productions in Las Vegas and was cognizant of the respect she saw in the London audiences. She stated that in her U.S. experience in seeing plays many audience members leave before curtain call, while those in London stayed to the end of the acknowledgements. Interviewee 2 said she felt more safe in London than she would in New York City. She also noticed that people, in general, are more respectful in London than in the U.S. Her experience in the states has been that someone will "help if it's convenient". Interviewee 6 recognized her attention to the actors' accents. She was particularly aware of those

actors using an American accent, and felt “obsessed with listening for ‘correct’” accents in *Young Frankenstein* and *A Comedy About a Bank Robber*. Interviewee 7 was thrilled to watch English plays in an English theatre, “We got to see a Shakespeare play at the Globe! America didn’t even exist when Shakespeare was alive”. I-7, along with many other students, noticed the “melting pot of cultures”. She noticed the myriad of languages and how polite people were, even on the underground. She also recognized and appreciated the “universal free admission policy for museums”, and stated that “Both the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Modern Museum of Art cost \$25”. With the subsidized admissions to West End productions and the duty-free museums, the cost of the same events in New York City would be significantly higher. Interviewee 9 summed it up nicely by adding, “the abroad part is what makes it special . . . All the little details create the big impact. The money exchange, the accents, the culture etc. changing geographically seems to impact at least my self the further I stray from home and my comfort zone”. Every part of being in a different country illustrates either our differences as a population or our similarities as the human race; each facet offering and education in itself. Whether the lesson came from the street or the stage, the foreign experience was beneficial.

### **Research Questions Answered**

In answer to RQ1, *Does watching London’s West End Theatre productions inspire SUU in London study abroad students to change their attitudes, opinions or behaviors on social issues*, most of the students answered with a negative as to any change of attitude, opinion or behavior. Nevertheless, some students contemplated social issues that were addressed in the productions and seemed to have their personal opinions confirmed by what they saw in West End Theatre productions. However, this was not unanimous as other students made a deeper

self-evaluation and pondered what effect the plays had on their ideals. One student left the musicals more self-aware and with a desire to adopt behaviors of characters on stage, while another student became educated on how to view certain works of art, and yet another came away with an understanding and appreciation for the emotions that choreography can elicit. Although not many students noticed a shift, scenes presented on stage did inspire a few students' to change their attitudes, opinions, and behaviors.

RQ2: *What is the value of watching theatrical productions in London over watching the same productions in the U.S., and how can this information benefit study abroad faculty?* solicited strong opinions for travel outside the U.S. The cultural experience; the opportunity to compare actors, directors, audience members; the co-riders on the underground; the realization of the importance that art brought to their awareness by the minimal costs of the venues; these elements won the students over. One can see a recording of events taking place in another community; one can read the details of another's encounter in a different culture; but one must be immersed in the realities of life in another country in person, with their own being, to get even a glimpse of how others live. Watching the productions in London offered the students the opportunity to be immersed in a foreign culture, to be exposed to the similarities and differences between the two countries, and to experience foreign theatre in its homeland atmosphere. These elements add value to watching the performances in another country.

RQ3: *What is the value of including theatrical productions on a study abroad excursion, and how can this information benefit study abroad faculty?* was met with heartfelt proclamations. By and large, the students enjoyed, appreciated, and gained knowledge and experience from this study abroad trip. Most valued the educational aspect of being immersed in

the culture of a country other than their own. Many acknowledged their interest in the historical details of London and their appreciation for the lengthy record of the city and the country, but noted that the trip would have lacked the excitement the productions offered had the plays been eliminated. Some students stated that they needed the time to sit back and enjoy the plays, and that this was a functional, educational, and necessary downtime feature on the trip. Others noted the iconic feature that London's West End Theatre District is and the focal point it plays in a well rounded experience in London. The value of including the theatrical productions on the trip afforded a greater connection to the people and culture of London, an evening of pause and enjoyment, and an excitement that otherwise would have left a void on the trip. Finally, the fact that this was a study abroad trip for theatre students determined the need to go to the theatre on the trip, and London being the location of the trip was driven by its being a venue of abundant world class theatre in an English speaking country.

#### *Benefits to the Study Abroad Faculty*

Student feedback provides information and reason to adjust educational programs. One of the purposes of taking students to live theatre is to expose them to the art of stage performances and to bring to their awareness the enjoyment, self-evaluation, and life lessons that can be learned through the mirror of the stage. It is hoped that students will come away as more educated consumers and with a desire to seek out live theatre in the future (Branin).

Through the questionnaires and interviews, students expressed their feelings on aspects of the trip other than the plays. The results, both positive and negative, will be forwarded to Jeb Branin for his evaluation and implementation of those things that will enhance future trips to London.



*Limitations*

As this trip was to a single location, students did not have the direct opportunity to view plays in both London and another country. Some students stated that they had watched live theatre throughout their lives, others said they had seen live theatre before, and still others said they had never seen live theatre. Research Question 3 focuses on the value of watching plays in a foreign country and discussing the difference between watching the plays in London as opposed to watching the plays in the U.S. The fact that the students only watched the plays in London limits their ability to judge the differences between the varied locations. Offering students live theatre opportunities in multiple locations would enhance the study.

*Future Research*

Future educational trips might include traveling to multiple locations in the U.S. to note regional variations along with nationwide similarities in live theatre. A dual city trip to both New York City and London would benefit in teaching students the differences in each world renowned location. The cultures, the internationality of each city, the affordability of similar venues, and a comparison of New York City's Broadway theatre to London's West End theatre experiences would enlighten students and allow for a marked comparison and realization of the similarities and differences of the theatrical experiences in each city.

**Conclusion**

Walter Fisher's Narrative Theory offers a simple, recognizable format with which to present the current study, that of discovering what the perceived effect London's West End theatre productions had on SUU study abroad students. The students were asked to reflect on the narrative fidelity of each play, how the plays and musicals resonated with them individually, and

to share whether their attitudes, opinions, or behaviors changed due to events they saw on stage. The students were also asked what value the productions had on their study abroad adventure and what value watching the plays in London had as opposed to watching the same plays in the U.S., for instance in New York City's Broadway theatres. The Narrative Theory offers a lens with which to view the responses of the students in a simple, straightforward method, and clearly denotes their thoughts towards what effect they feel the productions had on them.

The opportunity for the students to travel to and experience a renowned city which, for many, was their first time out of the U.S., and for most their first time to London, was an education in itself. Simple, everyday exchanges seemed to enlighten some and thrill others. Add to this the viewing of one of a kind and precious artifacts in the museums, at no charge, was possibly a once in a lifetime occasion that brought an awareness to students that is beyond compare to seeing the pieces in a book or on the internet.

That one of the world's most treasured cities was the destination for this study abroad adventure was thrilling for the majority of the group. Watching world class theatre exposed the students to an art form not readily available to the students on a regular basis. The invitation to be immersed in a prestigious city and to witness esteemed theatre allowed the students to walk away from the experience as more educated consumers of theatre and wiser travelers of the world.

### Sources

Branin, Jeb. (May 29, 2018). Personal Interview.

Clarke, Patrick. (May 29, 2018). Personal Interview.

Dill-Shackleford, K.E. Green, M.C., Scharrer, E., Wetterer, C., & Shackleford, L.E., (2015).

Setting the stage for social change: using live theater to dispel myths about intimate partner violence. *Journal of Health Communications*. e DOI:

10.1080/10810730.2015.1018622

England. (2017). *New World Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from

<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/England>

Fisher, W. (1984). Narration as a human communication paradigm: the case of public moral argument. *Communication Monographs*, Vol. 51.

Fisher, W. (1985). The narrative paradigm: an elaboration. *Communication Monographs*, Vol. 52.

Greene, J., Erickson, H. H., Watson, A. R., & Beck, M. I. (2017). The play's the thing: experimentally examining the social and cognitive effects of school field trips to live theater performances. *University of Arkansas College of Education and Health Professions, Education Reform*. Fayetteville, AR.

Grainger, R. (2013). Nine ways the theatre affects our lives: dramas of transformation. *The Edwin Mellen Press*. Lewiston, N.Y.

Hahn, R.R. (1956). World theatre. *Today's Speech* 4(1), 20-22.

Hansen, B.K., Phillips, G.M., & Arnold, W.E. (1965). Research note: measuring the message delivered by a dramatic production. *Speech Monographs*, 461-464.

- Hobart, M. (2013). My best friend's brother's cousin knew this guy who . . . : hoaxes, legends, warnings, and Fisher's Narrative Paradigm. *Communication Teacher* 27(2), 90-93.
- Mishra, D. (2013). Theatre and communication: exploring the process of life. *Global Media Journal - Indian Edition. Sponsored by the University of Calcutta*. 4(2).
- Reason, M. (2004). Theatre audiences and perceptions of 'liveness' in performance. *Participations* (1)2.
- Sham, P. (May 24, 2018). Personal interview.
- Shoda, H., Adachi, M. & Umeda, T. (2016). How live performance moves the heart. *Plos One*. 11(4).
- Vecchi, G.M., (2009). *Behavioral Sciences*. 12(3), 30-39.
- Wicked. (2018a). *Wicked the Untold Stories of the Witches of Oz*. Retrieved from <https://www.wickedthemusical.co.uk/london/about/awards>
- Wicked. (2018b). *IBDB Internet Broadway Database*. Retrieved from <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/wicked-13485>

SUU in London  
 Theatre Questionnaire

- 1) What elements of the plot, setting, and characters did you like or dislike?
- 2) Were there ethical or moral elements in this production that caused you to question your attitudes, opinions, or behavior on social issues? Briefly discuss.
- 3) What elements of the production could you relate to or not relate to and why?

## Appendix II

### Post Trip One-On-One Discussion Questions

Since you've been home:

1. Which production comes to your mind first?
2. Which production comes to your mind the most often?
3. Which production was the most enjoyable?
4. Which production was the most thought provoking?
5. Did any of the productions make you feel uncomfortable?
6. Have you shifted your attitudes or opinions?
7. Did you see anything on stage that made you change your habits?
8. Did this experience motivate you to seek live theatre in the future?
9. How would the study abroad experience differ if you saw no plays?  
(What value did the plays give to your experience?)
10. How would the study abroad differ if you went to NYC instead of London?  
(What value did going abroad give to your experience?)