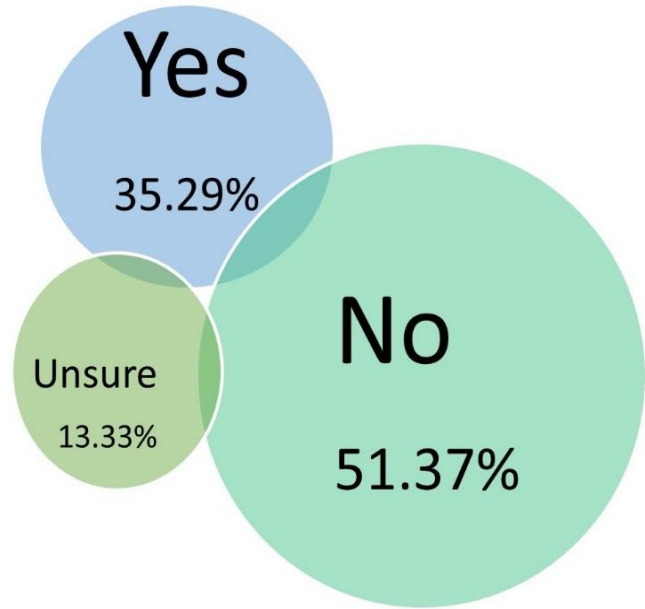


To participate in a study abroad program in the future, would you require financial assistance to pay for the costs?



Are you aware of study abroad or travel opportunities offered by UM?

“I’m interested, but I can’t afford it”: Exploring barriers and bridges to participation in UM International Opportunities for underrepresented students

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International Centre

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Executive Summary

This study, funded by Universities Canada (UC), attempted to identify perceived benefits, barriers, and bridges for engaging University of Manitoba (UM) underrepresented students in international opportunities. An online survey, adapted from CBIE (2009), was administered to UM undergraduate students (N = 369, aged 18– over 54 years) from three underrepresented categories (students with disabilities, Indigenous students, and students from low-income backgrounds) to investigate obstacles for their participation and explore solutions. Subsequently, we conducted focus groups with each stratum. We reached out to stakeholders and student mobility coordinators across different UM departments and faculties to delve deeper into suggested solutions and gathered further information and insights. Ultimately, the collected quantitative and qualitative data were compared and condensed into meaning units.

A significant majority of students expressed financial cost as the main hurdle for their participation. It must be acknowledged that unless significant financial supports are developed for underrepresented students, other interventions are unlikely to produce increased participation. In addition to cost, lack of knowledge about international opportunities, separation from the community, and delaying graduation were among the main barriers that students identified.

Institutional culture also has a role to play, with most students reporting that their academic programs do not expect participation in international experiences and that faculty and staff do not actively encourage students to participate. Less than a quarter of students felt that graduating students who are globally knowledgeable and culturally aware is a priority at UM.

The research results also provided essential hints about effective policies and procedures in place across different UM departments. The findings provided a snapshot of students' current perceptions and allowed us to develop recommendations based on information and policies in different departments.

“I’m interested, but I can’t afford it”: Exploring barriers and bridges to participation in UM International Opportunities for underrepresented student

Introduction

Prior to the rollout of the next phase of the Canadian Outbound Mobility Pilot, it is imperative that the University of Manitoba gains a baseline understanding of the systemic barriers that prevent our underrepresented students from participating in outbound student mobility. In the Government of Canada’s Building on Success: International Education Strategy (Government of Canada, 2021) (2019-2024), the upcoming phase of the Canadian Outbound Mobility Pilot will set aside half of the funds to support access to mobility opportunities for underrepresented students because these students are the least likely to pursue study abroad. Underrepresented students can include low-income students, Indigenous students and students with disabilities.

The University of Manitoba (UM) offers a number of excellent international opportunities (including but not limited to bilateral exchanges, co-op placements, research internships, travel study, field trips, community-engaged learning opportunities and more). However, very few students participate. According to our annual mobility report for 2018-19, only 339 students participated, approximately 0.01% of our student body. Our participation rates are low across all student demographics, but especially with underrepresented groups. Our aim with this research was to focus on the underrepresented student population.

This report presents several identified barriers and explores possible solutions. Further insights and recommendations are provided based on additional findings from our study. A list of recommendations is found near the end of this report. We would like to thank all of the students and colleagues who contributed their time, thoughts and expertise. This research project was funded by Universities Canada (UC).

The following section will provide you with an overview of the methods used for data collection in this study. Subsequently, the findings from the survey, focus groups and community outreach consultations are presented thematically by identified barriers. Each barrier is discussed, and key findings are shared from the participants. Moreover, insights and recommendations for each theme are provided. Finally, the report concludes by identifying recommendations for specific constituent groups at the UM to help overcome barriers.

Methodology

This study collected information using a survey, focus groups, and community outreach data collection methods to collect information and insights from UM students and stakeholders.

Survey

This survey investigated Barriers to Participation in Study Abroad Programs (N = 369, aged 18– over 54 years) enrolled as undergraduate students at the University of Manitoba. Over seven out of ten identified with the 18-24-year-old age group, and almost half of the participants indicated their employment status as employed and working 1-34 hours per week. A stratified random sampling

technique was used to select 369 participants who self-identified as underrepresented students from a population of ~29,000 undergraduate students from 21 faculties at the University of Manitoba, Canada. In this study, only a small minority of students had intersectional identities. The study utilized a cross-sectional survey approach because it was restricted to the 2020–2021 academic year undergraduate students' class. The inclusion criteria included being an undergraduate student at the University of Manitoba, being a Canadian citizen, and being a member of one (or more) of these groups:

- an Indigenous Student (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis)
- a student with a disability (including disabilities such as hearing, injury-related, mental health, medical, physical, or visual disabilities)
- a student from a low-income background.

Focus groups

We randomly selected and contacted participants from the list of students who had indicated their desire to participate in the follow-up study. The privacy and confidentiality measures were in place according to the REB 2 approval that we received. The co-investigator contacted 58 students via email invite. 13 students in total completed the consent forms and agreed to participate. The sessions were scheduled with 12 students, one of whom did not show up and one of whom was disqualified. The remaining participants took part in one of the focus groups.

- Students with disabilities N=2
- Indigenous Students N=4
- Students from low-income backgrounds N=4

Community outreach

The community outreach phase of this study was conducted in the form of consultation with UM engagement officers, exchange and study abroad stakeholders from various UM departments. They were asked to share policies and procedures in place across various UM faculties and departments.

The results obtained from the survey, focus groups, and community outreach provided valuable insights and recommendations for reducing barriers for UM underrepresented students to participate in international opportunities. The research results pointed to effective policies and procedures in place across some UM departments. The key obstacles and risks students identified were financial issues, inadequate awareness about international opportunities, separation from the community, and delaying graduation.

According to empirical information obtained from consultations from various UM departments, there appears to be a gap in the opportunities for underrepresented students to engage in these opportunities. The UM International Centre's exchange program indicated the main reasons for this issue as follows:

- Relying heavily on word of mouth for students to learn about the exchange program
- Instructors/professors' influence for students to consider exchange options
- Several international mobility options for students

- Fear of degree completion delay

Student Accessibility Services (SAS) also specified similar reasons such as lack of awareness, lack of financial resources, lack of family support at home, disability barriers (such as lack of accessible environment abroad, or attitudinal barriers around disability) as the main barriers for students with disabilities to participate in study abroad programs.

Addressing Equity for Underrepresented Students

In an era of competing priorities, it is important to emphasize why education abroad is a valuable part of one's education and not reserved only for those who have historically been represented and can afford such experiences. Diversifying international education is a shared goal that can have different meanings to different people (Gordon, 2018). The benefits to student participation in education abroad include the opportunity to grow academically, professionally, and personally, and should be equally open to students from various backgrounds and underrepresented groups (Gordon, 2018) This view is often shared by campus stakeholders, who all recognize the importance of promoting student achievement and educational equity (Gordon, 2018) Nonetheless, UM students strongly expressed their lack of awareness and insufficient opportunities to learn more about international opportunities in our survey (see Table 2).

An example of equity in practice from the Community Engaged Learning (CEL) programs at UM provide us with an excellent starting point to consider bridges to address inequity:

- Channelling institutional resources and supports to disadvantaged students.
- Working with offices and departments that work directly with disadvantaged students and building on their work rather than re-creating resources.
- Working with offices and departments who work directly with disadvantaged students to promote opportunities available through our office, the UM and Winnipeg.

Addressing the Main barriers

In many institutions, education abroad faces a shortage of stakeholder support (e.g., from upper administration), insufficient funding, inadequate staffing, and marginalization from an institutional perspective (e.g., education abroad is not considered a core objective and mission) (Kasravi, 2009). A UM exchange program coordinator echoed these sentiments, explaining that they lacked material and funding that specifically addresses underrepresented students (Price Faculty of Engineering, 2021). Table 1 presents a listing of barriers ranked from most to least selected from our survey.

Table 1 Perceived barriers

Answer Choices	Responses	
Cost	90.20%	230
Takes me away from my friends/family	60.00%	153
Cannot afford not to work during term	41.18%	105
Not needed to get a job in my field	35.29%	90
May not get credit for courses taken abroad	34.90%	89
Delays graduation	30.59%	78
Job may not be held for me while gone	23.14%	59
Courses in my program are too tightly scheduled to miss	21.96%	56
What needs to be learned abroad can be learned on campus	21.18%	54
My non-physical disability makes it difficult to travel	15.29%	39
Dependents need me to stay at home	15.29%	39
Parents would not approve	10.59%	27
My physical disability makes it difficult to travel	7.06%	18

Barrier 1: Low Awareness

Effective promotional methods are essential to raise awareness and interest in international opportunities. Over half of the survey respondents (51.37%) indicated their lack of awareness about study abroad/travel opportunities offered by the University of Manitoba (See Table 2). Only 10.56% of students indicated that their program strongly suggests a study abroad program before they graduate. Nonetheless, over 60% of the respondents expressed their interest in participating in a study abroad program/experience (See figure 1).

Table 2 Respondents' previous knowledge about study abroad programs

Answer Choices	Responses	
No	51.37%	90
Yes	35.29%	131
Unsure	13.33%	34
Total		255

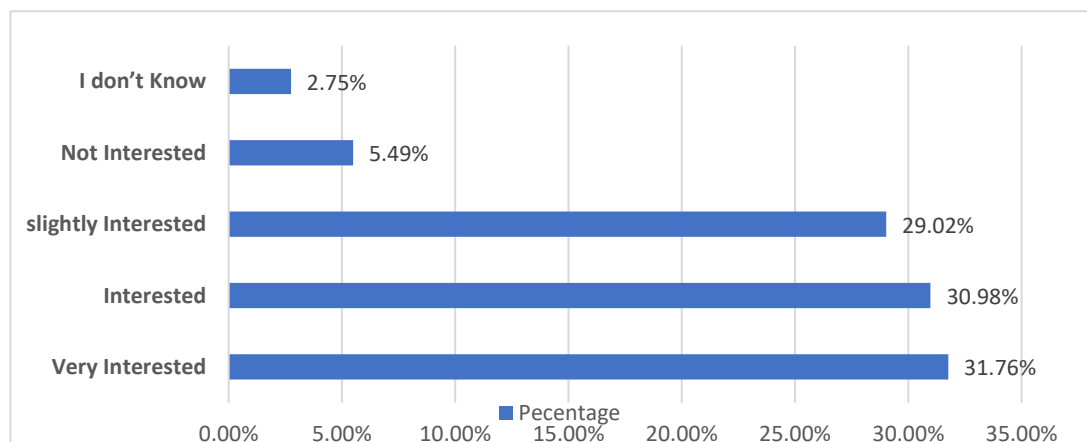


Figure 1 Students' interest in participating in a study abroad program/experience

This tells us that there is a communication and knowledge gap. It is recommended that we use the official communication channels, i.e. email, UM Website, and UM Instagram account, to disseminate information about international and study abroad opportunities. According to our focus group participants, an Instagram takeover might also be an entertaining way of communicating facts and values/benefits. Building upon procedures implemented at the faculty of arts, ‘takeovers’ of social media or sharing stories on these platforms can be promoted. Students who have returned from the exchange can be encouraged to present the information sessions (Faculty of Arts, 2021).

Classroom visits, information sessions, one-on-one advising sessions, and cross-departmental events and promotional activities are also among other communication methods that could be carried out. All marketing materials, including initiatives such as Instagram takeovers, should highlight a range of diverse students, including race, gender, and sexuality, so that others may see the program as accessible for all. International students are also targeted in specific messaging around the value of mobility (I. H. Asper School of Business, 2021).

Barrier 2: Cost

With respect to perceived barriers for all the strata of the underrepresented student groups, a significant majority of survey respondents, 90.20%, referred to financial cost as the main impediment to participate in study abroad programs. A significant majority (79.22%) noted that they would need financial assistance to pay for their costs (see Table 3); moreover, most of the focus group participants recommended using a needs-based funding allocation system to be inclusive of all students. Some students from the low-income category signalled their need to receive full coverage of cost. The majority of students stated that at least half of their costs need to be covered so that they can consider an international experience. Reens, a low-income stratum participant, noted that “I want to say, like 50 percent for low-income individuals is like kind of the minimum”.

To address financial challenges associated with international opportunities, further discussions with faculties and the International Centre are needed to secure more funds for students from low-income backgrounds (International Centre (IC) Exchange Program, 2021). Financial Aid and Awards (FAA) is also in the process of working with faculties on a regular basis to address the disparity of access to post-secondary attainment amongst specific student cohorts (Financial Aid and Awards, 2021). For example: infusing current internal award programs where deemed necessary; emergency funding programs; etc.

According to UM International Centre, it has been difficult to find funding for mobility programs (2021). Unlike other universities and provinces, it seems there is less support for international opportunities in Manitoba. To illustrate this challenge, the UM International Centre’s exchange program offers two funds; one is based on financial need, and the other is based on GPA. However, this funding is not guaranteed, and once the amount is divided amongst the students, it ends up being very small, usually not enough to even cover airfare.

Table 3 Financial assistance requirement for participation in study abroad program

Answer choice	Percentage
Yes	79.22%
I don't know	14.90
No	5.88%

Funding distribution

The results obtained from the survey and focus group discussions emphasized the necessity of allocating more financial aid to empower and encourage underrepresented students to participate in international opportunities. Throughout focus group discussions, the participants reiterated their need to obtain additional financial aid, loans, family support, or work to help offset costs in order to study abroad. One of the participants stated his viewpoint about study abroad incentives as, “It would incentivize me to go, but only if it was financially [supported].”

Creating systems that mitigate barriers such as “familial responsibilities, cultural differences, work hours, and often regimented major requirements” could be the only way to provide meaningful financial support, recognizing multifaceted support before, during, and after they have decided to undertake the program (Tolan & McCullers, 2018, p. 79). The majority of focus group participants agreed with establishing a needs-based financial aid program. According to a body of literature, researching and adapting institutional policies regarding needs-based aid processes can allow underrepresented students to gain institutional aid (Albrecht, Palacios, & Siefken, 2018). Developing a method of assessing these students’ needs allows them to be accurately recognized when awarding need-based aid (Albrecht, Palacios, & Siefken, 2018). As cited in the previous section, students expect at least 50% of the international opportunities to be covered. There was a call from focus group participants to ensure equality, non-discrimination and the fair distribution of funds. A focus group participant noted that “More well-off people probably wouldn’t need help as much... I know increasing diversity is becoming an issue, as ... I know quite a few people of colour who don’t have access to a lot of stuff and whatnot. So that, I think [equity] also should be taken into account.”

Bearing in mind the insights taken from focus group discussions and stakeholder consultations, we propose that we work toward offering full-cost or at least fifty percent of cost coverage for international opportunities for low-income students. (Community Engaged Learning, 2021)

Barrier 3: Detachment from community, family and friends

The majority of participants, mainly those self-identifying as Indigenous, reiterated the issues associated with family and community as a barrier to participating in international opportunities. One of the Indigenous focus group participants noted, “I think just also I have commitments here, volunteer opportunities that I like to stay involved in and jobs and a relationship and friendships.” To make indigenous students feel a sense of community or connection to their natural heritage, Hudson et al. (2021) suggested organizing short-term programs, group trips, and adapting and choosing a program relevant to the indigenous community. Predeparture preparation, training, community-

building, peer support and awareness-raising can also be beneficial for Indigenous students to overcome these challenges.

Opportunity to connect with past participants and supports

Like many international programs, the UM International Centre's student exchange program provides peer-to-peer mentorship support to encourage exchange students (International Centre (IC) Exchange Program, 2021). Hence, it would be essential to ensure the same level of support and resources are available at the partner school of their choice. Similarly, the I.H. Asper School of Business provides intensive one-on-one support for all students explicitly tailored to students' needs (UM I.H. Asper School of Business, 2021). Asper Students are provided with information about safety and diversity relative to their host schools and destinations. Students build relationships with the Exchange Coordinator and are encouraged to drop in without appointments. They are connected to host schools regarding disability accommodations as needed, and the program acts as a liaison where requested. The Asper Student Exchange program works closely with Indigenous Business Education Partners (IBEP) to provide further support if needed.

Part of the challenge is that many underrepresented students may not be aware of the services and supports available. It is essential to improve this aspect of our marketing and communications and relates to the previously mentioned communication and knowledge gap.

Barrier 4: Students' fears and concerns

Fear of racism overseas, a lack of family support, or awareness of the potential benefit of studying abroad or what it implies, and insufficient support or failure to address international opportunities among faculty and staff are all variables that impact whether racially and ethnically diverse students still want to study abroad. (Ganz, 1991; Gutierrez, 2015; Hembroff & Rusz, 1993; Kasravi, 2009; Norfles, 2003). During the focus group discussions, several students voiced their concerns regarding safety for study abroad and international programs. One of the participants with an intersectional identity stated that,

“...I think racism is a big fear for a lot of indigenous students. ...even discriminatory practices against not having enough money or disabilities to do something. So, I think that [racism] would need to not to be there. I would suggest that something like that is discussed openly because ... how we see ourselves is very different than how others see us.”

As an example, the UM Community Engaged Learning programs provide the following services to assist with student fears and concerns:

- Pre-departure orientation
- In-site support
- One-on-one meetings

Regarding assisting students with disabilities to overcome their specific concerns, the UM SAS provides support for students, inclusive of all cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. They offer academic accommodations to students and they help students connect with other campus and community resources as needed.

Barrier 5: Supporting students with disabilities

To eliminate barriers for students with disabilities, forward-thinking international education practitioners and organizations must adopt internal practises and strategies beyond the minimum legal requirements (Holben & Malhotra, 2018). With a growing focus on issues of equity and diversity, as well as the current ambiguity in the implementation of these policies overseas, the field of international education is shifting away from meeting only the basic requirements of disability non-discrimination laws and toward fostering an institutional culture of inclusion to provide greater access to students with disabilities to engage in Education (Holben & Malhotra, 2018).

The focus group participants in our study called attention to the need for mental health and physical accessibility services during their sojourn. To this end, The UM International Centre's student exchange office communicates with host institutions to ensure accessibility and that all required supports are in place (International Centre (IC) Exchange Program, 2021). The UM SAS also helps students connect with disability accommodations and supports, advises of funding opportunities through Manitoba Student Aid, helps with accessing technology and training on how to use it. They can help educate staff, faculty, and students on removing disability-related barriers (Student Accessibility Services, 2021). Accordingly, it is indispensable that a student with a disability be liaised with both SAS and their host institution (I. H. Asper School of Business, 2021). Another recommendation is providing support as requested based on individual needs (I. H. Asper School of Business, 2021). We are reminded once again of an awareness gap. Supports exist for students with disabilities, but many are unaware of them. This aspect of marketing and communications must also be improved upon.

Many higher education institutions and education abroad providers prioritize diversity and underrepresented communities in their outreach efforts (Sygall & Lewis). Mobility International U.S.A. (MIUSA) has documented several U.S. institutions' strategies to ensure that people with disabilities are included among them (Sygall & Lewis, 2006). Texas A&M University's Study Abroad Programs Office makes disability-related information available on its website to show that it expects disabled students to participate (Holben & Malhotra, 2018). Likewise, The University of Minnesota provides resources online through Access Abroad¹, a collaborative initiative between its Learning Abroad Center and its Disability Resource Center, intended for faculty, professionals, parents, and students. Access Abroad offers a checklist for students with disabilities as they prepare for a program and accessibility information for programs, including disability culture, classroom and excursion accessibility, housing and food, technology, and transportation (University of Minnesota, n.d.). Instructions on how to report a disability and seek disability-related accommodations in Education abroad are among the services available on their website.

Disability-positive messages are incorporated in Western Michigan University's outreach materials (Holben & Malhotra, 2018). The following statement from Juanita Lillie, founding director

¹ Access Abroad is a collaborative effort at the University of Minnesota between the Learning Abroad Center and Disability Resource Center to facilitate equal access for students seeking to pursue an education abroad experience and to provide information on accessibility at overseas sites.

of Abroad with Disabilities which appears in one of its study abroad brochures, is aimed at students with disabilities:

“I went to Costa Rica as part of a three-month study abroad experience with many other exchange students from across the United States. Once I returned to Michigan, many individuals were surprised that I was able to successfully go abroad with my disability (vision impaired). I know my situation is not unique, and I am an avid believer that students of all abilities should travel abroad.” (Western Michigan University, n.d.)

The UM’s international programs can take a similar initiative and incorporate disability-positive messages in all marketing materials and provide more disability-related information on our websites. While the UM SAS can help students connect with disability offices in locations abroad, the host university office might ignore the email or not know how to direct it. Therefore, it is recommended that, where possible, the host university coordinator does a soft hand-off/referral to the appropriate office at the host university and liaise as necessary with the SAS office at the UM. The UM SAS also encourages students to speak with their advisors about concerns they may have. In the sections above, the five barriers that emerged from the findings were discussed. We now turn to broad insights and recommendations.

Further insights and recommendations

Education abroad becomes more accessible to a wide range of students as it becomes a part of strategic planning initiatives and is incorporated into programs that influence student learning, retention, and achievement, rather than being an optional add-on for a select few (Raby & Rhodes, 2018). Efforts can be made to reach out to incoming freshmen with statements such as “Thinking about studying abroad as a chemistry major? Here are 15 institutions you could attend, and here’s how it would map onto your 4-year degree, approved in advance” (Gonzales, Flores, & Simmons, 2018, p. 145). With input from study abroad offices and departmental academic advisors, advising resources, brochures, and maps can be created for each major, using images and comments from students (Gonzales, Flores, & Simmons, 2018). The UM, by the same token, presents international opportunities on its UM Career Compass, during recruitment activities, and during new student orientation. Despite this, the way international opportunities are presented needs to be ameliorated as more than half of survey respondents expressed their lack of knowledge about these programs (See Figure Two).

The transfer credit process should be reviewed and streamlined at an institutional level (International Centre (IC) Exchange Program, 2021). Almost 35% of students indicated that they may not receive credit for courses taken abroad as a barrier to participation (See Table 1). As an example of credit transfer working well, it is reported that approximately 90-100 undergrads participate in one of the UM’s I.H. Asper School of Business exchange programs annually. Around 20% of Asper students have gone on some form of exchange through their faculty by the time they graduate. The UM’s I.H. Asper School of Business attributes the reason for the success of its exchange program to three factors: a dedicated, in house exchange coordinator with expertise on all Asper partnerships, ease of credit transfer, and the ability to reach Asper students directly through targeted events, marketing, classroom visits, etc. Asper’s prioritization of international activities allows for support of

programming and visibility, and it also creates the perception of viability and legitimacy of the program among students. It is not perceived as a niche, specialized programming option while at I. H. Asper of Business and is seen as an authentic option for all students (I. H. Asper School of Business, 2021).

While the problems of diversifying education abroad are not always easy, they are surmountable. We must learn from previous programs and campaigns, including those that were only partially successful. To fully promote multicultural excellence in education abroad, the field must shift beyond fragmented programmes that are exclusively centred on composite diversity (Gordon, 2018). The stakeholders at the UM Faculty of Arts (2021) recommend organizing a policy roundtable with all key players, such as the suspended International Advisory Committee in which Arts play a regular role, to consider underrepresented students' issues.

The necessity for further (holistic) support

Underrepresented people can have an awareness gap in adapting to the academic world (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996), which can be exacerbated when undertaking a study abroad program and education systems in other countries (Tolan & McCullers, 2018). Studies of college students' academic and social needs have found that student organizations and clubs' engagement benefits students, whereas disadvantaged students have a greater need for academic engagement (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). The survey respondents revealed that the majority of UM students lack knowledge or an opportunity to learn more about international opportunities.

With this in mind, study abroad and other international programs should include several support levels designed to encourage involvement from a wide range of students. For example, in new student orientation, students are invited to study abroad sessions to learn about the individual support they may expect during their studies at the university (Tolan & McCullers, 2018). This includes support with finding academically appropriate programmes with courses abroad that meet degree criteria, determining when to attend, applying for supplementary scholarships, receiving feedback on grant application essays, comprehending financial supports, and receiving help with family or other issues (Tolan & McCullers, 2018). Moreover, marketing and promotional materials could be further tailored to suit underrepresented students' needs (I. H. Asper School of Business, 2021).

Interdepartmental collaboration

As a high-impact educational practice, studying abroad provides students and their families with a significant opportunity to influence their academic and sociocultural paths (Tolan & McCullers, 2018). According to educational studies, high-impact practices—those that involve a lot of time and effort, faculty engagement, and cooperation with various people—increase student retention commitment and deep learning (Kuh, 2008). It is therefore essential that student mobility stakeholders, partners, and relevant support departments collaborate across campus and leverage existing supports and expertise. As an example, the UM International Centre exchange program

coordinators attempt to proactively reach out to all key players throughout the year to raise awareness of the exchange program and engage in a conversation about the program’s support and resources (International Exchange Program, 2021).

Conceiving and Marketing International Opportunities

Regarding sources of information for outbound mobility programs, two-fifths of the survey respondents (39.55%) indicated that they would opt for the internet as the medium of seeking information on study abroad programs (see Table 4). Table 4 presents sources of information about study abroad programs ranked from most to least selected from our survey:

Table 4 Sources of information about study abroad programs

Answer Choices	Responses	
University/faculty website	39.55%	53
Friend(s)	37.31%	50
Posted flyers	29.85%	40
During orientation activities	28.36%	38
In classes	23.88%	32
My faculty/school/department	23.88%	32
I had to search for that information as it was not easily available	18.66%	25
Through admissions materials	17.16%	23
Exchange advisor	12.69%	17
Through an academic advisor	8.21%	11
Social networks like Facebook	8.21%	11
Through the Co-op program staff	5.97%	8
Through an international advisor	4.48%	6
Student government members	2.99%	4
Residence hall staff	0.75%	1
Total Respondents: 134		

If universities and educators do not promote and establish proportionate and equal access to international education, the educational achievement gap between students will likely increase, effectively leaving an already disadvantaged student population behind. (Albrecht, Palacios, & Siefken, 2018); It is the international educator’s obligation to understand this increasing gap, encourage international opportunities among students, and assist these students as they strive to use their legitimate access to international Education. (Albrecht, Palacios, & Siefken, 2018). Effective promotional strategies are essential for increasing international program recognition and interest. Determining the most appropriate approaches that program coordinators and the university’s communication teams utilize to promote international opportunities must be a continuing discussion. Our survey revealed that 63.84% of students were not aware of international opportunities offered by the UM. This is a knowledge gap that must be addressed via multiple channels.

Social media is considered a significant vehicle of program promotion when used effectively. A conscious effort must be made to promote a diverse range of students and their stories. Representation is a crucial part of the messaging wherever possible (I. H. Asper School of Business,

2021). Utilizing social media, individuals can share their stories with images, videos, blogs, live streaming, and other platforms. Through diverse representation, education abroad can become more accessible for a broader range of students by sharing different perspectives. The ability to see and hear firsthand how education abroad influenced a student's learning, career and personal development emphasizes the value of diversifying education abroad (Gordon, 2018).

Our focus group participants also validated the significance of using social media as a communication and marketing medium such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter (International Centre (IC) Exchange Program, 2021). It is also interesting to note that many faculty and staff are not talking to students about international opportunities. In our survey, students reported that only 7.18% had a faculty member, and 2.39% had a student advisor talk to them about international opportunities. Only 24.54% of respondents felt that study abroad and other international learning opportunities are encouraged on campus. Only 21.15% of students agree that graduating students who are globally knowledgeable and culturally aware is a priority at UM. This speaks to a knowledge gap amongst faculty and staff about the opportunities available to students. This also points to a larger need for institutional culture change to value and encourage international experiences as a natural part of one's student experience. In the next section, we highlight promising practices to help institutions better support international opportunities for underrepresented students.

Providing resources: Strengthening the bridge to international opportunities for underrepresented students

There is an ongoing need for examples of best practices that illustrate how institutions can instill and sustain a culture of inclusion beyond compliance and individual-level support. It is imperative to ensure that we comply with Manitoba Human Rights legislation and The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) on what we can and should do. As an example, a section in each student mobility program acceptance letter can include privacy information and various disclosure options in order to connect students with appropriate supports and resources.

Advocating for underrepresented students

Aside from the risk of litigation, an ethical incentive for international educators to advocate for equity, diversity, and inclusion could be to maintain institutional or departmental missions, such as those intended to provide equal opportunities for all students to develop skills, expertise, and experiences that will prepare them to navigate an increasingly global environment (Holben & Malhotra, 2018). Various UM exchange program coordinators made the following recommendations:

Indigenous students:

It is vital for the student exchange program that new or current partner institutions offer indigenous study and support and resources that meet the specific needs of the Indigenous students. Also, specialized, targeted messaging is directed to our Indigenous students in collaboration with Indigenous Business Education Partners (IBEP) advisors (I. H. Asper School of Business, 2021)

Students from low-income backgrounds:

It is vital for international programs to have more funds available to make the programs more accessible. Instead of a 4-5 month exchange, a shorter-term program may be a desirable option to minimize the cost (as long as sufficient funds can be offered). The shorter-term option was validated by our focus group participants. By way of providing an affordable mobility program, it may also serve as an introductory mobility experience and segue into pursuing other international mobility programs (e.g. co-op, internship, etc.) (International Centre (IC) Exchange Program, 2021). The UM Community Engaged Learning (CEL) advocates for low-income students applying to CEL travel programs by providing them access to a needs-based experiential travel fund to cover part of the program fee for low-income students (Community Engaged Learning, 2021). It may also be possible to prioritize new international opportunities that offer paid work or other funding incentives to offset the costs.

Innovation via collaboration

Institutions have a responsibility to advocate for diversifying education abroad and to work with on and off-campus stakeholders to develop and implement comprehensive strategies (Gordon, 2018). The majority of our focus group participants requested inter-university collaboration to provide their logistical needs or organize and evaluate job opportunities. A focus group participant stated that:

“It would be great if you had more contact, direct contacts with institutions in the receiving country... institutions to provide a small amount of income to the student inside of the receiving country because it also adds to an experience, it’ll also be good to have a few of them somewhere in the continent or somewhere in the country that I could text for any questions or whatnot, someone that could speak the same language as I do and someone who would know how to navigate the differences between Manitoba and the receiving country.”

Much of the supports mentioned by this student already exist at UM, which again points to a knowledge gap. International programs need to do a better job of communicating supports to students and the university community.

As the application of Canadian laws to international education programs overseas can be ambiguous at best, and non-discrimination laws in host countries are often unenforceable or nonexistent; other solutions must be considered via collaboration and knowledge sharing with host institutions and organizations. In this regard, the UM Community Engaged Learning program works with partners to take on administrative costs and logistics to make the cost of these experiences as accessible as possible. This model can be tested with other mobility programs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

To better support students going abroad, there has been a shift toward creating a more inclusive curriculum and training programmes for faculty and staff (Lopez-McGee, Comp, & Contrera, 2018). Because the study abroad narrative has traditionally been dominated by white middle- or upper-class constituents, the support systems for students while abroad will need to be

revised as more diverse students go abroad (Lopez-McGee, Comp, & Contrera, 2018). Furthermore, additional work needs to be done to investigate the gaps in student experiences while overseas-based on student identity (Lopez-McGee, Comp, & Contrera, 2018). Since underrepresented students are less likely to attend fairs or visit websites, educators must go to where these students live, practice, and interact with compelling messages about the variety of services and reasons to participate (Lucas, 2018).

Faculty and staff can make a significant contribution to diversifying education abroad at the grassroots level by developing relationships and using available resources (Gordon, 2018). Institutions have a duty to advocate for the global expansion of education and collaborate with on- and off-campus stakeholders to develop and incorporate holistic strategies (Gordon, 2018).

The following is a list of recommendations for the UM to increase the participation and support of underrepresented students. The UM may wish to leverage the International Mobility Resource Network (IMRN) to develop a working group to execute the recommendations. These recommendations should be used in future strategic planning and the roll-out of new mobility programs and funding.

Barrier 1: Low Awareness

- a. Develop a multifaceted marketing campaign that effectively reaches students, staff, and faculty, communicating the benefits and supports for international opportunities. Multiple channels and methods must be used to target groups appropriately.
- b. Ensure that marketing messages include underrepresented students, present a diverse set of experiences, and work to reduce the inherent elitism of education abroad.
- c. Engage faculty and administration in promoting the value of education abroad and develop a culture of it being a natural and valid part of the student experience.
- d. Incentivize students to take part in an international experience as part of their degree experience.
- e. Improve upon existing messaging about international experiences (websites, promotional materials, advising materials etc.)

Barrier 2: Cost

- a. Develop a needs-based funding program that can cover at least 50% of the cost of international experiences, prioritizing underrepresented students.
- b. Develop a marketing campaign that raises awareness of the availability of funds for underrepresented students.
- c. Improve websites and promotional materials to include realistic and transparent information about costs for international opportunities.
- d. Seek additional sources of funding for international opportunities.

Barrier 3: Detachment from Friends, Family and Community

- a. Develop consistency across programs for mentorship, peer support and community-building for participants.
- b. Develop a menu of international opportunities, which include short-term, online and local opportunities in addition to the traditional, longer experiences.

Barrier 4: Students' Fears and Concerns

- a. Leverage existing supports across campus and partner institutions/organizations, including pre-departure supports, in-country supports, and returnee supports.
- b. Improve communications to students about available supports.
- c. Identify support gaps and develop as necessary.
- d. Provide guaranteed credit for any credit-bearing mobility activities organized by the U of M.
- e. Include student stories and testimonials on websites and marketing materials.

Barrier 5: Supporting Students with Disabilities

- a) Organize a stakeholder session with program coordinators and SAS to develop shared guidance for supporting and communicating supports to students with disabilities.
- b) Include disability-positive messaging on websites and promotional materials, including testimonials.
- c) Develop a disability and travel checklist and resource

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Appendix A: Further insights from the Survey

Suggestions from Students:

Survey respondents were asked to consider a fictional scenario to provide feedback to the Prime Minister of Canada to make study abroad opportunities a reality for half of all post-secondary students. The respondents were required to provide open-ended answers to this question. The collected responses were coded and summarized into ten emerging themes in order of frequency:

- Providing financial assistance
- Providing (further) accessibility services
- Increasing safety measures concerned with the travel program.
- More arrangements regarding visa application/airport pickup/ between universities and less/Red tape reduction
- Providing pre-departure language training
- Providing further information/insights/ publicizing
- Having Canadian universities accept a more comprehensive array of courses for credit transfer
- Accommodation arrangements
- Providing incentives
- Ensuring that it will not delay graduation.

Ideas and Insights

The comparison of the data from three student categories, i.e. students with low-income, indigenous students and students with disabilities, revealed *no statistically significant difference* between the groups' barriers indicated for each stratum. The following table presents recommendations based on the analysis of participants' answers.

Recommendations	Rationale	Samples from Qualitative Evidence
Funding dedicated to underrepresented students. Communication plan to build awareness amongst underrepresented students.	The vast majority, 90.20% of participants, indicated they needed financial support to participate.	E.g., <i>“My financial situation would be the deciding factor.”</i>
Guaranteed credit for credit-bearing activities organized by UM.	Just under a fifth (18.82%) of the participants expressed their concerns regarding the participants in study abroad programs.	<i>“Depending on credits offered, I hope to study abroad in winter 2023.”</i> <i>“There needs to be an easier way to get credit for courses taken in other countries. And you need to be guaranteed to</i>

receive credit for those classes.”

Follow-up awareness survey for faculty and staff about international opportunities.	Above half of the participants expressed (51.37%) that they were not aware of the study abroad opportunities and they had demanded further publicization of the study abroad programs.	<i>“I am unfamiliar with the requirements. Financially and academically.”</i>
Followed by an awareness campaign for faculty and staff	Just a tiny fraction of students indicated that they were encouraged at their department, faculty or by their Academic advisor. According to the qualitative data collected, a majority of students expressed their lack of knowledge regarding these programs.	<i>“I have genuinely no idea how this all works or who to reach.”</i> Also, one of the respondents stated that: <i>“I was never directly told or encouraged to go.”</i>
Similar to the initiative undertaken at the University of Waterloo, the University of Manitoba can assist students in creating personalized travel plans based on their needs or disabilities ahead of departure.	In total, just over a fifth of participants (22.35%) expressed their physical and non-physical disability as barriers to their participation.	<i>“I am unable to move away from Canada due to my health conditions.”</i>
Students want the opportunities to have access to information resources from: <ul data-bbox="250 1524 548 1598" style="list-style-type: none">• University Website• Peers	39.55% expressed a desire to access information via the University website and from their peer(s), respectively.	<i>“Experiences shared by students in class.”</i> <i>“Speaking with international students in my faculty (very common for me).”</i>
Students already facing significant barriers may be better served to go to traditional locations, and that language barrier must be adequately addressed. Anecdotally, students often come to see exchange advisors saying they want to visit the UK or Australia	Almost 83% of respondents pointed to the significance of studying in a country where English or French is spoken.	While most of the students noted language learning as a motivating factor, some of them referred to the language as an obstacle, e.g.: <i>“finances, sometimes language barriers.”</i>

because they do not speak any foreign languages. This is before we explain that many of our partners teach in English in many countries, and then it really opens them up to considering other locations.

<p>Providing mental support services for students while they are abroad to reduce family-related issues.</p>	<p>44.71% of students consider being away from family [and its consequences] as a barrier.</p>	<p>A respondent indicated “anxiety about leaving friends and family” as an impediment.</p>
<p>Communications plan to build awareness amongst underrepresented students</p>	<p>More than half of the students (51.37%) indicated that they are not aware of the study abroad or travel opportunities. Also, half of the respondents expressed their unawareness about such opportunities on campus</p>	<p>A respondent noted that “I’m not aware of any opportunities, but if the right opportunity came up, I would be very interested in studying abroad.”</p>