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# Leaving the Classroom to Stay in College: Investigating the Relationship between Model UN Study Away and Retention

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**Martha Humphries Ginn**  
*Augusta State University*

**Craig Douglas Albert**  
*Augusta State University*

**Andrew Phillips**  
*Augusta State University*

*The escalating costs of higher education have generated an increasing emphasis on college retention rates as a metric to determine if public universities are being good stewards of student and taxpayer dollars. Emerging research suggests that study abroad programs, in addition to promoting cross-cultural skills, global understanding, strong interpersonal skills, and academic knowledge, may possibly impact a student's decision to stay in college. Building on this research, we use a case study to explore the relationship between learning experiences during college programs outside of the classrooms, such as a study away trip, and student retention rates. We identify the benefits of the Model UN program at Augusta State University and its contribution to students' college success and improvement of academic experience. Specifically, we examine the extent to which this program offers the critical components identified in the literature as factors that lead to increases in retention and persistence rates. We find that the Model UN program at ASU was successful in developing both academic and social integration, as well as increasing intellectual development. We suggest that Political Science departments invest in Model UN programs and other study away opportunities to increase retention and enhance student education.*

**T**he escalating costs of higher education have generated an increasing emphasis on college retention rates as a metric to determine if public universities are being good stewards of student and taxpayer dollars. Scholars and policy

analysts agree that strategic planning and effective teaching methods are factors in students persisting in education. Emerging research suggests that study abroad programs, in addition to promoting cross-cultural skills, global understanding, and strong inter-personal skills, may also impact a student's decision to stay in college. This research suggests that study away programs in Political Science like Model United Nations or Mock Trial can potentially increase both the academic experience of the student, as well as persistence rates. Specifically, we study the relationship between learning experiences during a college program outside of the classroom and student persistence rates.

We will examine the extent to which a study away program at Augusta State University offers the critical components identified in the literature as factors that lead to increases in retention rates. We expect to find a positive relationship between students' participation in a study away trip, such as the Model United Nations program, and students' persistence toward their educational goals. In a still struggling economy, cheaper yet still academically rigorous study away trips provide a learning mechanism that the literature suggests will contribute to student success in college, specifically their persistence rates.

Our research adds to the literature by proposing that study away programs, in addition to study abroad trips, meet the requirements needed for students to persist and excel in college. We argue that in an ever-globalizing world, study away programs such as the National Model United Nations (NMUN) provide an exceptional educational experience. Further, NMUN provides an affordable option for many students to participate in an international competition about the international system, where they learn about negotiation, international relations theory, and how to think about these issues from the point of view of their assigned country. This potentially creates not just a well-educated student, but also a well-rounded individual, one with global sensitivity and a cosmopolitan understanding of international diversity.

### **Defining Student Success**

Scholars have identified three measures of student success in college: retention, persistence, and attrition (Bean 1980; Hackman and Dysinger 1970; Nam and Folger 1965; Tinto 1975). Retention is a basic university measure of the percentage of students that continue in their education at the school, though calculated differently for various types of colleges and programs (Wild and Ebberts 2002). Persistence is a measure of the student's desire and action to start and complete a degree (Seidman 2005). Attrition, related to both retention and persistence, refers to the decrease of the student body as a result of low retention rates (Hagedorn 2006). While negative attrition indicates

students are not satisfied with their education and do not graduate or meet their expectations, positive attrition occurs when students still complete their goals and consider themselves successful (Fralick 1993). Students who are enrolled in college, but transfer to another school and students that discontinue their education after mastering a certain skill or meeting job requirements cause positive attrition (Polinsky 2003). Negative attrition, however, is associated with students who enter college with an already low high school GPA, or have no stated goals for college or a declared major (Fralick 1993). These students may also have problems scheduling school around their work schedule or may be unhappy with professors' instruction methods (Polinsky 2003).

Despite variations in terminology, theories of college success incorporate factors that encourage students to pursue their education. Tinto's (1975; 1987) Student Integration Model places responsibility for retention with both individual students and academic institutions. Together, the students and institution form a social and academic community, and students' integration (or lack thereof) into this community plays a large role in retention. Tinto argues that students' success in both academic and social integration determines attrition; a student who fails to be integrated into the college community is less likely to finish college. Measures of social integration include students' interaction with peers and involvement in extracurricular activities, whereas measures of academic integration include GPA, the student's assessment of the value of what they are learning as well as the extent to which they enjoy learning, and the student's perception of how they are doing academically. Academic integration involves not just meeting academic standards, but identifying and embracing the norms in the academic setting. Interaction with faculty tends to help with both social and academic integration. In general, contact with faculty outside of class is found to be important in student academic development and the decision to remain in college (Endo and Harpel 1982).

Ashar and Skenes (1993) extended the Student Integration Model to non-traditional students, and noted that while social integration affects retention of these students, academic integration was found to have little effect. Commitment to learning, as well as intellectual development and culture, were unimportant to their sample of managers and potential managers. Allen et al. (2008) focus on students close to graduation and find that how well students connect with other students and the college at-large affects persistence. For two-year institutions, Deil-Amen (2011) similarly finds that this social connectedness makes students feel supported and contributes to their feeling of belonging and confidence, improving their overall college life.

Though institutions have a responsibility in increasing retention, students are also responsible for their decisions to persist in education. Students who clarify their academic and career goals and who believe that their education

will help them succeed in their career are more likely to return to school the next semester (Luke II 2009; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). Students' motivation to succeed academically is also a factor in their persistence (Fralick 1993; Friedman and Mandel 2009). Students with low motivation to get good grades are at a higher risk of dropping out. Others (Allen et al. 2008; Lotkowski, Robbins, and Noeth 2004) find that pre-college academic preparation is important, noting that high school GPA and rankings have positive effects on persistence.

Individual demographic factors such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and family support, have also been found to affect persistence (Tinto 1975). Other than Asians, minorities tend to have lower persistence rates (Astin 1997; Murtaugh, Burns, and Schuster 1999). Results on gender are less conclusive. While some find females have lower persistence rates (Polinsky 2003; Robertson 1991), others have found similar or even higher rates than their male counterparts (Astin 1975; Lewallen 1993). Personal and financial problems, high work demands, and attending school part-time, all negatively affect persistence (Polinsky 2003). Financial support and socioeconomic status also negatively affect persistence; students who work or experience financial hardship are less likely to graduate (Lotkowski, Robbins, and Noeth 2004). Allen et al. (2008) find that students with a higher socioeconomic status are more likely to remain enrolled or transfer rather than drop out.

### **Study Abroad Programs and Retention**

Study abroad programs foster relationships between students and faculty, provide valuable out-of-classroom experience for students, and have a reputation for creating well-rounded students with superior academic performance. Given the previous insight on retention, it is clear why Metzger (2006, 167) calls study abroad programs a 21st century retention strategy. Metzger notes that students who participate in study abroad grow personally and develop academically; these students perform better in school and benefit from the unique social experience of being outside of the classroom with peers. Posey (2003) finds a direct link between study abroad programs and increased retention, noting students' higher graduation rates and less time spent attaining their degree. In another study abroad program, students who participated had a 64% greater chance of graduating within five years and over a 200% greater chance of graduating in six (Hamir 2011, 4). The Rome Program of the University of Dallas is another example of clear retention benefits; students who participated persisted for almost one more semester than those who did not go (Young 2003; Young 2007-2008).

Scholars mention social and academic integration, key features of Tinto's Student Integration Model, as part of study abroad programs. Young (2003)

notes that students live in close proximity to each other and take the same classes, integrating them more with each other, both socially and academically. Young (2007-2008) also notes that informal interaction between the students and faculty, which develops academic integration, is critical to the Rome program. Dwyer (2004) noted that in addition to overall academic development, study abroad students also had an increased interest in academic study. Emanoil (1999) and Kitsantas (2004) find that study abroad programs increase life skills, academic experience, cultural views, and global understanding. Hadis (2005) found that students became more independent and more open to new ideas after studying abroad. Younes and Asay (2003, 143) note that study abroad consists of traditional learning of course material, but students also learn more about themselves and gain a deeper understanding of the world. Younes and Asay (2003) discovered that students benefited from strengthening preexisting relationships, opportunities for new relationships, and learning from other students. The large group aspect was also helpful for students; inexperienced travelers learned from the group, and students often enjoyed the diversity of others. Such group dynamics contribute to social and academic integration since they stimulate more personal and frequent peer and faculty interactions.

One of the most ambitious efforts to explore achievement of learning outcomes through study abroad is the Georgia Learning Outcomes of Students Studying Abroad Research Initiative (GLOSSARI). Richard C. Sutton and Donald L. Rubin were the principal investigators of the project that studied learning outcomes of study abroad participants in the 35-institution University System of Georgia. Initial findings were that those who studied abroad, when compared to those that did not, achieved higher scores on learning outcomes including functional knowledge, knowledge of global interdependence, cultural relativism, and world geography (Sutton and Rubin 2004). The final report from the decade-long project found that students who studied abroad had higher GPAs after returning, had higher graduation rates, and that the initial findings on increased cultural knowledge continued in the expanded sample (Sutton and Rubin 2010). Furthermore, the study found that study abroad was beneficial to academically at-risk students by providing needed focus to be successful.

In sum, study abroad programs integrate students socially with close living arrangements and opportunities to get to know both students and faculty outside the classroom setting. These programs also contribute to academic integration, as students are shown to be more intellectually developed, academically curious, and to have more interaction with faculty. While study abroad programs have been successful at increasing retention, not all students can participate due to financial constraints. Interestingly, very little research

has been done exploring whether shorter, less expensive trips within the United States are capable of fostering social and academic integration, too. Utilizing the knowledge we have regarding study abroad programs, we posit that other programs that involve a setting outside the classroom serve the same functions and meet the same goals as a study abroad trip. We hypothesize that study away programs have many of the attributes of study abroad programs that encourage retention, but do so at only a fraction of the cost. Using a descriptive case study method, we will explore a study away program in hopes of documenting the benefits of this type of programs in retention efforts. Specifically, we will describe a study away program at Augusta State University in the spring of 2011 that consisted of a seven-day trip to New York City, where 18 undergraduate students competed in the National Model United Nations. Utilizing demographic data combined with self-reported student data in reflective questions and essays, we intend to show that this program met many of the factors identified as having a positive impact on student persistence in college.

### **Case Study: National Model UN Study Away Program at Augusta State University**

Located in the second largest city in Georgia, Augusta State University, a unit of the University System of Georgia, has an enrollment of just under 7,000 students. The average age for undergraduate students is 25. Minority enrollment currently stands at 34%. The university struggles with retention rates<sup>1</sup> such that at the beginning of the fall semester of the sophomore year, ASU loses approximately 32% of the cohort that began the previous fall as freshmen. Further, when this cohort reaches the four-year graduation checkpoint, the graduation rate is a mere 5.3%, and only 14% graduate in five years, and 20.2% graduate in six years.

The ASU Improvement Plan identifies the lack of institutional connectedness as a primary factor in low retention. The only on-campus housing at the university is an apartment-style complex that accommodates fewer than 500 students. Based on survey data, students indicated that they did not actively participate in university life outside the classroom, either in student activities, sponsored events, athletic events or intramurals. The report suggests that students view ASU as a place to attend class and then go home. We argue that since our Model UN is a three-credit-hour program, students may enroll in the course for the academic credit, but the study away trip component facilitates a university life outside the classroom that provides connectedness

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<sup>1</sup> For the complete report, see [http://www.aug.edu/vpaa/retention\\_graduation.pdf](http://www.aug.edu/vpaa/retention_graduation.pdf).

to the university, the faculty, and fellow students. The plan also identifies positive factors to increase retention that include faculty attitude toward students and the availability of teaching faculty outside the classroom. Again, we would suggest that the trip component of this course provides the students a unique view of the supervising faculty and facilitates social integration with students and academic integration with faculty in a way that cannot be achieved in the traditional classroom setting and is similar to what is found in study abroad trips.

While the National Model United Nations has been in existence for almost half a century, Augusta State had never participated in the program until 2011. Two Political Science faculty members partnered with the Study Abroad program office at ASU and developed the NMUN as a study away program. Collaborating with the Study Abroad program had several advantages, including the ability to offer course credit for participation, reduced administrative burdens for the faculty, and student eligibility for Study Abroad scholarship and fundraising programs to offset the cost of the trip. The decision to offer the program as a for credit course, unlike many schools that offer Model UN as an extracurricular activity, was critical to its success at ASU, where most students work and do not have the extra time to devote if the endeavor does not count toward their degree. The trip to NYC cost individual students under \$1,500, although tuition for the course and living expenses while in NYC were additional. While the cost is not a trivial amount of money to our average student, it is still well below the cost of a Study Abroad trip and several students were able to participate in fundraisers and were awarded scholarships from the Study Abroad office to cover the entire cost of the trip.

The participants could enroll in either a 2000- or 4000-level Study Abroad course that could be course substituted accordingly for a lower- or upper-level Political Science course. The course met twice a week for one and a half hours each time. Students were expected to dress in professional attire for each class meeting to prepare them for the conference and to promote a group identity for the students. Coursework included reading multiple texts on the United Nations, parliamentary procedure, and assigned country. Other assignments included writing multiple drafts of position papers, public speaking exercises, and simulations. The final assignment was an assessment of the experience that included a list of open ended questions and a reflective essay. The student responses to these questions and reflective essays comprise the primary data source for this descriptive case study. These answers and essays were content analyzed independently by three coders for reliability.

### Analysis

We assert that Model UN at ASU was successful in increasing intellectual development, as well as developing both academic and social integration. After a brief discussion of demographics and persistence, we will discuss the evidence supporting intellectual development, academic integration, and social integration. A total of 18 students participated in the National Model United Nations program at Augusta State University in spring 2011. There were a total of ten (56%) females and eight (44%) males. This was a slightly larger percentage of males when compared to our general population of students—65% female, 35% male. Of the students enrolled, five could be classified as minority in terms of race or ethnicity. The 28% minority figure in our sample was slightly below the 35% minority representation in our general student population. The students ranged in age from 18 to 33 with a mean age of 23. There were ten Political Science majors, two English majors, and then the remaining six students each had different majors including Business, Communications, Foreign Languages, History, Sociology, and undeclared.

To assess the impact of the study away program on retention, the most obvious measure would be individual student persistence in their education after completing the course. Clearly, it is impossible to determine causality in this scenario since we cannot isolate the impact of other contributing factors. Of the 18 students enrolled, four graduated in the same semester. We readily admit that participation in NMUN had little, if any, impact on the progress of these students towards graduation given the timing of enrollment. Of the remaining 14, eleven enrolled again at ASU the following semester, which is a 78.5% persistence rate. Of the remaining three students, two experienced positive attrition by enrolling the following term in other University of Georgia System schools. Further, the other student went on to attend a community college outside the state due to financial constraints. Of the 11 students at ASU in fall 2011, one graduated in December 2011, another two graduated in May 2012, and the remaining eight enrolled in classes at ASU for the fall 2012 semester. As far as intellectual development and academic performance, on average, the students that continued at ASU after Model UN achieved a tenth of a point increase in their cumulative GPAs from the semester prior to enrolling in Model UN to the semester after completing the course, a trend that remained a year after enrollment.

The raw graduation and persistence numbers suggest that the study away program may have a positive impact on these rates, but the small sample size severely limits our ability to make any broad conclusions. Further, gains in academic achievement are problematic in such programs due to the self-selection of participation (Hadis 2005). Thus, to isolate the program's effectiveness more accurately for our small sample, we will look at student



perceptions of the program and its influence on their academic journey at ASU. After summarizing student improvement in terms of academic integration, we will explore social integration.

First, we look at the extent to which students perceived that the program increased their intellectual development and academic performance. Since academic integration includes the student's assessment of the value of what they are learning as well as their perception of how they are doing in academically, we feel these self-reported measures are valid for our research purposes. In addition to the open ended directed questions, students were given a week after returning from the trip to write a reflective essay imagining that they had the opportunity to write a letter to their former, naïve self from the first day of class, describing the ways this class impacted their life. While the parameters of this assignment were much more open than the direct questions, the theme of enhanced academic skills permeated these essays as well.

We asked students to explain, if at all, the ways in which their writing skills improved as a result of NMUN. Sixteen students stated that their writing skills had improved as a result of participating in NMUN. Eleven students indicated that writing resolutions for the conference improved their ability to develop more concise and succinct statements, and four indicated that they learned how to write more diplomatically. In the reflective essays, one student said, "You will learn how to be a more concise writer as you will be forced to say a million things in a two-page position paper." Another suggested that their research skills in general increased by stating, "I would encourage students that are looking for an opportunity to further develop their research skills while feeling uncertain of the outcome to take this class." One student articulately summarized the academic integration occurring in the experience by writing, "... you develop many skills that are necessary and applied to daily experiences ... and you also realize that the actual process of the work is more fun and advantageous than the final outcome."

We also asked the ways in which their speaking skills had improved as a result of NMUN. Almost 90% of the students identified tangible ways their speaking skills improved. Eight said they were more confident, less nervous, or no longer scared of public speaking. Seven said that their overall abilities increased. Four said that the speaking style utilized in the class helped them to speak more concisely and choose their words more carefully. From the standpoint of the professors, we witnessed that the class speeches also helped the students become more acquainted with each other, enhancing social integration as well. If a student was nervous, others would offer encouragement to help them feel comfortable and confident. Outside of class, more experienced students helped those who struggled, and after each speech, classmates offered advice for improving the speech, both in content and in style.

Another specific skill we asked about was their negotiation skills. Again, almost all (16 of 18) students indicated that they saw significant improvement in their negotiation skills. Six students said they were better at negotiation generally, and five students said they enhanced their ability to work with others in groups. Four mentioned that they learned how to fulfill the role of consensus builder and to help facilitate discussion to find common ground. Three specifically stated they learned how to get their way or that they were able to stand strong on their position. While we categorized each of these skills as academic in nature, it is arguable that each represents a job related skill that will benefit the students after they finish their college careers.

The literature suggests that students who experienced intellectual development and increased motivation were less likely to drop out and that clarification or validation of school related goals tended to positively impact persistence. We measured this type of development by probing students about increased self-confidence and self-growth. All but one student felt that NMUN improved their self-confidence in some way. Many students felt more confident and less nervous about public speaking as a result of the numerous opportunities they were given to practice speeches and converse with international students. Being able to negotiate gave many students the confidence they needed to work in a group setting. A few students mentioned with great enthusiasm that this element of the class/trip had helped their confidence greatly, that it was something they had struggled with often, and that they hoped to continue this trend of confidence. One student mentioned how much it would aid her in being more active in class discussions. Another stated that “It helped my confidence the same way that going on study abroad to Paris helped.”

Another question asked students to discuss the ways they thought the experience made an impact in their life. The main themes covered in the students’ answers were the friendships made during the trip, the life experience gained, having a greater awareness of international affairs, the ability to speak in public more confidently, and the inspiration it gave to solidify future goals. One student commented, “It really is a big deal that I feel like I can talk in my classes now.” Another student wrote, “I learned to be more assertive. I learned that fun and work are a possible, real combination.” Finally, one referred to the occasion as “... a great cultural experience, the mere opportunities one gets to go outside of their own comfort zone and experience things new to them, the better off they will be.”

The reflective essays also included many references to increasing self-confidence and self-growth due to participation in the NMUN. In fact, several students explicitly mentioned overcoming fears due to their experiences in the class and on the trip. One student announced, “For the first time you will also

learn how to write a speech for the allotted time and learn how to deal with your public speaking fears.” Another reflected on overcoming life-long insecurities in writing, “You will finally realize that you do not sound nearly as stupid as you think you do, and you will acquire a sense of self-confidence in your abilities that you never had before. You will be comfortable being smart, which for so long has been difficult for you to do.” Several students articulated the fact that the experience helped them become more well-rounded, worldly, dedicated, and educated individuals.

Students also noted the importance of getting to know their professors outside the classroom, and this type of academic integration has been found to greatly increase student persistence. At ASU, because students do not participate in many activities outside of the classroom, it is more difficult to make student-faculty connections. The NMUN trip provided this opportunity and substantially increased the connections made between the students and faculty. Throughout the day, students interacted with their professors as they walked around the conference, checking in with each committee member and engaging in dialogue about the processes and happenings of the day. At the end of the day, the students met with their faculty mentors to debrief the day’s activities. These sessions were fairly informal and allowed each student the opportunity to bond with one another and gave the entire group, including the faculty, a sense of loyalty. Each day, the faculty dined with the students and took them out to popular places in NYC to fully experience the trip. During these outings, the students got to see their professors as more than teachers. Inside jokes were formed, hilarious and sometimes awkward moments provided great bonding opportunities, and eating and socializing together solidified the truly exceptional and fully integrated experience.

One of the most critical factors influencing a student’s decision to remain in college is a sense of social integration. Developing a sense of integration at ASU is an uphill battle. As discussed previously, many students view ASU as a place to take classes and then go home. With limited residential facilities on our campus, the vast majority of students live off campus; many commute from the home they share with their parents, and as a result, do not feel connected to the university in significant ways. We argue that by taking the students off campus as a group to compete in a conference where they directly represent the university, we were able to cultivate a sense of integration with their peers, faculty advisors and the university in general.

To explore this concept, we asked students to explain the ways they bonded with their classmates during NMUN. A majority of the students indicated that they acquired a sense of camaraderie during the NYC trip through group outings, hotel arrangements, and talking with each other about the experience of NMUN. Most believed they gained a better sense of each

other's personalities as well as how better to work together. Several indicated that previous impressions and assessments made between students about one another changed in the course of the NMUN trip to NYC as some were seen to "come out of their shell." Multiple students noted that the trip was a turning point in feeling bonded with other classmates and wished that they had felt that way before the trip.

Interestingly, we asked if the class developed a group identity by the end of the semester and after the trip to NYC; 16 out of 18 students felt that there was definitely a group identity formed. Those sensing a group identity felt it was formed by rooming with fellow students in such close quarters, spending an abundance of time with each other, enduring the process together, representing ASU, and by creating inside jokes. The majority of the students felt like they had bonded in ways they had not prior to the trip. The idea that the trip itself was necessary to cultivate cohesion and that the cohesion did not exist prior to the trip was a primary theme in the reflective essays. Multiple students indicated that things changed once they began the journey of the trip. One student noted, "The class dynamic greatly improved, I feel, once the trip began." Another student indicated, "As for your classmates, you may be very distant from them and find some unapproachable, but that will change as soon as you make your way to New York. There will be a bond between you and the rest of your classmates by the time the trip is halfway done." One student suggested that certain class members did not even know everyone's names after being in a class of 18 students for three months, but that changed in New York where they could definitely see more cohesion.

Several students expressed regret that the camaraderie did not develop until the trip, in essence realizing what they had missed out upon with the lack of social integration early on. One student stated, "I most certainly bonded with my classmates; however, I had to wait until the trip to do so. I truly wish I was able to befriend many of them prior to the trip." Further, one noted that "Your roommates are some of the funniest people you will ever meet, and you will regret that you only spent a week getting to know them better, rather than an entire semester. I wish that I had hung out with my NMUN classmates so much more before the trip."

To further validate the sense of social integration that developed during the study away experience, it should be noted that several students explicitly used the word family to describe the bonds that developed on the trip. According to one student, "My favorite part (was) ... being able to really get to know other people on a more personal basis. I gained a connection with people that I may not have otherwise even talked to." The student continues, "Every one of us in this class has grown together in various ways because of our new found connection with each other. We have grown to be like a family support

system for one another and that is just something that you cannot get anywhere else because it is priceless.” A fellow classmate echoed these points in writing, “The best part of the trip will be hanging out with everyone and getting to know each other better. This class and trip is an excellent opportunity to bond with your classmates and have a great time. The study away course is a great experience that differs from any other class. I feel the bond between our classmates was much stronger than in any of the other traditional classes that you have taken, it’s like you’re all one big crazy family.”

### **Discussion**

This article has reviewed several ways retention and persistence rates can be increased on university campuses. The literature suggests that strong academic performance, academic integration, and social integration all positively impact a student’s decision to remain in college and that study abroad trips address a majority, if not all, of these variables. Our work suggests that it is perhaps beneficial to universities to establish less expensive study away programs in addition to study abroad programs, particularly at smaller institutions with a nontraditional, diverse, economically challenged student population like that of Augusta State University. In our study, we found that participating in the National Model United Nations increased student perceptions of their academic performance, both in writing and speaking capabilities. Additionally, the NMUM experience created a sense of academic integration, as well as social integration, providing students with a sense of belonging with each other, faculty, as well as the university, and through the context of investigating international affairs and diplomacy, with the globalized world at large.

Universities concerned about retention often look to student affairs programs first to solve the problem. We suggest that raising awareness of the importance of academic integration in retention is critical to help redirect resources towards successful academic programs like Model UN. In Political Science, we are fortunate to have multiple opportunities for students to study away. Successful programs include, but are not limited to: Model UN, Model Arab League, Model African Union, and the American Mock Trial Association competitions. Although our work has a small sample size, we are confident that continuing research in this area will validate the positive effects these types of programs have on persistence rates. We assume that many of our colleagues are directing similar programs at their universities and may be struggling to compete for resources to help enhance or grow these programs. We feel that establishing an empirical link between these programs and retention will be vital in elevating their importance to universities and should help attract resources. While not always possible, we also suggest that the

ability to offer course credit for participation will enhance the connection to retention and eventually to resources.

Furthermore, these types of simulated experiences offered in Political Science provide hands-on, real world experience where students get to engage in tactics and strategies of international relations and negotiation. Students learn about game-theory, strategies of negotiation, and theories of international relations in an academic sense, but by participating in simulations, these students also get to see at a practical level how the world operates and how the international system works. The game simulation environment provides students a realistic chance to test the theories they learn in class within a real world context. This is learning at its best, and as the literature suggests, this type of learning benefits both students and the campus by increased rates of persistence and retention. Additionally, these program tend to help students transcend their parochial visions of life and allows them to edge more toward a cosmopolitan understanding of the international world order. In an ever globalizing world, this is a critical facet of the university education.

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