

Student mobility and the hunt for 'something different':

*Comparing the motivations, experiences,
and satisfaction of American and European
students studying for a semester in Oslo*

Julie Ann Schiering



Master of Philosophy in Higher Education

UNIVERSITETET I OSLO

December 2018

Student mobility and the hunt for 'something different'

A comparative analysis on the motivations, experiences, and satisfaction of American and European students studying for a semester in Oslo, Norway.

© Julie Ann Schiering

2018

Student mobility and the hunt for 'something different': Comparing the motivations, experiences, and satisfaction of American and European students' studying for a semester in Oslo.

Julie Ann Schiering

<http://www.duo.uio.no/>

Trykk: Reprosentralen, Universitetet i Oslo

Abstract

Student mobility is a worldwide phenomenon that has increased significantly over the past decade, supported by internationalization policies within Europe and other countries worldwide. International students are an important part of the internationalization process of a university and university guidelines continue to call for more of these types of students. Traditionally, student satisfaction has been measured by an increase in the number of student participants. The majority of mobility literature looks at students motivating factors as a collective group, in which they are all coming from the same country. There are gaps in the literature on specific host countries, what the main motivations to go to said countries are, and if the students expectations are being met.

Using the 2016 SIU study of 'Perceptions of Norway as a study destination' as a backdrop, this unique study takes an in depth, comparative look at international students from the United States of America and continental Europe who have chosen to come to Oslo, Norway, for a one semester study abroad experience. The most common destinations to spend a semester abroad in are London, Barcelona, or Paris. Deciding upon the Norwegian capital of Oslo is a unique decision in which students are looking for 'something different.' The purpose and aim of this research is to glean a deeper perspective on what student satisfaction is within the Norwegian context; what motivations and expectations students have before they come on a study abroad experience in Oslo, and if their expectations have been met by their experiences.

The 'push' and 'pull' migratory factors, in addition to human capital theory, expectancy theory, and Nordic Exceptionalism helped shape the conceptual framework of this study and create a series of lenses with which to analyze the data gleaned from discussion groups. Results from the data showed there were indeed differences in motivating 'push' and 'pull' factors between the two groups of students. Satisfaction levels of both groups were high, but for different reasons. The differences in satisfaction levels can ultimately be important for university recruitment strategies when recruiting more international students. The most prominent finding is the use of expectancy matching; as long as students are aware and educated on what they are about to experience, the more satisfied they are with the results of their semester. Norway is not only seen as being able to offer 'something different' for international students, but can be considered "the best kept secret in study abroad" (Male, BI, U.S).

Acknowledgements

With a long term interest and experience in study abroad and a newly discovered professional interest in internationalization and international students, I found this topic to be extremely interesting and close to my heart. Thank you to all of those who made it possible for me to explore further on this topic and who helped me to grow both personally and academically during this time.

Firstly, i would like to thank my supervisor, Rachel Sweetman. If it wasn't for all those long, coffee filled conversations, I wouldn't be where I am today. Thank you for keeping me motivated about writing and peaking my interest in roller derby. I am forever grateful to you for being my non-Norwegian, Norwegian academic support here in Oslo.

I would also like to thank all the participants in my study. They participated in this study out of the goodness of their hearts, and of course the free food, but I am grateful to everyone who came out to support the study and shared their honest experiences with a room full of strangers.

I would lastly like to thank my family. They have forever been supportive of my whirl-wind adventures and were my biggest supporters when I decided to move to Norway to complete a Masters degree. Well, here it is! Thank you for your unconditional love and support.

Table of Contents

Abstract	IV
Table of Contents	VI
1. Introduction	1
1.1 The relevance and importance of 'study abroad' in contemporary HE.....	2
1.2 The case of Norway as a study abroad destination.....	3
1.3 Exposition of chapters	4
2. Literature Review	5
2.1 Research on motivating factors and mobility drivers on the political agenda...5	
2.2 Individual decision making and Norway as a destination	8
2.3 Summarizing what we know.....	11
3. Analytical Framework	13
3.1 The 'Push' and 'Pull' factors.....	14
3.2 Expectancy Theory.....	16
3.3 Human Capital Theory.....	18
3.4 The Missing Piece: Nordic Exceptionalism	18
4. Gaps in mobility research	22
4.1 Research Questions.....	22
5. Empirical Setting	23
6. Methodology	27
6.1 Research Design.....	27
6.1.1 Comparative Design: two cases of mobile students in Norway.....	27
6.2 Case Selection.....	28
6.2.1 Survey pilot study.....	28
6.2.2 Choosing a Discussion Group as a method.....	29
6.2.3 Selection and recruitment of the respondents.....	29

6.3 The Interview Guide.....	31
6.4 Conducting the discussion groups.....	31
6.4.1 An abductive approach to analysis.....	33
6.5 Ethics and Validity.....	34
6.6 Generalizability.....	35
6.7 Limitations.....	36
7. Findings.....	38
7.1 Motivations to go abroad and expectations of a stay in Norway.....	38
7.2 Experiences.....	46
8. Analysis of results.....	51
9. Conclusion and Final thoughts.....	57
9.1 Reflections.....	57
9.2 Implications.....	58
9.3 Suggestions for further research and development.....	61
References.....	63
Appendices.....	67
a. Student participant breakdown.....	67
b. Discussion Group Guide.....	68
c. NSD approved consent form.....	69
d. Student informational survey.....	71

1. Introduction

1.1 The relevance and importance of 'study abroad' in contemporary HE

"Why do students choose to study overseas? Demand for education, particularly higher education, has traditionally been driven by expectations of its ability to raise the economic and social status of the graduate" (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002, 82).

The phenomenon of studying abroad has a history that goes back almost 1000 years. In William Hoffa's book, "A History of U.S. study abroad," he discusses the man Emo of Friesland, also known as the "pioneer of study abroad." (Hoffa, 2010, 46). Emo was the first documented scholar to travel from his home country of Northern Holland to Oxford in 1190. Shortly after many others followed and so began the concept of 'studying abroad.'

The idea of internationalization has an even richer history. Universities originally began as "truly international institutions" (Altbach and Teichler, 2001, 6). The original universities during the 13th century in Bologna and Paris used the common language of Latin and provided training to students from various countries (Altbach and Teichler, 2001). Professors were internationally recruited, knowledge was internationally spread, and "the Roman Catholic Church provided a degree of supervision" (Altbach and Teichler, 2001, 6). It was only when the Protestant Reformation came about that universities began to teach in national languages and "were more closely linked to nation states that internationalization became less central" (Altbach and Teichler, 2001, 6). In more recent times, internationalization has become a key tool for universities and higher education institutions aspiring to be better rounded. One key approach to increase internationalization is through international recruitment of faculty and students, student mobility, and the concept of study abroad.

Today, studying abroad is used as a multifaceted instrument with many different purposes. A sojourn abroad serves to promote academic and intellectual learning, professional and personal development, and intercultural awareness and sensitivity (Michigan State University Office of Study Abroad, 2004 as cited in Anderson et al. 2006; Dwyer, Peters, 2004). As Chirkov et al (2007) illustrate in their summary of research on international students, researchers have investigated this population in term of academic success, health,

and psychological wellbeing, providing insights relevant to students and academic administrators as well as research communities. Under New Public Management and from perspectives focusing on the university as a distinct type of organization, study abroad has also been seen as a recruiting tool as students increasingly make institutional choices based on study abroad opportunities (Ludwig, 2000 as cited in Anderson et al. 2006). The administration of universities has begun to view study abroad programs in new ways. It can be seen as a way to increase revenues, to diversify the student body, to add value to academic programs by offering the benefit of an international student population, and also by providing experiences in international teaching to faculty (Sanchez et al., 2006, 28). "At no time since the Middle Ages has higher education been more international in nature." (Altbach and Teichler, 2001, 5). The concept of studying abroad is diverse and can be used in favor of both students and staff.

Study abroad has become increasingly popular over the years, however when a program is described as 'successful,' the term "success" (Sutton and Rubin, 2004 as cited in Pedersen, 2010, 71) is typically defined by the number of students who participate, not by the actual quality of the program. Research is conducted by the OECD every year containing information about students' countries of origin, countries of destination, and mobility patterns, but no information can be found regarding the quality. Students do earn college and course credit for their study abroad semester, but it is unknown if the quality is on par with that of the student's home university. According to Hadis' 2005 study, every student he interviewed upon their return home from a study abroad program claimed that that time abroad was "the most meaningful and rewarding" (Hadis, 2005, 7) experience in their life up to this point. But there is a difference between successful and rewarding experiences. This general sense of a time abroad being 'rewarding' may mask enormous variations in students' expectations, motivations and experiences.

Studying abroad is becoming more of a standard or expected step of action for a university student in today's world, but there is limited evidence from current research on what the students are hoping to gain from these experiences or if their expectations are met. Do students feel that their sojourn abroad was successful? Was it in line with their social and academic expectations having been met? Does the nature of success or rewarding experiences look the same across different countries? While there is extensive research that maps the frequency and scope of international mobility, and various approaches have been taken to mapping the key issues that drive mobility and satisfaction, the overall literature on student mobility can tend to be very general and 'one size fits all' in the way the study abroad experience is investigated and interpreted. This study attempts to look at the issue of

student mobility in relation to a specific destination (Oslo, Norway) and the motivations and experiences of students in terms of a comparative analysis of students from two distinct regions.

1.2 The case of Norway as a study abroad destination

The topic of this research project is the comparison of expectations, experiences and satisfaction of American and European students studying abroad in Norway for a one semester sojourn. As previously stated, there is considerable research completed about motivations of students but it is dependent upon where the student is from and not dependent upon the host country. One rationale for studying this particular case, it that it is able to build on and problematize recent research of a more quantitate nature, notably a report from SIU (*Senteret for internasjonalisering av utdanning*) the Norwegian Center for International Education in 2016 entitled, 'International Students in Norway Perceptions of Norway as a Study Destination', While this has provided findings on why students choose Norway as a study destination in terms of overall factors that are important to most students, it raises as many questions as it answers. The information gained from this report provides a starting point for my research and the aims of this thesis project, and will provide a fruitful jumping off point to look more in depth at the student experience. Study abroad research shows there are common 'push' and 'pull' factors that are prominent in students' choice to study abroad, but what are the specific 'push' and 'pull' factors that affect students' decision to come to Norway? What positive and negative experiences have students had in regards to the organization of university affairs, social aspects, practicalities such as student housing, the visa process, and financial matters? These are explored in depth and in a comparative analysis, to shed more light on the case of Norway as a study abroad destination.

As well as exploring the international students' satisfaction and experience, the research aims to provide insights on what could be done better to help them reach these goals. Information found in this project can either legitimize the processes already in place for students studying in Norway or it can aid in making changes to better attract and support international students. Instead of the view of mobility "success" (Sutton and Rubin, 2004 as cited in Pedersen, 2010, 71) as simply an increasing number of students participating, the study aims to engage more in questioning the perceived quality of stays and program.

1.3 Exposition of the chapters

A short break down of the chapters can be found below.

Chapter 1 describes the nature of student mobility, current trends in mobility literature, and begins to set the scene for my thesis research.

Chapter 2 goes in depth into relevant literature. It begins by looking at mobility as a political instrument in both an American and European sense. It is then broken down into levels by delving deeper into the Nordic region and then concludes by looking at the individual students' decision making through process by use of migration 'push' and 'pull' theories.

Chapter 3 contains the analytical framework, the section of the thesis that describes the theories used to look at the phenomenon of student mobility and study abroad and how this project draws comparisons and explanations from said academic theories and concepts.

Chapter 4 summarizes the gaps in student mobility literature which the research questions address.

Chapter 5 describes the empirical setting of Norway.

Chapter 6 outlines the methodological choices and carefully explains each stage of the data collection and analysis process.

Chapter 7 presents the results from student discussion groups.

Chapter 8 is an analysis of the data in relation to the theoretical lenses presented in Chapter 3.

Chapter 9 draws conclusions from the entire thesis and presents future research and recommendation ideas.

2. Literature Review

This section will summarize the state of knowledge in regard to three main themes that are prevalent within current study abroad literature. The themes will be analyzed as three levels, starting from the top with the supranational level, moving downwards towards the country level, and ending on the individual student level. First of all, it provides a broad overview of study abroad literature by looking at it as a feature of higher educational policy in both Europe and North America, and why this has such significance. The next theme is region specific to the Nordic area; it delves into cultural aspects within the Nordic countries and the approach to mobility within this region. The third theme focuses on the individual student and their study abroad process. The factors that influence the individual to make certain decisions and are discussed here will then lead into the analytical framework.

2.1 Research on motivating factors and drivers of mobility on the political agenda

Student mobility has been referred to as the “more institutionalized, routinized, and systematic process of internationalization” (Gornitzka et al., 2008, 174). Since 1987 and the creation of the Erasmus program in Europe, student mobility has continually increased in participant numbers and the structures around it have grown in scope and complexity. Historically speaking, the most popular countries for international students to study in have been “Germany, United Kingdom, France, Italy and Spain” (OECD, 2014). The decisions to study in said countries have not only been due to cultural interest in each country, but due to a number of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ migratory factors. These ‘push’ and ‘pull’ migratory factors will be further discussed in the analytical framework portion of this thesis, but it is important to be aware that this is a key topic and theme that arises in student mobility literature. Student mobility as an established form of internationalization is typically orchestrated by actors such as “multinational companies, higher education institutions, national governments, and intergovernmental and international non-governmental-organizations” (Gornitzka et al., 2008, 174). The following section will take a look at student mobility from a political perspective and the perspective of mobility as something national governments have a significant role in, in terms of higher education processes and the notion of students as a form of internationalization and cultural ambassadors.

Papatsiba (2006) takes an in-depth look at the EU initiatives in the context of the Bologna Process to clarify the rationales behind student mobility. As previously mentioned, student mobility is not a new concept, nor is it original to Europe. But in the 1970s, after the creation of the EU, student mobility began to weigh heavier on the European agenda. The creation of ERASMUS in 1987 was motivated by two main rationales: an economic professional rationale and a civic rationale (Papatsiba, 2006). Economically and professionally, these mobile students were meant to promote, and be promoted by the labor market within Europe. Civically, they were being formed into 'European citizens,' figuratively speaking, citizens who saw no borders between nations. The European Dimension of reinforcing a European identity and citizenship has continuously held a large portion of the political agenda, especially in today's global society. Mobility can be seen as an "instrument for personal development useful to the economy and to society." (Papatsiba, 2006, 99). This development includes international competencies, such as learning languages, becoming autonomous, resilient, taking initiative, and gaining self-confidence. The drive to be mobile is largely understood as stemming from the individual, as opposed to an institutional level. Mobile individuals experience environmental changes, as well as personal changes, which can include one's sense of belonging. This important change contributes to reinforcing the individual's decision to become mobile, which in turn contributes to the individual benefitting from this experience (Papatsiba, 2006). The act of being mobile increases the possibility of encounters and confronting differences while adapting to new settings. These characteristics help the individual to acquire new competencies and new knowledge and on aggregate are assumed to contribute to national skills or human capital. This description of competency and knowledge acquisition takes both a European and an individual perspective. The two rationales for mobility, economic professional and civic, can also be found in American perspectives and policies.

While the instrumentation of student mobility from an American perspective includes the aforementioned factors, there is arguably a greater emphasis placed on the employability factor. Altbach & Teichler state, "[one of] the most important elements of mobility has been the growth of a global labor market for scholars and researchers" (Altbach & Teichler, 2001, 8). Not only is the mobile student widening their perspectives academically, they are also creating more economical innate features and a more employable self. The international students of today are considered to be "economic capital in the global knowledge economies" (Sutton & Rubin, 2004, 70).

Around the same time the EU created the ERASMUS program, a Carnegie study was undertaken at a number of American Higher education institutions regarding their thoughts

on internationalization and student mobility. At the time of this study in the early 1990s, American universities were experiencing an influx in international students and the U.S. was statistically the largest host country to international students. Despite this, the response of institutions was “relatively uninterested” (Altbach & Teichler, 2001, 9) in international education and they did not seem convinced that scholarship knowledge of other countries was beneficial. European institutions have since embraced internationalization and pushed for greater student mobility. There is an interesting question to be asked about how contemporary developments in American society and politics (in the Trump Era) are shaping cultural identities of American students in relation to notions such as the dimension of independence and how this shapes American views on student mobility and the value of international experience and competencies.

Although being a global citizen isn't the most important element on the political agenda around mobility, it does still carry weight. In both Europe and America, government sponsored exchange agencies are traditionally tied to foreign policy, examples of this being the ERASMUS program in Europe and the Fulbright Program in America. Regardless of the country, mobile students are one of the largest sources of income to the University, since the majority of these exchange students are self-funded. This does not significantly increase profits in most cases, and there are many non-financial advantages that can be accrued. Hosting international students/researchers/staff can increase “competition, prestige, strategic alliances of the college” (Altbach & Knight, 2007) as well as enhancing research and knowledge capacities and acting to increase cultural understanding. In recent years, the U.S. has tightened visa restrictions and application requirements due to the heightened fear of terrorism. This has led to a decrease in the number of international students coming to America, which will likely have an effect on the knowledge and production output from many universities in the future. In such ways, students on an individual level, in both the EU and the U.S. may be affected by shifts in their home countries' political agendas in regards to internationalization, identities, and the rationales behind student mobility. Cultural Identities in student mobility will be discussed more in depth in this literature review in section 2.3 'Individual decision making Level.'

Contemporary higher education themes regarding student mobility have shifted through a range of differing types. “Cross-border education has gradually shifted from a development cooperation framework to a partnership model and now to commercial competition orientation” (Knight, 2012, 2). Current developments in internationalization include but are not limited to: “increased privatization and commercialization of higher education, [...] for-profit providers, new quality assurance and accreditation regulations global higher education

ranking systems...” (Knight, 2012, 2). There have been a multitude of benefits to come from these new developments however there have been a number of risks involved as well as “unintended consequences” (Knight, 2012, 2). These trends are not country or even region specific, but rather are occurring at the global level. The theme ‘education as a business’ has also been affected by student mobility, higher education institutions and universities now consider international students as an income stream, as tuition fees for international students tend to be higher than local students and cities earn income from accommodation fees, shopping fees, and all around cost for international visitors. It can be argued that internationalization, and student mobility, have “evolve[d] from the traditional process based on values of cooperation, partnership, exchange, mutual benefits, and capacity building to one that is increasingly characterized by competition, commercialization, self-interest, and status building” (Knight, 2012, 18). This reasoning, may offer part of the explanation as to why the term “success” (Sutton and Rubin, 2004 as cited in Pedersen, 2010, 71) is typically defined in numerical terms by the increasing number of students who participate, and not in relation to the quality of the program or experiences.

2.2 Individual decision making and Norway as a destination

According to Mazzarol and Soutars’ 2002 study, there are three distinct stages involved in going abroad. In the first stage, the student decides to become mobile and “study internationally, rather than locally” (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002, 3). This is a form of ‘push’ factor from within the home country. The second stage, a ‘pull’ factor, occurs when the student decides which particular country he/she wants to study in. And the third stage is the decision of which institution to attend, another ‘pull’ factor (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). Delving deeper into the second stage, Mazzarol and Soutars’ research revealed that there are six distinct ‘pull’ factors that make one country more attractive than another in the eyes of the student. These factors include: “knowledge and awareness, personal recommendations, cost issues, environment, geographic proximity, and social links” (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, 4). A complete breakdown of each of these six factors can be found in the Analytical Framework chapter.

In addition to these six ‘pull’ factors, OECD research shows that other reasons for a student to decide upon a host country include “offering some programs in English, excessive research capacity and competitive tuition fees” (OECD 2009, as cited in Kondakci, 2011). In some cases, “academic programs may not be the primary reason of choosing these countries [...] partnerships with elite institutions from core countries serve as attractions to

international students (OECD 2009, as cited in Kondakci, 2011). For students coming from outside of an economic and political union, i.e. American students coming to the EU, the logistics and paperwork can be overwhelming enough to turn even the most ambitious student away from going abroad. These institutional partnerships serve to be crucial, even for students from the EU deciding to go to another EU country, Erasmus+, an EU funded project, has greatly simplified the process. Another set of rationales also suggest that the choice of destination for study abroad is related to personal characteristics of the individuals such as their ability level, gender, age, motivation, and aspirations (Li and Bray, 2007 as cited in Kondakci, 2011).

Indeed, one of the main concerns and questions posed in study abroad research is what motivates students to partake in a sojourn abroad. Why do some students choose to go abroad, to leave their current lives behind, while others choose to stay? Is it because they are looking for new experiences, freedom, improving their professional situations, or the acquisition of a second language (Sanchez et al., 2006)? Many researchers have studied this question, however the answers vary greatly, as motivation “is strongly influenced by culture” (Sanchez et al., 2006, 49). Motivation levels and reasons amongst students differ from country to country. Another pressing topic is what the student expects from their study abroad experience. What are they hoping to gain from this time in a foreign land; gaining a second language skill set, meeting new friends, traveling to new lands? Or do they see it as an academic gain, a chance to better their skills, become more marketable for the job market when they return? An international education is becoming a “necessity, not a luxury” (NUI Study Abroad Office, 2000 as cited in Anderson et al., 2006, 458) and study abroad is one of the best ways to get such a sought after educational experience.

On the individual decision making level, “countries, regions, and institutions are regarded as being politically the most important, and academically and socially the most attractive from a student perspective” (Maassen et al., 2008, 128-129). It’s the students themselves who play the central role in the phenomenon of study abroad. They are the ‘actors’ on the educational stage, it is them who are directed by the push pull factors and it is them who are affected by their countries political initiatives. Students who specifically choose to study in Norway have similar motives for coming ‘up North’, regardless of their countries or origin. Mobile students in Europe create their own kind of ‘social Europe’ ((Mol, 2014). This is a Europe characterized by their own personal international contacts, mobility and experiences of being a freely mobile student. ‘Social Europe’ is the result of extensive socialization processes abroad in which students must rebuild and reframe their entire social contacts. This process mainly occurs in the first weeks of being in the host country and is a critical time for the HEI

to capture their student audience and build a relationship. This relationship is crucial to student retention, keeping student satisfaction sufficient, and immersing the student into the new culture. International students, independent of their home country and host country, all experience a “socialization process” (Mol, 2014, 424). The immersion into a new country often comes with difficulties as foreign students have not been “mentally prepared to encounter and to deal with otherness” (Papatsiba, 2006, 112). Traditionally when international students come together in a host country, they form a ‘uniform group,’ where their closest friends are other co-nationals or students with a shared linguistic background. Problems arise when these Erasmus students isolate themselves from host country nationals and prevent themselves from creating relationships. One of the biggest barriers to cross is having limited contact with natives. There can, however, be positive assets to being a foreigner in a new country, it can “open dialogues [and] arouse curiosity of others” (Papatsiba, 2006, 112) which can aid in crossing the cultural boundaries and communicating across cultural borders.

Student choice for those wanting to come to Norway has been heavily researched by SIU (*Senteret for internasjonalisering av utdanning*) the Norwegian Center for International Education. Their most recent 2016 study entitled, ‘International Students in Norway Perceptions of Norway as a Study Destination,’ surveyed 2, 623 international students about their motivations to come to Norway. Students completing full degrees and semester exchange students were surveyed and the top motivations were: Courses taught in English, Nature specific to Norway, care of the physical environment, a peaceful and safe environment, the reputation of teaching and research, lifestyle, and lack of tuition fees (SIU, 2016). The top reasons found in this study can be easily identified with the Mazzarol and Soutar push factors and the OECD factors listed in the Analytical Framework. This reasoning leads us to believe that students choosing Norway are no different than any other student choosing to study abroad, the reasons and ‘push’ factors can all be labeled within the same category.

The concept of internationalization at home is becoming a more consistent theme found in HEI’s throughout the world, and the use of international students already at said institution is becoming much greater. “The purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students, within domestic learning environments” (Beelen and Jones, 2015 as cited in SIU, 2016, 7) sits high on the Norwegian higher education institutions’ internationalization strategic plans, as 4 out of 5 Norwegians do not study abroad (SIU, 2016). Therefore, it is critical to utilize these

international dimensions as fully as possible for the local students to develop international competencies in any capacity.

One overarching issue of programs, such as ERASMUS or any exchange program, is that there are few universally accepted goals within higher education student mobility programs. Academic and government officials have only one goal and that is to “maximize the number of students who go abroad for study” (Altbach & Teichler, 2001, 18). As there are no common goals, there is no real way of assessing results. Quality of exchange programs is often not discussed as there is little quality assurance markers put into place. The most concrete argument presented to counter this lack of goals and assessing results is that “exchanges are about mutual understanding.” (Altbach & Teichler, 2001, 17). If a proper integration process is administered, “exchanges involve providing future leaders, both academic and societal, with an international perspective as well as giving an international opportunity to population groups hitherto excluded from post-secondary education” (Altbach & Teichler, 2001, 17). The whole concept behind going on exchange is to be exposed to new ideas and cultures, and more often than not “stereotypes are born out of social isolation [but] broken by personal acquaintance” (Papatsiba, 2006, 117). An individual goal of students going on exchange is often not for second language acquisition or becoming more employable, it is simple seen as an opportunity to “prove to themselves and others their capacities to undertake unusual activities and to achieve autonomy” (Papatsiba, 2006, 128). Successful integration into a foreign country can build students’ self-confidence, which can in turn affect them in other areas of their lives.

2.3. Summarizing what we know

Each of the three levels is important to the state of understanding of the status and nature of student mobility activities. Starting at the top from the supranational level, moving to the country and institution level, and ending on the individual student level, mobility is highly regarded and “appreciated by academic staff and students, and seen as an important dimension by the institutional leadership” (Maassen et al., 2008, 137). There are a wide range of factors that shape choices, and the ultimate value of mobility is framed in ways that are quite consistent across countries but which seem to shift in emphasis over time. We now move into the analytical framework section that takes the individual student levels’ decision making process and breaks it down with different analytical lenses. This framework will delve deeper into reasons why students are drawn or ‘push/pulled’ into becoming a mobile student. We will also look at theories that explain international students’ satisfaction and

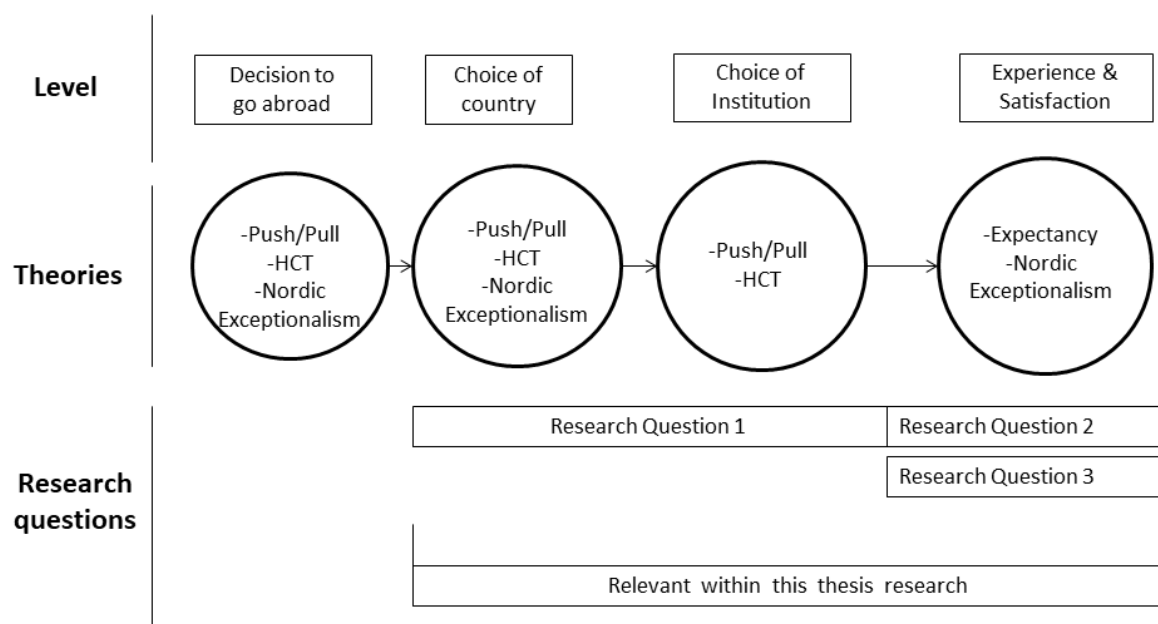
motivations while out of their home country. And lastly we will look at the idea of Norway as an exceptional or unique country for an American or European student to study in.

3. Analytical Framework

This section describes the key theories used in study abroad literature. These comprise: traditional migratory 'push and pull' factors, expectancy theory, and human capital theory. These three theories are commonly found in relevant study abroad and international student literature, as presented in the literature review. In addition, the theory of Nordic Exceptionalism is discussed as an additional theoretical perspective which may be valuable in understanding specific features of student mobility to Norway.

Different scholars present various frameworks within study abroad literature. Mazzarol and Soutar rely strictly on traditional migratory 'push and pull' factors while reports from organizations such as the Institute of International Education and SIU use a combination of human capital theory and expectancy theory to describe students' reasoning and expectations of their time abroad. It is common in study abroad literature to use more than one theory, and the topic here of both choice of destination, and experience, required more than one theoretical perspective. After completing the data collection, it was apparent that multiple theories would be helpful in providing a framework for the analysis. And after completing the second round of data collection, it also became apparent that the theory of Nordic Exceptionalism could be used to dig further into aspects of the students' discussions that did not seem to be adequately captured by the two theories initially used as the initial framework for the project. Together, the project draws on four theories as part of an analytical framework that clarifies the project's starting assumptions, focus and which have helped analyze and explain the data gathered.

Figure 1: Analytical Framework overview



*HCT, Human Capital Theory

3.1 'Push' and 'Pull' factors

In a traditional sense, 'Push and pull' factors present a sociological approach to migration theories in regards to three circumstances; social, political, and economical. Simply stated, the 'push' factor are the factors and reasons behind why people leave while the 'pull' factors are the factors and reasons why people come. Refer to the chart below for traditional migration examples of both push and pull factors within a social, economic, and political sense.

	Push Factors	Pull Factors
Social	Discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, religion and the like	Family reunification Ethnic (Diaspora migration) homeland Freedom from discrimination
Economic	Poverty Unemployment Low wages	Prospects of higher wages Potential for improved standard of living

	High fertility rates Lack of basic health and education	Personal or professional development
Political	Conflict, insecurity, violence Poor governance Corruption Human rights abuses	Safety and security Political freedom

Source: Zimmerman, 1995

If one applies these push pull migration factors to international education, the reasons found amongst students are quite different. Because exchange students are not fully migrating to a new country they are considered temporary migrants and “free will” (King, 2002, 92) migrants, as they are choosing to move based upon largely non-economic life choice ambitions. As they are only in the country for a short and limited amount of time, their motivation factors are considered more ‘pull’ factors, rather than ‘push.’ The chart below summarizes Mazzarol and Soutars’ 6 factors of international education flows.

Push <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of access to HE 2. Commonality of language 3. Availability of science/technology 4. Geographic proximity 5. Perceptions of quality 6. Level of economic wealth 	Pull <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Knowledge and awareness 2. Personal recommendations 3. Cost issues 4. Environment 5. Geographic proximity 6. Social links
---	---

Source: Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002

In the case of a one semester exchange of students in Norway, we can therefore assume that the factors primarily involved are ‘pull’ factors. Push factors may be more relevant for students coming to study a full degree, but for exchange students, ‘pull’ factors are more relevant. Mazzarol and Soutar found the decision making process of a student to go abroad to be based on three distinct steps. The first involves the student deciding to go abroad rather than staying local. This step is considered a ‘push’ factor. In the second step, a student decides where specifically they want to study, in what exact country and/or city. ‘Pull’ factors are extremely important in this stage, as one host country becomes more attractive than another. The third step occurs when a student selects an institution to attend (Mazzarol

and Soutar, 2002). The 6 'pull' factors listed above have the biggest influences on steps two and three, where the student is selecting the host country and the host institution. As this research is focused on the selection of Norway as a host country, it focuses primarily on the second step of the student selection process.

The second step of the selection process involves the six typical 'pull' factors.

1. **Knowledge and awareness of a host country:** This factor is associated with "the nature, cultural, political, and historical proximity between home and host country" (Kondakci, 2011) as well as the overall information available to the student when making their decision, how easily information is found either on the internet or at the home university study abroad office.
2. **Personal Recommendations:** These recommendations are associated with the level of referrals from family, friends, or other individuals that can be considered 'gatekeepers.' A word of mouth referral can be considered one of the more important referrals a student can receive.
3. **Cost issues:** Can be in reference to the financials costs, such as living expenses, tuition fees, travel costs, visa costs (if applicable). This also includes social costs, such as issues of safety and crime.
4. **Environment:** This refers to the study climate as well as the physical climate and lifestyle.
5. **Geographic Proximity:** This is in relation to the physical and geographic distance from the students' home country.
6. **Social links:** These links refer to the importance of a student having any familial ties or friends already in the host country.

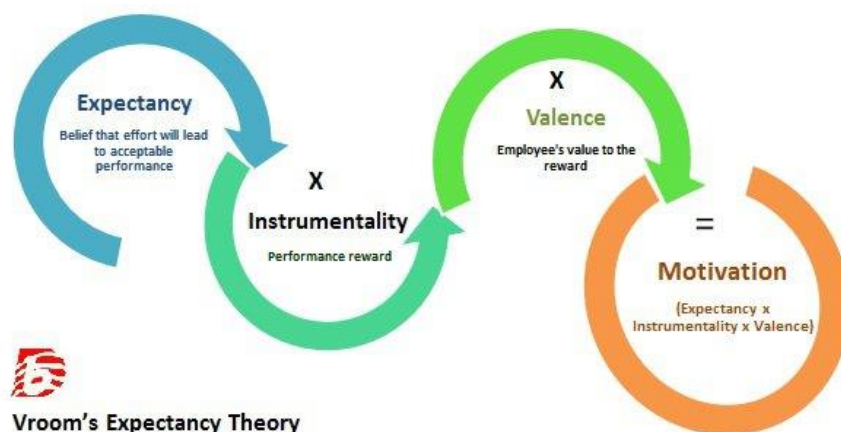
If these six factors were expected to be prevalent in shaping the decision-making process of the students in Norway and therefore these factors informed the design of the discussion group guide and questions for data collection.

3.2 Expectancy theory

Vrooms 1964 Expectancy Theory states that an individual's tendency to perform in a particular manner is dependent upon the expectation that that said performance will be followed by a definite and appealing outcome (Expectancy Theory, 2016; Farrugia et al. from IIE Report, 2017; Kondakci, 2011; Sanchez et al., 2006). There are three factors that must be fulfilled; expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. Expectancy is the effort the individual puts forth in order to have an acceptable performance. Instrumentality is the belief and faith

that the individual performance will result in a valid outcome. Valence is the expected satisfaction, or perceived reward, the individual hopes to achieve through their performance and effort. Advantages to this theory are that it addresses self-interested individuals who want to achieve maximum satisfaction. Students who make the choice to study abroad are statistically shown to be more proactive and individualistic, so this theory directly relates with the type of person who chooses to go abroad (Farrugia et al. from IIE Report, 2017). The theory emphasizes rewards and pay-offs, the greater the reward, the greater the satisfaction.

An important limitation to this theory is that “sojourners have a wealth of expectations, some relating to social, economic, geographic, and political aspects of life in their new country” (Weissman and Furnham, 1987, 316). Of course these sojourners are bound to be wrong about some of these expectations, by either expecting too much or too little. It is unclear however, to decide which expectations are more crucial for adjustment into the new country (Weissman and Furnham, 1987) and which expectations are completely unrealistic. In certain cases, it would seem that having “low expectations may be better for adjustment but worse for overall social mobility” (Weissman and Furnham, 1987, 317). One important limitation to Expectancy Theory is that reward is not always immediate. Some rewards take time to develop and it can be difficult to look at as only short term rewards. Expectancy theory is ideal for this study because there is an “end” to the semester and the students’ time in Norway. This can be an appropriate time to ask the students if they received the valence they expected. They can look back on their semester and decide if their ‘performance’ has resulted in the results they wanted to have. Preconceived expectations have been made coming into the semester, and based on these expectations, the students acted in certain ways to achieve specific results. This, to a certain extent, can be tested and answered. These are important considerations in the analysis of the data.



3.3 Human capital theory

Human capital theory (HCT) can aid in understanding students' economic motivations to come to Norway and likely benefits of a stay abroad. Human capital theory in education specifically looks at education as an "investment," (Gillies, 2015, 200) both to the individual and to the state. The individual gains earning potential and employability opportunities while the state gains employment and economic growth (Gillies, 2015). Higher education in Norway is a good that is 'free,' and for students from the United States, this phenomenon is completely foreign. Many American university students graduate with thousands of dollars of debt from tuition fees (Friedman, 2018) and even though higher education in Norway is 'free,' the opportunity to study abroad can also be an expensive experience. In some cases it is cheaper to study abroad in Norway than it is to continue studying at their home university in the US. In the most recent report from the Institution of International Education (2017), 48% of participants interviewed stated that their time abroad led them to employment within the first 6 months of graduation. HCT guides the notion that students are investing in their education and future as a motivating factor to study abroad. These desires to invest in oneself by acquiring new characteristics and knowledge in today's knowledge society can be reinforced by the 'push-pull factors' of migration. In the case of Norway it is an important perspective as it offers one way to consider how students think about trade-offs involved in relative costs and benefits of visiting a low-fee, but high cost-of-living country.

3.4 The missing piece: Nordic Exceptionalism

After the discussion groups were conducted and an initial process of coding was conducted, it was apparent that there was a piece missing from these perspectives. The relevant literature on student mobility, literature on American students studying abroad, students' decision making process to become mobile, and literature about cross cultural experiences and cultural identities did not adequately address many of the specific themes that were brought up in the discussion groups. The Push and pull model is the underlying theoretical concept behind most reasoning for students to study abroad. But in this particular case the 'pull' factors underpinning students wanting to come to Norway to study seemed to be related to the idea of Norway as an unusual, even exceptional, location to visit. The theory of Nordic Exceptionalism was identified as a lens that could help address these issues. A brief overview of Nordic exceptionalism will be presented below.

Norway has been voted the World's happiest country (World Happiness Report, 2017), is one of the wealthiest countries, continually ranks high in issues like safety, and has one of the best social welfare systems in the world. Grouped with its neighboring countries, the Scandinavian region often outranks other areas of the world in the aforementioned factors. What makes Scandinavia in general and Norway specifically, such an exceptional land? Some argue that "The secret of economic and political success in this remote and sparsely populated part of Europe lies in keeping a distance from neighboring powers" (Ostergard, 2005, 183). Scandinavia is always depicted as somehow 'apart from' and different from the rest of Europe and Norwegians characterize themselves as first Norwegian, second Scandinavian, and lastly European (Mol, 2014). Politically, culturally, and economically Norway is more closely tied to Scandinavia than to the rest of Europe. Their "respect for national differences and sovereignty" (Ostergard, 2008, 201) serves as the basis of Nordic political culture. As they are not members of the EU, the Norwegian political outlook and agenda is not tied directly to an expanding EU policy and growth strategy. So what exactly makes Norwegian society so highly functioning? Some argue that the "culture traits from Lutheranism [result in] economic flexibility, absence of corruption, and a high degree of social equality [in addition to] the Christian conservative principle of caring [and] the provision of basic needs of the population on a collective and state basis" (Ostergard, 2008, 187; 189). These 'traditional' Nordic principles are often seen as the secret to the wealth, happiness, safety, security, and equality of the region.

'Nordic exceptionalism' is the identity construct, the model, and the brand (Browning, 2007) that encompasses the Nordic countries and what they represent. The idea of Nordic Exceptionalism came during the Cold War, when the rest of their European counterparts were becoming "'warlike' and 'conflict prone'" (Browning, 2007, 27), the Nordic states were staying "'peace-loving and rational'" (Browning, 2007, 27). The Nordic Model stands for progress, modernization, and for being *better than* other models in a socio-economic organizational sense (Browning, 2007, 28). The three major components of this are "foreign policy, international morality, and social justice" (Browning, 2007, 35). Not only with the creation of this model, but throughout the years, it has held true that "Nordic Identity and Nordic Brand [have been] the promise of a better, more advanced, more peaceful, less militarized future [with] elements of cohesion, recognition, and autonomy that [have] become central in development" (Browning, 2007, 36). What does this mean for international student attraction to Norway? In the case of students from the U.S., this is a complete contrast to the "individualist, neo-liberal America" (Browning, 2007, 43) that these American students are used to. Coming to an environment like the Nordics, specifically Norway, is a drastic change

in the three elements to Nordicity; foreign policy, international morality, and social justice. In general, “Europe is depicted as kinder and more sympathetic towards the world’s poor and has a stronger belief in the value of international law than the U.S.” (Browning, 2007, 40). This attitude towards humanitarian issues, economical issues, and ecological issues, and the Nordic ‘brand’ seem likely to contribute to the fascination of many students coming to Norway to study and experience an alternative perspective on life have. While these issues might not be at the forefront of students’ decision making process, the prominence of Norway's ranking at the top of global ‘happiness lists’, ‘wealth lists’, and its reputation for unusual safety and stability seems to be a key component in students interest in coming to a country such as Norway to study.

All Nordic countries’ higher educational institutions follow the EU’s Bologna process rules and regulations. However, Nordic higher education institutions have a few distinct characteristics; they are “state - owned [...] with institutional autonomy in many areas, high levels of state investment, strong emphasis on equality concerning the institutional landscape, and the way in which public resources are allocated throughout the system. [...] the state has traditionally also offered quite favorable student support schemes with the aim of stimulating high participation rates” (Maassen et al, 2008, 127). This is an increasingly unusual case that not many other countries can offer to students. This idea of Nordic Exceptionalism stands applies to higher education, but also too many aspects of life outside the university. Nordic Exceptionalism can be described as a “particular Nordic way of doing things [and] has been a central element in Nordic and national identity construction for the Nordic states (e.g. Lawler, 1997 as cited in Browning, 2007, 27). The Nordic model can be described as not only a ‘model’ and an ‘identity’, but also as a ‘brand’ to “position themselves in the world and provide them [selves] with an international role” (Browning, 2007, 28). The three aspects of the Nordic brand are: “foreign policy, international morality, and social justice” (Browning, 2007, 35). These aspects can be found both at home and abroad and add to that certain ‘Nordic’ feeling tourists and students alike find fascinating about Norway.

Nordic cooperation and exceptionalism in higher education follows a similar suit to the role it plays on the world stage. The ‘quality’ of higher education within the Nordic countries allows for “cooperation with its neighbors (to be) attractive and natural” (Maassen et al., 2008, 129). As previously mentioned, all Nordic countries, regardless of their EU participation, have followed the Bologna process, thus resulting in students and staff having free flowing mobility to any and all of these countries. As there are different languages found within every country, English was the “preferred [...] language of communication in Nordic cooperation”

(Maassen et al., 2008, 129) which makes higher education more accessible to the rest of the non-Scandinavian language speaking world. On this same note, and as one of the components of the Nordic branding scheme, Nordic cooperation is turning to 'regional cooperation' by "turning the focus and attention not only on the introvert Nordic/Baltic countries but to an extrovert, global approach." (Maassen et al., 2008, 135) The Nordic Council of Ministers have considered other Asian countries as new potential collaborators and want to be able to cater to these students in addition to other Nordic students

By using and combining these four relevant theories of: 'push' and 'pull' models, Expectancy theory, Human Capital theory, and Nordic Exceptionalism, the research topic is provided with an overall framework (see figure 1) and with sufficient theoretical reasoning to analyze the stated research questions through the data. The following section will briefly highlight the gaps that exist in the literature and present the research questions for this thesis.

4. Gaps in mobility research

The research undertaken here aims to problematize the assumption that study abroad 'success' is simply about increasing participant numbers. It takes a somewhat critical approach to the 2016 SIU report of International Students in Norway in aiming to dig below some of the indicators and categories used, to look at motivating factors as to why students choose to study abroad or why they decide to come to Norway, in-depth. It also takes a somewhat different approach to literature which takes a 'global' or 'one size fits all' perspective on mobility, by comparing American and European students coming to Norway. There have been studies researched on specific nationalities going abroad, but the lens is typically of the international students from the host country perspective, neither from the host country nor as a comparison to another group of students. As previously discussed, "student mobility is still the most visible form of internationalization of higher education. Higher education institutions as well as policy makers stress quality enhancement, knowledge exchange, and academic cooperation as important rationales for student mobility" (Wiers-Jenssen, 2013, 473). If internationalization is one of the most important rationales for mobility, than it is important these students feel they are getting an 'international experience' that meets the standards of their motivations and expectations. Typically, students who choose to study abroad have some desire to become more internationally sound. This research will discuss the international experiences with students from two different areas of the world, to compare and go qualitatively in depth to learn if one group feels like their experiences have been met more than the other. As well as investigating motivations, this research goes beyond push-pull ideas to assess if students' overall exchange goals have been met.

4.1 Research questions:

1. What are the key 'push' and 'pull' factors that bring students to Norway specifically? Do these differ between American and European students?
2. How have the students found the experience of studying in Oslo? Has it been in line with their expectations? What has been better or worse than expected?
3. Are students coming to Oslo to study satisfied with their experience? What do they think they have gained from it?

5. Empirical Setting

This section will identify background information to the particular context studied. It explains the Norwegian higher education system in terms of key characteristics and the processes international students must take to study there, mobility patterns from 2013 to the present and influential organizations that play an influential role in international students' experiences in Norway.

“Education for all’ is the basic principle of the Norwegian educational system” (Study in Norway, 2005). Due to the strengthening of the internationalization platform, this statement no longer only applies to local citizens but foreigners alike. Norwegian higher education has become more international throughout the years. Currently there are more than 170 Masters programs taught in English, covering a variety of subjects. Some institutions are also offering English taught programs at the Bachelors level. Norwegian higher education institutions have conformed to the guidelines of the Bologna Process, resulting in “a common degree structure (3 + 2 + 3) and a common European credit transfer system (ECTS) [which] are intended to facilitate mobility” (Wiers-Jenssen, 2013, 472). In addition to the degree structure, Norway has also been able to implement the ECTS credit system, in house quality assurance agencies and engage in degree recognition for foreign earned degrees. In total, there are approximately 70 universities and university colleges in Norway, located throughout the country. With “student mobility and international cooperation [as] key objectives for the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research” (Study in Norway, 2005) the increase in numbers of foreign students is an important factor in increasing the internationalization of higher education.

One key factor that is unique to Norwegian higher education is the lack of tuition fees. “As a rule, tuition is not required for study at Norwegian higher education institution, although fees may be imposed for certain professional education programs, further and special education programs and study at some of the private institutions” (Study in Norway, 2005). This pertains to all students, both local and international. The only groups of students who are left out of this tuition free scheme are international semester students coming from outside of the EU. Students coming from the U.S., Africa, Asia, and Latin American countries must continue to pay their home institution tuition fees and the other excess fees it takes to become a student in Norway, specifically the student visa fee of 5300 kroner (Fees, UDI, 2018). Students needing a student visa must also provide documentation that shows a

sufficient amount of funds «to live on, at least NOK 116 369 per year” (Fees, UDI, 2018) or approximately 58,000 NOK for a semester. Erasmus students, or students from other EU countries that are participants of the Erasmus Plus program do not need a student visa nor any kind of legal documentation besides their ‘learning agreement for studies’ (Smith, 2018) that is required by all Norwegian higher educational institutions. These students from the EU also receive what is known as the Erasmus grant, which was used by most students to pay their room and board fees. Dependent upon where the student was coming from was the amount of money received, i.e. students from Czech Republic and Poland received more than the students from Germany and the Netherlands. 80% of the grant is paid in the beginning of the semester and the remaining 20% is paid once the student finishes the semester. On average, the student receives 400 euro/month.

These learning agreements are contracted between three parties; the student, the home institution, and the receiving institution. The purpose of said contract is to “provide a transparent and efficient preparation of the exchange to make sure the student receives recognition for the activities successfully completed abroad” (Smith, 2018). This contract clearly states the learning outcomes the student will achieve during their semester abroad. If the home institution falls under the CEFR, Common European Framework of Reference, the student does not need to submit any kind of IELTS or TOEFL English language score. If the student comes from a non EU non English speaking country, they are obligated to submit a language test score. Students coming from the U.S. do not need to provide a language test score. All students, regardless of country of origin, must register with the foreign police upon arrival in Norway (UDI, 2018).

There are a select few organizations within Norwegian Higher Education that help manage and navigate international students throughout their experience in Norway. Some organizations help international students with every day logistical issues while other organizations provide research and advisory roles. The biggest and most commonly used organization in the Oslo region is SIO, *Studentsamskipnaden i Oslo og Akershus*. SIO provides all students with accommodation, health services, food and drink services, gym memberships, and if applicable, child care. SIU, *Senteret for Internationalisering av utdanning (Center for International Education)*, provides information to international students on how to study in Norway. They also engage in numerous projects that continue to strengthen the quality of higher education institutions in Norway. For students coming from the U.S., another key organization is NORAM, the Norwegian American Association, which serves as both an advising center and an organization providing scholarships. Day to day logistical issues can often be serviced best by the individual higher education institutions’

international office. All three major universities in Oslo (UiO, Oslo Met, and BI) have an on-campus internationalization office where help is available to all international students. In addition to international offices, there are international student associations that are available to both Norwegian and international students. These associations include Erasmus Student Network International, ESN, and International Students Union, ISU. Both associations aim to provide a common ground for students to meet other students and engage in social activities throughout the community.

Historically, Norway has received international students from around the world. From Sweden to Brazil, students have flocked to Norway to engage in quality, English language, tuition free education (Study in Norway, 2005). Refer to the chart below for enrollment numbers of international students from 2013-2016.

Table 1. International student mobility in higher education in Norway, 2013-2016

	2013	2014	2015	2016
From continental Europe	4 338	4 627	5 056	4 419
From the United States	204	202	267	247
From Africa, in total	1120	1153	1373	1137
From Asia, in total	3161	3123	3482	2871

*Facts about Education in Norway 2018, ssb.no, 2017

At the time of this publication, data was not available for the 2017 year. In total, the number of international students has continued to increase until 2016. Though 2016 showed a decrease in numbers from 2015, University of Oslo (UiO) boasted the “1st place Study Abroad Award” (UiO Annual Report, 2016).

Though the representation of American students in Norway has traditionally been quite small, they are an important group. Historically, Norwegian-American relations have been positive and fruitful, until the most recent Trump Era. Currently the U.S houses “more than 4.5 million Norwegian Americans” (Schweide & Terry, 2013, 3). In 2018, there are “8,637” Americans living in Norway (Immigrants ssb.no, 2018). As seen from the table above, the student population is even smaller. Research between the two nations are comprised of a total of 143 (DIKU, 2018) projects over the last 10 years between Norwegian and American research groups, case dependent regarding location within both respected countries. They have allocated over one million Norwegian Kroners to work on said projects. The market between the Norwegians and the Americans is lucrative and can only become stronger.

Norwegian higher education follows a unique system that is conceptually new to American students but more familiar to EU students. The next section will describe in detail the pragmatic data gathering process and the methodology used to gather said data.

6. Methodology

6.1 Research Design

In this section the research design will be presented. The overall approach is a comparison of qualitative data, based on a series of discussion groups with American and European semester exchange students. This section will further address concerns of validity, reliability, ethics and generalizability. Lastly, a description of limitations will be presented.

6.1.1 Comparative Design: two cases of mobile students in Norway

The study will consist of a comparative cross sectional design with case study elements. By definition, cross sectional designs typically encompass a sample of cases, a single point in time, the ability to be used with qualitative data, and patterns of association (Bryman, 2016). The study will utilize a comparative design element in cross cultural research. Cross cultural research helps “reduce the risk of failing to appreciate that social science findings are often [...] culturally specific” (Bryman, 2016, 65). Social phenomena are better explained when they are compared in relation to two or more contrasting cases (Bryman, 2016) therefore this study will compare students from the United States of America to students from the European Union. These comparisons will look further into political culture, higher education structural differences, challenges and differences to mobility and addressing the language barrier, as none of the students would have native Norwegian language skills. The research questions require a deeper investigation into the satisfaction of international students in Norway and if their country of origin plays a role in their expectations or levels of satisfaction. To gather this data, respondents were asked a variety of questions, supported and influenced by the analytical framework, regarding student expectations and satisfaction in Oslo and at Oslo-based Higher Education Institutions. Comparing the case of students from both the U.S. and EU, “the researcher is in a better position to establish the circumstances in which a theory will or will not hold” (Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 2009 as cited in Bryman, 2016, 67). This analysis will be made later on in the Discussion chapter of this thesis.

The goal of the data collection is to find patterns of association between both the American students as well as the EU students. The case study elements consist of ‘singleness,’ in this case the singleness of the city of Oslo, as “‘case’ associates the case study with a location”

(Bryman, 2016, 60). Participants were taken from any of the three main higher education institutions in Oslo; UiO, HiOA, and BI.

6.2 Case Selection

The reason for choosing to conduct this study about semester exchange students in Norway is partly pragmatic. I am a student at the University of Oslo and had a personal interest in this case as a foreign student and as my professional interest's lies in the internationalization of universities and study abroad. However, the choice of this case also reflects a view that Norway is a somewhat exceptional case, as one of the last remaining countries that doesn't charge tuition fees, to both international and national students alike. The country of Norway has also been argued to be an interesting case to consider 'pull' factors for visiting students in light of the reputation of Norway internationally based on various comparative reports and league tables proclaiming it one of the happiest countries in the world, and indeed its status as the "Happiest country in 2017" ("World Happiness Report 2017", 2017). The report is gauged on issues such as "income, healthy life expectancy, having someone to count on in times of trouble, generosity, freedom and trust, with the latter measured by the absence of corruption in business and government" ("World Happiness Report 2017", 2017). How these aspects and reputation might influence international student choices and experiences was an open question in this study.

6.2.1 Survey pilot study

When I initially began my research, I planned to use a survey to interview international students both before and after their semester abroad. With the help of the SIU 2016 study on international students as well as NOKUT's Student Barometer, I assembled a series of questions that I felt would cover topics that fell under my research questions. After conducting a pilot test amongst colleagues, I used the snowball technique of gaining participants and advertised my survey on the "International Students in Oslo" Facebook page. The goal of reaching 50 students proved very challenging, and I was only able to obtain 9 legitimate results. In particular, the open questions were barely answered and this meant there was little scope to gather the detailed, rich data my topic required. After some reevaluation and deliberation, it was decided to utilize a different method that would better serve my research purposes. I decided an 'in person' method would be more effective in gaining in-depth responses, in particular in offering the possibility for follow up questions.

6.2.2 Choosing a Discussion Group as a method

The discussion group method builds on the simple understanding that “what people say is a major source of qualitative data” (Patton, 1990, 25). As the unit of analysis was based around specific groups of students from the U.S. and Europe, made sense to cluster the interviewees by home country into separate groups, based on where they were from. Focus group utilization is commonly used in settings where researchers want to examine the ways in which people interact with one another. This method allows for participants to probe each other’s reasoning for making certain statements and breaks up the monotony of a traditional interview ‘question-answer-question’ process. Participants can be challenged by each other and in some cases; more information can be extracted from these interactions than can be in just a one on one interview. It can give more insight into the meaning making process which can be helpful in providing more data to solidify theory (Bryman, 2016). For the subject matters discussed, discussion groups were a good choice as all the respondents had one aspect in common; they were all international students. Regardless of where they were from, they all had the title of ‘international student.’ The students from the U.S., though coming from different states, had similar experiences being in Norway and living life outside of the U.S. Having this baseline of familiarity was able to facilitate levels of comfort in which the respondents were able to open up to each other in these discussion groups and fruitful discussions were generated. Discussion groups reflect the “process through which meaning is constructed in everyday life” (Bryman, 2016, 503) which is more prevalent than in individual interviews. Overall then, discussion groups seemed a choice that was appropriate to the questions but which was also likely to work well for these topics and population, in terms of generating detailed discussion and reflection on experiences.

6.2.3 Selection and recruitment of respondents

This study’s’ main focus is on American students but adding in the EU students to compare to the American results has proven there to be differences in motivations, expectations, and experiences between the two groups. The amount of international students, both degree and exchange, in Oslo is approximately 2,000 (UiO Facts and Figures, 2016). Out of these 2,000 students, approximately 200 originate from the United States of America (UiO Facts and Figures, 2016). The amount of exchange students is even smaller.

Each discussion group was conducted at the end of the academic semester. This timing was chosen specifically so that the students would have completed their entire semester abroad and could reflect back on it in its entirety. Student groups were conducted over the course of

two semesters with a set of two discussion groups taking place at the end of each respective semester. While the groups were not all conducted simultaneously, this ensured that all students were involved in the research at the same point in their study abroad experience, and nearing the end of their time in Oslo, when they would inevitably be starting to reflect on what they had experienced and achieved.

Since I conducted two rounds of focus groups, the first in December 2017 and the second round in May 2018, both semesters could be used networking and laying the foundations in international student groups so that when the time came for recruitment, I would have already established a good rapport with some of the participants and it would not be so challenging to find volunteers. I used not only the aforementioned 'International Students in Oslo' Facebook pages but found more social media outlets to market my research to. The criterion for the participants was as follows:

- Attended any of the three higher education institutions in Oslo; UiO (University of Oslo), HiOA/OsloMet (*Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus now named Oslo Metropolitan University*), or BI (*Handelshøyskolen BI*)
- Was to be a student in Norway for only one semester
- Was completing any portion of their bachelor degree
- Country of origin was either the USA or a country within continental EU

I did not specify from which faculty or field of study the students came from, as I didn't want to narrow down the number of participants by too much. While discipline may well influence the factors that shape study choice this was not central to my study; by maintaining a range of subject areas across groups I hoped this issue would not provide a significant influence within the focus on national differences. Similarly, I did not specify gender in the criteria but aimed for and succeeded in there to be at least 2 people of each gender in each group.

I used purposive and snowball sampling to find respondents. Purposive sampling is used to sample specific cases or purposes in a strategic way (Bryman, 2016, 408). As this is a non-probability sampling approach, it does not allow for the researcher to generalize to an entire population. Although this isn't a random sampling strategy, it is not a convenience sampling either, as I, the researcher, had goals in mind for who I needed to be in my sample. The initial sampling started from my involvement with the international student group and social media) and led further into snowball sampling. Once the initial contact was made with a few

individuals who were relevant to my criteria, I used them “to establish contact with others” (Bryman, 2016, 188). For the purpose of this thesis, in regards to time, money, and manpower, sampling occurred by purposive and snowballing processes. I also added an incentive of free food to each discussion group, and the responses were overwhelming.

6.3 The Interview Guide

The interview guide was developed using a combination of the SIU 2016 report of International Students in Norway and NOKUT’s Student Barometer questionnaire, and the development of questions that related to the analytical framework. Some of the questions were based on survey items that originally had numerical scales and these were converted to open ended questions. The guide started out with very broad open ended questions, ‘Why study abroad? Why Norway?’ and led towards more specific questions. All the questions were rooted in the theories and model that make up the thesis’ theoretical and analytical framework; the push pull model, expectancy theory, and aspects of human capital theory. The combination of these perspectives supported a broad and open set of questions, leaving room for respondents to express a range of views and ideas around mobility. As previously discussed in the analytical framework, human capital theory is mentioned heavily in relevant literature, however it is not perfectly suitable for my own research. However, in addition to the other two theories, it provides a solid base to generate interview guide questions and answer the research questions. The interview guide can be found in the appendices.

I applied to the Norwegian Center for Research, NSD, early on to get approval of my research and data collection. Every participant signed a consent form and was made aware that the session was being recorded and the processes for anonymizing data as far as possible. I described to participants how the recordings would be kept throughout the duration of my writing, the data would be transcribed, and it would be disposed of at a later date. In the initial consent form students signed, I stated that my completion date was set for June 2018. After I decided to continue with a second round of focus groups, I was able to change my completion date with NSD but the original form still states the June date. A copy of the consent form can be found in the appendices.

6.4 Conducting the discussion groups

The first round of discussion groups occurred in December 2017, at the end of the fall semester. This involved one group of six American participants and one group of four EU

participants. After coding and analyzing this initial round of groups, the results did seem to be quite distinct between the two regional groupings. And with only small numbers of students, it was decided that an additional round of groups would be beneficial to help establish which differences were more robust and which might be less significant or artifacts of a particular group or even the events occurring each semester. One recurrent example within the first American group was the recent election in the U.S. of President Trump. While this was a significant theme in the first set of groups, it was possible this was because it was such an impactful world event, rather than reflecting a general significance of political contrast in U.S. students' choices of Norway as a study destination.

The second round of focus group took place at the end of the spring semester in May 2018, to ensure all participants were responding based on their experiences and views towards the end of their semester. These participants were subject to an identical process from initial recruitment to group recording. The second round of discussion groups resulted in four American participants and three European participants. The breakdown of students can be seen in the chart below:

American			European		
University	Field of Study	Gender	University	Field of Study	Gender
BI	Business Admin	M	BI	Finance	M
BI	Business Admin	M	UiO	Education	M
BI	Business Finance	M	UiO	Education	M
BI	International Bus.	F	UiO	Education	F
BI	Business Mgmt	F	UiO	Mathematics	F
UiO	Natural Resource Mgmt	M	UiO	Business Psych.	F
UiO	Earth Science	F	UiO	Sociology	F
UiO	Social Ecology	F			
UiO	Communications	F			
HiOA	Child Devlp.	F			

Each discussion group (four in total) lasted approximately one hour. I began each group with a short introduction and explained the 'rules' of how the groups would be run. Every group was active and engaged, and provided solid data to strengthen my research questions. They were also respectful of each other; some participants disagreed with each other and would voice those differences, but diplomatically. As this can be a typical pitfall of discussion groups, I used my role as moderator to make room to allow differences of opinions to be heard. The discussions were recorded on both a cell phone and a computer recording system and were able to produce clear, comprehensive audio.

While the results between the two rounds of groups were quite similar, the data obtained from the second round aided in making arguments and ideas produced in the first round much stronger and richer. Having two rounds of discussion groups was a valuable part of the research approach.

6.4.1 An Abductive Approach to analysis

This research process initially started with an interest in international student satisfaction in Norway. The majority of study abroad research shows a semester abroad is often regarded as "the most meaningful and rewarding" (Hadis, 2005, 7) experience in an international students' life. I wanted to look at this phenomenon and break it down further to see what specifically made it so great and what aspects could be improved. Abductive reasoning starts with a "grounded theoretical understanding of the context and people" (Bryman, 2016, 394). After empirical data is collected and analyzed, the researcher must come to a "social scientific account of the social world as seen from these perspectives" (Bryman, 2016, 394). As there has been previous research done on student satisfaction within study abroad, there are theories that tend to be used quite often, mainly the push and pull factors. Once I completed my data collection and analysis, I realized that these pre-existing theories did not fully explain the phenomenon I had analyzed. In addition to utilizing push and pull factors to explain the phenomenon, I also employed the use of Nordic Exceptionalism to aid in my justification process.

The combination of these theories helped to create the discussion group guide. Once the discussion groups had taken place and the transcription process occurred, it was decided to use a type of directed content analysis to code and understand the data collection. The goal of this type of analysis is to "validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, 1281). Since I utilized four different theories I was able to create a type of coding system that looked through the lens of each individual theory. Potter

& Levine-Donnerstein (1999) state that by “using existing theory [...] researchers begin by identifying key concepts or variables as initial coding categories” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, 1281). These existing theories also helped shape my research questions and were able to “provide predictions about the variables of interest or about the relationships among variables and thus helping to determine the initial coding scheme or relationships between codes” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, 1281). The codes were first categorized by theories, and then were broken down into the decision making levels (levels can be seen from *Figure 1 Analytical Framework overview* in the literature review chapter).

By use of pre-existing theories as starting points, the analysis of data collection, and inductively generating a conceptual framework from said data collected, the overall approach to this study is abductive.

6.5 Ethics and Validity

The nature of this research design is qualitative and as qualitative research focuses more on the emphasis of words rather than quantification of data collection and analysis (Bryman, 2016) it was thought to be a more useful approach to collect data through a structured group discussion method. However, qualitative research can be critiqued as too subjective, difficult to replicate, too generalized, and has a lack of transparency (Bryman, 2016). Because of these critiques, I took a critical view and attempted to combat these issues by utilizing certain methods to keep the data from becoming too general or transparent.

Validity in qualitative research consists of two factors, trustworthiness and authenticity. In this thesis, the criteria that will be utilized are transferability and dependability with respect to thick descriptions and auditing trails. Transferability was pursued due to the nature of the content, and the “orientation to contextual uniqueness and significance [...] of the social world being studied” (Bryman, 2016, 384). Dependability was attained by establishing a type of ‘audit trail’, that ensures records are kept of all phases of the process, in a transparent way. (Bryman 2016). Each discussion group was transcribed within a week of taking place, so that critical impressions and thoughts from the interviews were recorded as well.

Due to the non-numerical nature of qualitative research, it is difficult to “speak about correlation [...] in a statistical sense. [...] Nevertheless, a communicative dialogue with respondents may be a fruitful way to get information about construct validity” (Kleven, 2008, 226) Because of this concern, I felt that two separate rounds of a discussion group method would be an appropriate way to strengthen the construct validity. Validation must “combine

scientific inquiry with rational argument” (Messick, 1995, 742 as cited in Kleven, 2008, 224) and in this case, the rational argument was made stronger by a larger amount of data collection. One concern of validity, as well as a potential limitation to qualitative research in general, is “the so-called Hansons Thesis (e.g. Phillips, 1987, p.9 ff.)” (Kleven, 2008, 225). This thesis states that all observations are “theory-laden,” which is the main reason why all knowledge gained from these observations should be considered constructions and not “final facts” (Kleven, 2008, 225). Qualitative research within the educational field is also unique; Zeller states this “measurement can be defined as the process of linking concepts to indicants” (Kleven, 2008, 224). The most ideal way to show that these indicators are actually gauging the phenomenon at hand is by ensuring validity has been addressed.

There are a number of ethical considerations to consider when conducting discussion groups. As this is taking place in a group setting, researchers need be aware of the group dynamic taking place, such as stress due to the intensity of interactions of groups (Morgan, 1993 as cited in Smith, 1995). Strict and absolute confidentiality cannot be ensured, as the researcher has no control as to what happens or is said after the group has taken place. One way I made sure this didn’t happen was by making it clear in the introduction statement of each focus group to set guidelines about the rules of confidentiality and described to each participant what will happen to any notes, audio, or visual recordings that are used (Smith, 1995). As mentioned previously, I had each participant sign an NSD approved consent form. Depending on the content of the material discussed, researchers must be aware of the feeling in the room after the focus group is complete. Since the overall theme and content of the questions I asked were quite insensitive, I didn’t consider holding debriefing sessions after the group was over. Participants left each focus group in light moods with some participants even forming friendships with others during the discussion group. Another ethical consideration to keep in mind is if participants admit to an illegal activity. There is a certain professional code of ethics researchers follow and again, this is case specific, depending upon the nature of the content (Smith, 1995). This was not apparent in any of the groups I administered, but it was something important to keep in mind.

6.6 Generalizability

Because of the nature and the chosen units of investigation used in this study, the issue of generalizability was considered normal and expected. Qualitative research includes some “sort of inference because it is impossible to observe everything, even in one small setting. The sort of sampling done in qualitative research is usually ‘purposeful’ (Patton, 1990) sampling,” (Maxwell, 1992, 293) that is not probability based. This type of sampling method

goes hand in hand with the qualitative research design so that the researcher can “make sure one has adequately understood the variation in the phenomena of interest in the setting, and to test developing ideas about that setting by selecting phenomena that are crucial to the validity of those ideas.” (Maxwell, 1992, 293). To combat this issue of generalizability, it was decided to conduct a total of 4 discussion groups, two separate rounds, to dig deeper into any of the issues that were brought up during the first rounds of data collection.

6.7 Limitations

During the execution of the focus groups, I had to remind myself of my position of a researcher and not as a participant. As an international student myself at a Norwegian University, I had to take into account my own bias towards the subject matter. My role in this scenario was to moderate the focus groups from a third party perspective and to report on the results stated in these groups. My knowledge on this topic comes from both personal experience as well as literature read and reviewed. Therefore, there is a certain degree of subjectivity within this study.

There are also limitations to the discussion group method. There can be issues of “control” (Bryman, 2016, 520), the involvement of the moderator versus the free conversation of the participants. In theory, the group has a purpose with a specific set of questions but flexibility is key in qualitative research and in certain cases, the tangent conversations are where the actual data lies. Some researchers consider this ambiguity to be an advantage. Other concerns include difficulty in transcription, difficulty in organization, difficulty in analyzing data, but also difficulty with group thought, having a dominant speaker who takes over the conversation, and sensitive topics. Another limitation to using any type of interview method is the possibility of ‘lip service.’ This occurs when the respondents tell the researcher what they think the researcher wants to hear, or withholds the truth (Bryman, 2016). As the moderator, I continued to remind the respondents to voice their own opinions, and encouraged them to disagree with each other if they so felt inclined to.

Other limitations that occurred were: comparing the U.S., a country, to the E.U, a region; the number of participants being low; and the disciplinary differences. As the main focus of this thesis is on American students in Norway, I chose to compare it to the E.U. as a region. Both the U.S and EU are mass geographical regions with extreme differences spanning the entirety of the country and region, respectively. As I did not want to single out any specific European country for fear of losing focus on the American students, it was decided to recruit

students from the EU as a whole. I completed two separate rounds of focus groups at two separate times of the academic year. In academics, there is no one right answer about how many groups or participants to have, but as soon as the time comes that the “moderator [...] is able to anticipate fairly accurately what the next group is going to say” (Bryman, 2016, 505), it is no longer needed to conduct more groups. With no more new themes emerging from said groups, there was no need to continue conducting research. After two rounds of discussion groups with 17 students in total, I felt I had reached a stopping point. While choosing students from specific disciplines could have provided me with a completely different data set, I chose to have participants participate, regardless of discipline. The nature of my research questions as well as the interview guide was not specific to students in particular disciplines. Rather than focusing on a particular faculty or discipline of study, my overall aim of research was to interact with both U.S. and EU international students regarding general satisfaction with their semester in Norway, from a top down perspective. As the data collection ensued, specific themes and observations were apparent, but this became a part of the research process.

Due to the nature and first failed attempt to use a survey method, the discussion group method was the method, despite its limitations, that I found to be the most fruitful in obtaining the data I needed to answer my research questions.

This methods section described in detail the methodological process from beginning to end. The next section will explain the empirical setting, a description about the Norwegian higher education system relevant to international students, some historic mobility patterns, and key players that influence and are involved in international students' experiences in Norway.

7. Findings

Results from the discussion groups

This section will be devoted to presenting the results obtained from the series of focus groups. The breakdown of student participants can be found in the Appendices, A. Each question asked during the discussion group will be presented and the full interview guide can be found in Appendix B.

Section 7.1 will include the questions and responses to students' motivating factors before they arrived in Norway. Section 7.2 will look at the satisfaction levels and experiences during the semester abroad and the lasting impressions the students took away from them.

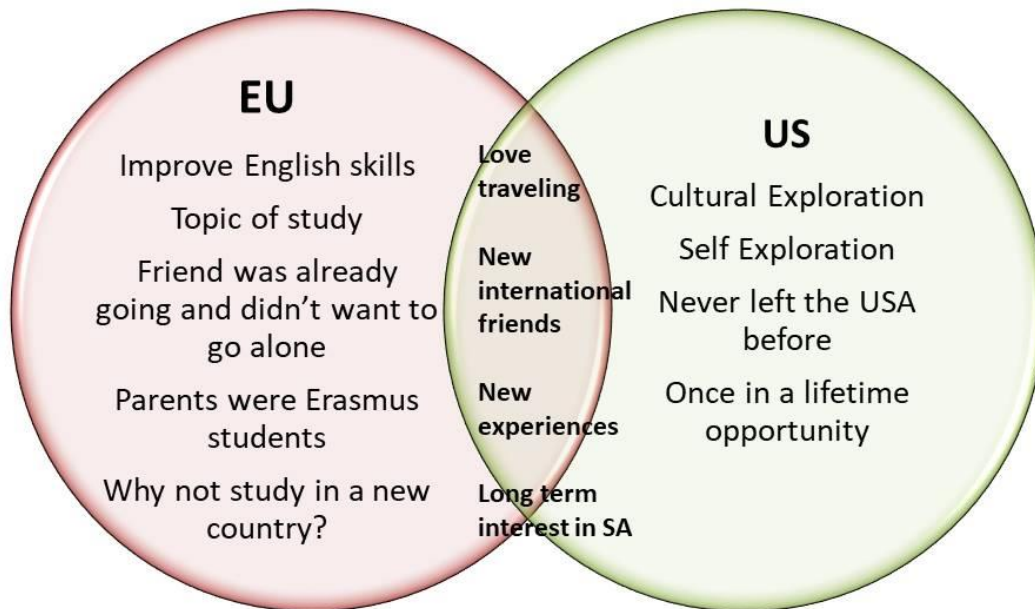
Throughout these sections, comparisons are drawn between the American students and the E.U. based students. The next section then analyses these results in relation to the key theories used in this thesis and the wider literature on student mobility

7.1 Motivation to go abroad and expectations of a stay in Norway

The focus groups started off with the overarching 'why' question. The figure below shows the reoccurring themes that were mentioned throughout all 4 focus groups.

Why study abroad?

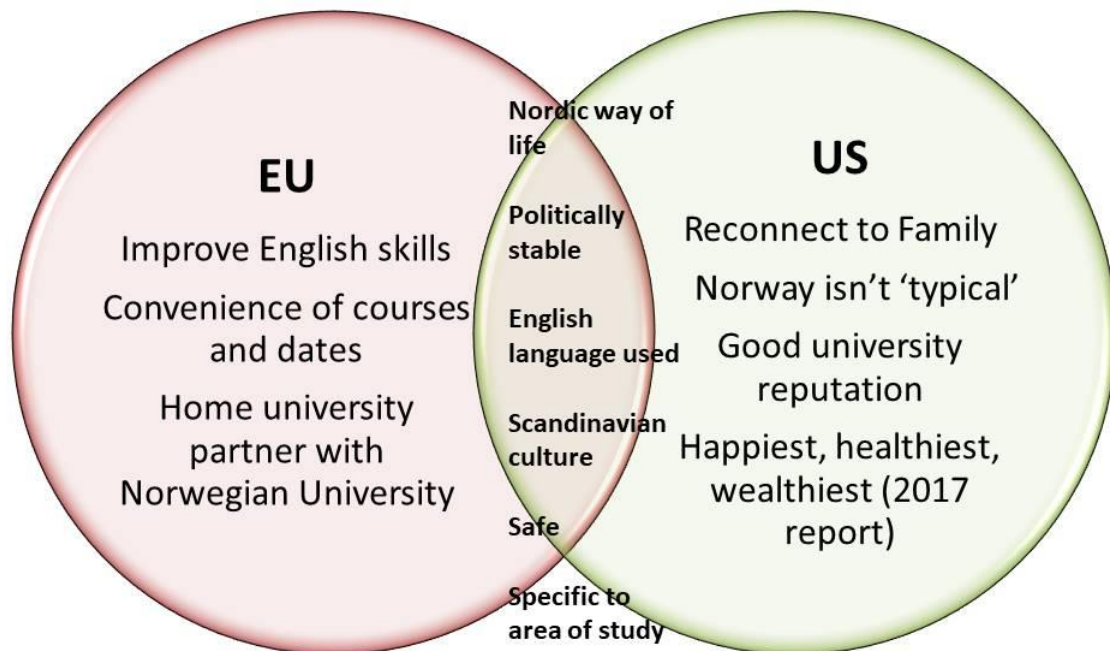
Figure 1: Why study abroad?



Students, regardless of country of origin, were excited about the new opportunity to experience new things, meet new people, and see a new place. However, there were some clear contrasts between the EU and U.S. students. EU students were more influenced by family members that had previously studied abroad as well as the prospect of improving their own English language skills. There were also two sets of students in the EU focus groups that came to Norway with a friend, which in turn made their transition to Norwegian life less intimidating as they already had a support system here. The U.S. students were more focused on self-exploration and finding themselves. They saw the opportunity to come study in a foreign country as a 'once in a lifetime opportunity,' and didn't think they would ever get the chance later in life to do such a thing. Students from the EU felt that studying abroad for a semester was almost a 'default' option; it was something that most students would do. The U.S. students felt as if this was more of a big decision and that it set them apart from their fellow American students at their home universities.

Why Norway?

Figure 2: Why Norway?



Both groups of students had an interest in the ideas that comprise 'Nordic exceptionalism.' Everyone felt it was a safe country. Both groups liked that the English language was used, the EU students wanted to better their English language while the U.S students were more concerned with being able to study in their native language. What was striking across all groups, was how Norway was seen as a somewhat 'special' or 'unusual' place: for continental Europeans it is somehow 'different' to the rest of Europe, and to U.S. students it is almost exotic in representing a country very different to most. Both groups took into consideration the unusual political and social safety of Norway. One student stated, "Norway is one of the happiest countries, the wealthiest, and the healthiest. With this combination they must be doing something right!" (Male, BI, U.S) The U.S students who chose Norway wanted to study somewhere different, that wasn't a typical study abroad location. "Everyone studies abroad in London or Barcelona, but when you say you studied in Oslo people ask questions" (Male, BI, U.S). The EU students also mentioned the idea of Norway being a unique study abroad destination. Some of their home universities were

already partnered with UiO, and for the students to do an Erasmus exchange here was sheer convenience.

Many American students who come to study in Norway have Norwegian heritage and were looking to reconnect to their roots. Three American students who partook in this study fell into this category. Two of the three students had relatives and family members living throughout Norway, while one student only knew he had descendants from Norway. The two students with active family here chose to study here to meet their family members, to learn more about their familial history, and to partake in local customs and traditions. Nature was of course mentioned as a big motivating factor as well as the 'green' lifestyle approaches Norway takes. Some of the students were studying for degrees specific to natural resources and they were able to complete field work here that they couldn't have done in their home country. Other students were studying subjects like education and pedagogy. They made reference to Scandinavian education being well regarded internationally, and the belief they would be able to gain some useful information to take back to their home countries with.

Political reasons

One of the aspects of Norway's 'unusualness' or being 'different' that came up on groups related to Norwegian politics – as somewhat different from the rest of Europe and extremely different from American politics. The American students described being curious to see a new political system in action, and the Nordic social system is something that was talked about in the groups as a feature of Norwegian life students were interested to see in practice. They all agreed they had been exposed to new ideas and felt they had all learned something new from this way of life. The fall 2017 semester group was also able to see the Norwegian National election, and this prompted a range of reactions. One student was in disbelief that there could be “so many different political parties! And they're not even that dramatically different” (Male, UiO, U.S). Both EU and U.S. students described being curious to experience the 'welfare state' with socialized health care and free education for all. Two of the EU students and three of the U.S. students were very supportive of the Green initiatives taken in Norway and were hoping to learn as much as they could here and take these ideas back home with them. The Americans, especially the fall semester group, had a difficult time with the topic of President Trump being so high profile during their stay, and the actions that took place during these five months. All the American students, regardless of the semester, said the first question anyone ever asked them was about Donald Trump. “President Trump, if I own a gun, and if I only eat unhealthy food when I'm at home. I've started to just tell people I'm Canadian, so I can avoid these conversations” (Female, UiO, U.S.). EU students, while not having to face the Trump issue, were also influenced by American politics. One EU

students' home university had a partner university in both the U.S and Norway. For political reasons, she didn't want to go the U.S. and support what is going on there; so, by default she came to Norway. For EU students, they all agreed that staying within Europe was much easier, both logistically and financially. There is no visa process to go through and with the Erasmus + program, study abroad couldn't be simpler. They all agreed that Norway was one of the most neutral and politically stable countries in Europe, and at no point did anyone of the students feel unsafe.

Funding and costs of living

One of the biggest concerns for all the students was money. Everyone had been told that Norway was one of the most expensive countries in the world and these students were prepared for the worst. As the time between deciding to go abroad and leaving to go abroad is typically about 6 months, all the students had a short amount of time to financially prepare themselves. However, the differences in tuition fee practices at the 'home' universities of the U.S. students and EU students meant that the two groups approached their financial issues with different perspectives.

For the American students to study abroad, even in Norway, they were spending less money on tuition, room and board, etc. than they would have if they stayed at home for this semester. One student joked, "my parents asked me if I'd rather stay a year in Norway since it would be cheaper for me/them to be here and not in California for that time" (Female, UiO, U.S). Most of the American students had scholarships for their home universities which were able to be transferred to study in Norway. They all had had summer jobs which helped them to save money. Some had applied for additional grants and scholarships through both their home university and their host university (BI). Many students admitted that by the end of the semester, they had to ask their parents and family for support, which they felt ashamed about. One student even admitted that she had gone into significant debt to be in Oslo for the semester, but she felt it was "worth it and would figure it out when I (she) got back home" (Female, Oslo Met, U.S).

The EU students were also concerned about the cost of living. However, all these students came from countries where tuition fees are extremely low relative to the U.S. case. Some students came from less wealthy EU countries, so the cost of living and average price for daily items was much higher. These EU students also received the Erasmus grant, which was used by most students to pay their room and board fees. On average, the student receives 400 euro/month. Even with this grant, the EU students also used money they saved from summer jobs and previous savings, and they also had to ask their parents for a

financial help towards the end of the semester. Two students even found part time jobs in Oslo to cover more of their expenses.

Resources used for information about Norway

Overall, both groups of students felt unprepared upon arrival in Norway. They all visited their home university study abroad office to apply, fill out paper work, and complete the logistical steps that needed to be taken. But as mentioned previously, Norway is not that common of a study abroad location. It's so uncommon in fact, that most universities don't have enough information about it or any information on Norwegian universities. Personnel in said offices often suggest that students do their own research, via the Internet or travel books. The American students also had the trouble of obtaining a study visa. Many of them had to fly to different cities or even states where a Norwegian embassy was located. Most students had already spent quite a bit of money to get this visa before even leaving for Norway, which also contributed a bit to the financial stress. Two of the EU students had friends who had studied in Norway before, and they were able to use them as a primary resource for getting information. Most students in this study frequented YouTube, social media, studyinnorway.com, and travel blogs such as Lonely Planet to learn more about studying in Norway. The SIO website proved to be a valuable resource as well.

Expectations of the semester in Oslo

The biggest expectation all students were prepared for was the relatively very high cost of things. The resources, websites, or books students describe using all constantly remind readers of the high costs in Norway. Some home universities (both EU and U.S) offered pre-departure meetings for students leaving to study abroad (country unspecific). These meetings helped students become aware of culture shock and how to handle oneself in a foreign country. Many U.S. students coming from warmer states (i.e. California, Florida) were warned about the temperate and drastic weather differences. All students were prepared for how they believed Norwegian people to be, and most didn't have hopes of making friends or getting to know any Norwegians on a personal level due to an expectation that Norwegians can be hard to get to know, or at least that making friends in Norway takes longer than is realistic in a single-semester stay. They expected nature to be breathtaking and easily accessible, they expected everyone to speak English, and they also expected their course work and classes to be difficult and challenging. The students who studied at BI chose to do so because of its high ranking, prestige, and the elite status of this particular school. The concept of paying more for a higher ranked school held true to the American students who took part in this study and all these students who attended BI in Norway also

attend a private university in their home country. The EU students chose to attend a public university, as their home universities were all public.

What the students expected to gain from their semester abroad varied. Some students didn't expect to gain anything academically; they saw it as a party semester filled with traveling and making friends. They had little to no expectations for academics and were focused primarily on social activities and getting the most out of being in a new country or continent. Other students were hoping to gain more confidence in themselves, a sense of accomplishment and gratification. One student, upon reflecting what she gained the most from the semester, stated "I am a completely changed person, I am the absolute best version of myself and I want to bring that person home with me" (Female, Oslo Met, U.S.). Another student had the opposite experience. She told the discussion group that she tried her best to become 'Norwegian,' by not smiling as much and not being as openly friendly and talkative as she would in her home country. She said by the end of the semester she felt she had "lost myself. It made me feel so isolated from others and even myself; I didn't even know who I was anymore." (Female, UiO, U.S). All the EU students hoped to gain a better grasp of the English language and better their academic English usage. Not all students felt the semester should only be a party; others were truly excited about their courses and class load. As a motivating factor to come to Norway revolved around their field of study, they were hoping to gain a deeper knowledge of said field. Many were able to complete field work in real life instead of remotely.

The biggest barriers most students faced were again related to financial issues. Even though many students had secured outside funding, the cost of living loomed over their stay and concerned all students. While tuition was much cheaper in Norway than the U.S, but the cost of living in Oslo was much higher than in most cities these students were coming from. There was also the factor that most students wouldn't be working while they were in Oslo. Income that would normally be coming in and spending more money on expenses that typically wouldn't take place in their home country (i.e. traveling) was something that all students were concerned with. The physical distance from the American students' families was worrisome; in case any emergencies happened it would be more challenging to take care of. All students stated that their families were encouraging of them to partake in a semester abroad. Nothing was holding any of the students back or making them hesitant to participate; all 16 participants agreed it was primarily the monetary situation.

Personal Qualities developed during the study stay

As students had been led to expect from various resources that Norwegians were not the most approachable people, they were prepared to do what they had to do to make friends and have a good time. The U.S. students described playing on their typical, national stereotype of being loud, friendly, and outgoing, and that proved to be successful for most of them. All students agreed that it was necessary to push oneself out of the comfort zone. All students also agreed that alcohol helped to create friendships with not only other international students, but with Norwegians. “Everyone wants to be your best friend when you’re drinking, and if that is the way to make Norwegian friends, then so be it!” (Male, BI, U.S). The EU students had a different approach to life in Norway, one student said his home country was even more cold and distant than Norway, and the only difference for him here was that “I speak English and not my native language. I appreciate that people don’t bother me and want to talk all the time” (Male, UiO, EU).

Most excited about?

‘Being in Norway’ was what all students the most were excited about. This question had the most similar answers between the two groups, regardless of the country of origin, gender, university studying at: all students had a sheer fascination with Norway. They were all excited to get out and see the world, meet new international friends, be exposed to new thoughts and ideas. Some students were even excited about the courses they had signed up to take. The U.S. students who had come for family reasons were excited to learn the Norwegian language. The dramatic weather was also something a few students were looking forward to. Some students had never experienced seasons or snow, and for them this was a new experience they were looking forward to.

Most worried about?

The biggest concern all students had was regarding money and finances. Lack of sunlight, dramatic weather, cultural differences, missing out on things happening at home, and being lonely were also discussed. The EU students were concerned about taking courses and exams in English, as they didn’t feel confident in their academic English levels. The U.S. students were more nostalgic about missing certain holidays or events that happened in the U.S while they were gone, i.e. Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Easter holidays. One student mentioned he was initially upset that he wouldn’t be able to watch the World Series of Baseball, but after he arrived to Norway and started his life here, he didn’t even remember to check the game highlights (Male, BI, U.S). Living on ones’ own was also a concern; many of

the students had never lived away from their families before or had to grocery shop and cook for themselves. “I ate a lot of bread and eggs” (Female, UiO, EU). The EU students were also more concerned with safety issues. If an accident or injury occurred, they didn’t know what they would do, who to call, etc. The least pressing concern the U.S. students discussed was the course load and passing of exams, while this concern was of higher priority for the EU students.

7.2 Experiences

This second section looks at how students experienced lined up with their expectations, their overall satisfaction with their stay in Oslo, and their experiences during the semester abroad and the lasting impressions the students took away from them.

Norwegian Culture and lifestyle

All students agreed they wished they could have gotten to know more Norwegian people while they were here. The students here with family had the opportunity to experience events such as Confirmations and traditional family dinners, but the students who had no personal tie to Norway always felt a bit distanced. The students who were involved in sports teams or student associations felt like they were able to make better connections to Norwegians, although it took almost the entirety of the semester to form these relationships. All students liked the Norwegian attitude towards nature and free time. The biggest shock to the U.S group was the amount of trust that was apparent in all aspects of life, for example being able to leave their laptop and cell phone open on a table in the University library while going to the bathroom, or not having the fear of having to lock their bicycle every time they left it outside.

Language

Some students were excited to learn the Norwegian language while they were here. This motivation was short lived for most, as they discovered it was easier to communicate in English. One student stated, “I was so excited to learn Norwegian, to be able to speak to my family and learn a second language, but Norwegians just thought it was ‘cute’ when I tried to say something and would just laugh” (Female, UiO, U.S). The EU group felt the same, a primary reason they chose to come to Norway was to improve their English language and they felt they became stronger in English after studying for a semester.

Keeping an active social life

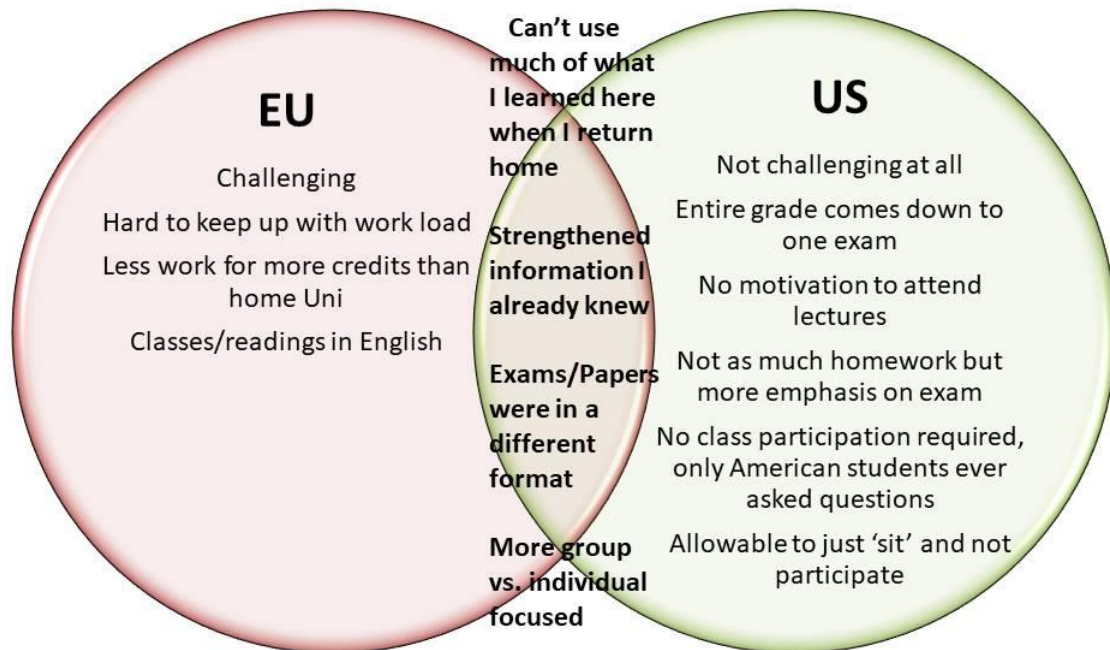
One of the most important aspects that all the students agreed upon to make friends in Oslo was the introduction of Buddy Groups and the welcome week festivities that each university puts on. This had a huge impact on the rest of the students' experiences for the semester. Students from BI, UiO, and Oslo Met all agreed that this set the overall tone for the semester. Students at BI needed to pay a fee to participate in most of the events, but it was "well worth it" (Female, BI, U.S). Events put on by the university during the rest of the semester were always well attended, especially events that "had free food. Anything with free food and I'm there" (Male, UiO, EU). All students felt like they were in similar positions, everyone was looking to make new friends and relationships, so they were more open to attend all types of events. However, the harsh spring semester weather meant long dark days filled with ice and snow. Often students wouldn't want to leave their apartments to face the climate, and this resulted in feelings of loneliness and solitude.

Cost of living

The cost of living was not as appalling as the students had previously expected. Going out to eat and buying alcohol were the most expensive activities but since many of the American students were not of legal age to purchase alcohol in the U.S, they decided the cost was justified. Many students cooked at home. The students who attended BI felt differently, they agreed it had more of an 'elite' feeling and that you had to "dress and act a certain way to fit in, which typically involved spending more money" (Male, BI, U.S). All students agreed that Grønland was the most cost-efficient location to shop for food and even the bigger supermarkets offered certain brand products at lower prices. There were a multitude of activities offered around Oslo that were free of charge and anything done in nature is free, so students were surprised at how much they could do without spending any money. The U.S students were concerned with traveling as much as they could around Europe and though they spent a lot of money, were surprised at how inexpensive it was to fly to another country. The EU students were more concerned about traveling within Norway and partook in many of the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) trips that were offered at student prices. The overall take away feelings were that yes, Norway is an expensive country to live in, but it's not nearly as bad as their resources had made it out to be.

Academic experiences and learning: the ‘real’ reason students are here?

Figure 3: Impressions of the academic environment

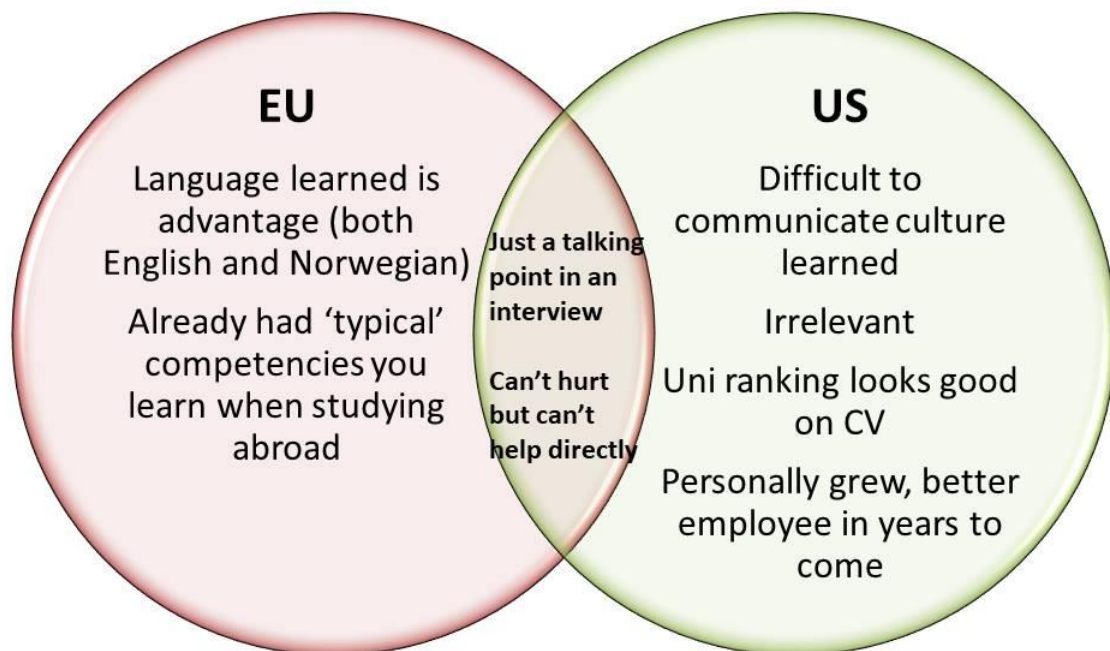


One of the most striking contrasts between the groups of students was their views on the academic environment. The EU and U.S. students had different attitudes towards the academic level here in Norway. Most students felt they didn't have to work as hard as they would have at home to achieve the same academic results. The U.S. students' views of the academic environment and the level of courses were strikingly negative. They felt there was no motivation to attend lectures, no one was held accountable to produce any work, and the only grades given for the entire semester were from the final exam. The EU students seemed to see the classes as a bit more challenging but less homework than what they were used to from their home university. Both groups agreed that the exam format was something completely different than they were used to; the idea that the professor was not present during the exam was difficult for both groups of students to grasp. Some papers and exams were in a group format and not individual, which the U.S. students had never experienced. Specifically, the students at BI were disappointed in the outcome of the courses; they were initially drawn to BI for its reputation and elite status and felt that the product did not meet the standards. Most of the students felt they didn't learn anything new, but rather relearned information that solidified what they already knew. The students who were studying environmental, natural sciences, and educational subjects were much

more academically challenged and felt their work in Norway would help them in the future, though they still agreed that the courses were not as demanding as they would have been at their home university.

Job prospects because of studying abroad?

Figure 4: Employability factor



Both groups of students had different opinions on if their study abroad experience would potentially open doors later in their careers. Both groups agreed that it was more of a talking point in an interview and that it wouldn't directly help them. The U.S. group overwhelmingly agreed that it would be difficult to communicate with an employer all of the competencies learned while abroad, as it ended up being more of a personal growth experience as opposed to an educational or professional one. However, they did agree that as a person, they become stronger and more confident, which would in turn help them in the long run. They also became more open minded and more aware of their surroundings. The EU students agreed that they already had these latter competencies and that studying abroad didn't help them grow in those specific ways. They did agree however that studying abroad helped their language skills, both Norwegian and English, and that an employer would be intrigued by their language proficiency.

International Student Enrichment?

Both student groups agreed they did not feel their international status contributed to any classroom learning environment. The U.S. group felt and experienced that other students were only interested in discussing President Trump, guns, and “if college was really like the movies” (Male, BI, U.S). EU and U.S. students were in large lecture classes where the nationality of every student was irrelevant. Some of the U.S. students felt valued for their ability to ask questions that other students were too shy to ask. They felt like they were the only students who would ever speak up in class and weren’t embarrassed to admit they didn’t understand something. These students felt like they were able to help their fellow classmates, as the others were too shy to say anything. Even in group assignments with Norwegian students, they would all interact with each other for the duration of the project and when the project was finished, so was their interaction.

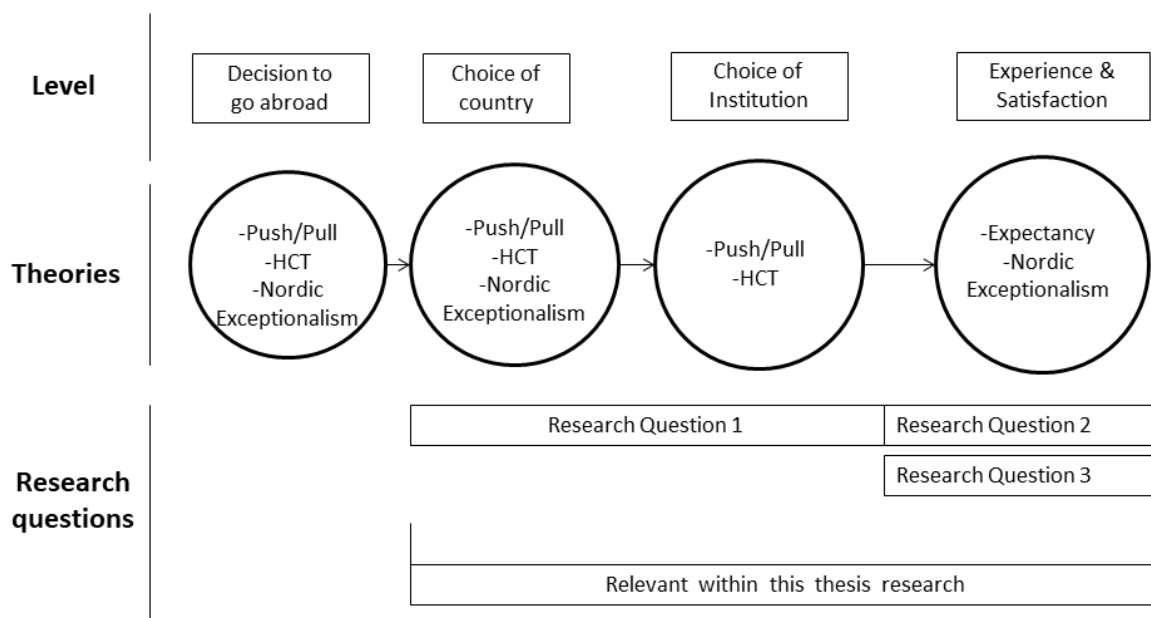
Overall, are students satisfied?

The majority of students across groups gave an overwhelming yes in terms of overall satisfaction. When asked if the students would do it again, the answer was also a resounding yes. However, this satisfaction did not reflect a sense that everything had been good, or that their expectations had been met. All students were extremely satisfied with Oslo and Norway as a study destination and wished that more students knew about it. They all decided it was the best kept secret in study abroad destinations. However, regarding academic satisfaction, most students were not satisfied. Even though they all came into this semester with the expectation that it would be more of a social semester than an academically challenging one, they were a little disappointed that these high-ranking universities didn’t have more to offer to them. Despite this, they felt they had personally grown, become more confident individuals and had a better idea of what life had to offer them. They believed they would return home as different as when they left and were excited to tell others what they had experienced.

8. Analysis of results

Having described the main results from the groups, taking a comparative approach to mapping how the students from the two regions were similar and different, this section takes more of a ‘big picture’ approach to analyzing the results, addressing the research questions one by one. After this, the results are explicitly related to and discussed in light of the theories that have been used to underpin the project and which shaped the research questions.

Figure 1: Analytical Framework overview



*HCT, Human Capital Theory

Research Question 1: What are the key ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors that draw students to Norway specifically and do these differ between the U.S. students and the EU students?

The lenses used to look through and answer the first research question were the traditional ‘Push’ and ‘pull’ migration factors, Human capital theory and Nordic exceptionalism.

Amongst both European and American students, the migratory ‘pull’ factors played a larger influence on the students’ decision making. The various ‘pull’ factors however varied between the two groups. The European students were more influenced by cost issues and

geographic proximity while the American students had more knowledge and awareness of Norwegian ratings in world reports, cost issues, and social links in regards to a family reunification idea. Pull factors that affected European students were of family or personal recommendations, political safety, social equality, the physical nature and the idea that Norway is a unique country with a good reputation and high quality of education. Speaking about academia from a pragmatic view, many students came specifically to study a subject that was specific to the Norwegian climate and geographic landscape. Pull factors that affected the American students were of social links and personal recommendations, the rankings of the country in terms of environment (safest, wealthiest, happiest, healthiest) as well as politically safe. The social equality, physical nature, and study of a specific subject were also factors for the American students.

Both groups were affected by the push factors of a known language, perceptions of quality (BI has excellent ratings as do the two other public universities), and the level of economic wealth. Even though Norway is known to be expensive, all the students were prepared. But there is also an idea of this being an elite experience. The use of the English language was a huge determining factor in choosing Norway. While the motivations behind the two groups were different, the European group wanted to better their English while the American group wanted to study in their native language, both groups were positively affected by their desire of a common language. Both groups were 'push'ed by the same factors, commonality of the English language, the economic wealth of the host country, the alleged quality of education, and the safety and security of Norway.

Some concepts and expressions used to describe the idea of Nordic Exceptionalism are: "peace loving, rational, economic flexibility, high degree of social equality" (Browning, 2007, 27) and these concepts can be seen throughout Norway's "foreign policy, international morality, and social justice" (Browning, 2007, 35) systems. Both groups of students in Norway experienced these concepts and systems even before arriving in Norway. This knowledge and awareness had a 'pull' effect on the students that drew them to study here, and not somewhere 'usual,' such as London or Barcelona. Personal recommendations were not huge motivating factors in the decision to come to Norway, but both groups were extremely interested in the environment of Norway, both physical and socio-culturally. As previously stated, Norway continues to be ranked at the top of many world reports, and a majority of the students admitted that these report rankings were what made them decide to study in Norway in the first place. For the American students, the political climate of both Norway's foreign and domestic policy is something so different to what they are used to in their home country, the political side of Nordic Exceptionalism created certain expectations

that the students hoped to learn from. These experiences have since allowed the students to compare the two political structures side by side; the instrumentality of said expectations added valence to the perceived expectations and experiences.

Human Capital theory applies more to the American students. As higher education in Norway is a good that is 'free,' this is an astounding difference to what the American students are used to in America. Most of the European students came from countries where higher education is also a good that is not necessarily free, but held at an affordable price. Regarding employment opportunities, neither group of students were led to believe their study abroad semester would help them find a career type of employment, but the Americans were more positive about the instrumentality of studying abroad. All students believed they were investing in their future by studying abroad. Some students expected that learning a new language (either Norwegian or bettering their English) would make them a better candidate in the workforce, some students believed that they were learning new competences relating to not only education but life skills in general, but overall, all students thought of this semester as an investment that would only help them, mainly indirectly, in the future.

Research question 2: Were the experiences captured throughout the semester on par with the expectations of students from both the U.S. and the EU? Did the experiences meet the expectations?

The lenses and theories used to explain this phenomenon were Nordic exceptionalism and expectancy theory.

The experiences captured by both sets of students were quite different. The American students had their social expectations met but their academic expectations often were unmet, or at least fell short in several ways. As expectancy theory states and proves in student mobility literature, students who tend to study abroad are those who desire a higher risk and reward ideology (Farrugia et al., from IIE Report, 2017). The American students overwhelmingly felt like their social expectations had been met. They came abroad with the ideal of meeting friends from new countries, traveling around Europe, experiencing a different way of life with a different thought process, and that is indeed what they received. They were however, disappointed in their academic experience. The students who attended BI were disappointed in the lack of professionalism, the lack of class structure, and the lack of new knowledge gained. They had chosen to attend this higher education institution due to its high ranking and quality reputation, and they didn't feel that their experiences met the standards which had been presented to them. It is also important to note, that all of the

American students who had never studied abroad before, had Norway as their first choice as study abroad destination (appendix A) and had never experienced any other type of educational system besides an American style education. The students therefore experienced certain things in the classroom that they hadn't expected. These misconceptions in expectations seem likely to be mainly due to inexperience and by not having information presented beforehand to clarify the differences between American and Norwegian courses or academic culture.

The European students had both their social and academic expectations met. One major difference between the two groups was that all but one European student attended either Oslo Met or the University of Oslo. All the European students attended a public university in their home country and continued to attend a public university in Oslo. Socially, the European students' expectations were met but not as fully as the American students had been. The European students were almost disappointed at how similar Norway was to their respected home countries. They didn't experience that much of a difference in daily life and many of the students were hoping for a life changing experience and seemed to expect Norway to feel more 'different' as a place to live and study. Academically, they felt they were challenged, learned a great deal of new material to be taken home with them that added to their knowledge base, and felt that taking these classes in English helped strengthen their English language skills.

Both groups seemed to have been positively affected by the "identity construct, the model, and the brand" (Browning, 2007, 27) that is Nordic Exceptionalism. The excited feeling of simply 'being in Norway' was met time and time again by students from both groups. Whether it be from the location or the notion of being an international student, all students felt they had "prove[d] to themselves and others their capacities to undertake unusual activities and to achieve autonomy" (Papatsiba, 2006, 128). All the participants had a notion that spending the semester abroad would make them better, more confident individuals, and a majority of these students left Norway feeling like a new person. This is very much in line with prior research such as Hadis' 2005, in suggesting that most students return home from a study abroad program feeling it has been very meaningful and rewarding (Hadis, 2005).

It is important to acknowledge the idea of 'choice supportive bias', or 'post purchase rationalization' in making assumptions about how satisfaction can be seen as an indicator that semesters abroad are of a high quality or a positive experience. This idea states that an individual who makes a decision often times retrospectively ascribes positive attributes to the option chosen (Welsch & Kühling, 2010). If applied to this thesis, one could note that any student who chose and committed to studying abroad in Norway would look back upon

their experience and tend only see it as a positive experience. This could indeed be a case here, but it would be necessary to carry out additional research on the subject with a larger number of participants from various other home countries.

Research question 3: What can we learn and what can be done differently to enhance the satisfaction of international students in Norway?

The contributing theories to the third and final research question were expectancy theory and Nordic exceptionalism.

From the students' perspective, the most important take away points from this data collection are that studying abroad in Norway is "the best kept secret" (Male, BI, U.S) in study abroad destinations. The students that participated in this research overwhelmingly loved their experiences here and in many regards it exceeded or at least met their expectations (with some key exceptions). As study abroad is often synonymous with the idea of academic tourism (Sanchez et al., 2006), the importance of good quality academics doesn't play the biggest role in the decision making process of when students are making a decision. Though it is a 'pull' factor, it typically is involved in the third level of decision making (Mazzoral & Soutar, 2002). In regards to the high cost of life in Norway, the data proved that the price of things wasn't actually as bad as the students had thought, regardless of American or European roots. Prices weren't as high as expected and the "concept, model and the brand" of Nordic exceptionalism all played a huge roll in the student's experiences here. Life was 'good'; things were safe, people were friendly, but it was also a cold and somewhat distant country. Students who had some kind of social link here that either came with friends, significant others, or family, had a much easier time integrating than those who didn't. Some students constantly felt lonely, that they only had other international friends and that they didn't know any real Norwegians.

The most valuable way for the universities to combat these feelings of loneliness and isolationism, is by their use of 'buddy groups.' Each university in Oslo (BI, UiO, HiOA/Oslo Met) hosts a one or two week welcome week in the beginning of the semester, which is so important for introducing students to other students. This is a service not only offered for international students but to Norwegian students alike. These groups help integrate students into both Norwegian and university life, and provide them the platform to meet other students in similar positions. According to the data collected from these discussion groups, this is the single most important event all the universities can continue to do and continue to enforce. These buddy weeks are crucial for the international student community and the experiences the students can have during these first few weeks in Norway can shape the rest of their

time here.

What is it that can be enhanced or changed in order to improve American and European students' experiences in Norway? The biggest difficulties both the European and American students had found challenging to deal with were cultural differences and educational system differences. These are not perceived as negative differences however, these differences are actually what make a study abroad experience a learning experience. Students choose to go abroad in order to learn a new system and way of thought, and that is what both groups of students in Norway were able to experience and take away. The biggest enhancement the Norwegian universities can take to ease the international student's transition into Norwegian education and culture more smoothly is to educate students more effectively to expect differences, especially in academic culture. A negative comment of both American and European students was that there was simply not enough information available about studying in Oslo, regardless of the source, whether it is their home university internationalization office or even within the Norwegian universities themselves. SIO, *Studentsamskipnaden i Oslo og Akershus*, provides a plethora of information to students once they have been accepted into a Norwegian HEI, but until that decision point students are essentially on their own to research and collect information regarding Norway. Creating more readily information would be a critical move to attracting even more international students.

The study abroad phenomenon's assessed within the data collection proved to hold true by the theories listed in the analytical framework. The following section will provide a conclusion of this thesis and suggestions for future research.

9. Conclusion and final thoughts

This conclusion will relate some of the key issues brought up throughout the thesis and reflect upon them in relation to relevant contemporary research from the study abroad literature in higher education. It will also discuss the implications of the findings and will end with suggestions for further research and development.

9.1 Reflections

As stated in the introduction, this specific study was built upon and formulated after the SIU 2016 “International Students in Norway Perceptions of Norway as a study destination” report. While there were a number of issues that the two studies are strongly in line with, there were also a few major differences, mainly the satisfaction students describe in academic experiences. According to the SIU study, the biggest reason for students to choose Norwegian education was for the English taught degree programs and courses. 69% of international students were satisfied or very satisfied with the study environment and exchange students were more satisfied than degree students (SIU, 2016). The ‘study environment’ can be defined as introductory arrangements and social and academic study environments at the individual Norwegian higher education institutions (SIU, 2016). There is also a generally high degree of satisfaction with teaching and academic supervision (71%) and 84% were satisfied with the teachers ability to teach in English (SIU, 2016). This level of satisfaction in academia between the SIU study and my own research vary greatly. The biggest reason for this discrepancy is due to the participants; the majority of participants in the SIU study were coming from European and Asian countries. There was a small representation of American students but the majority of students were from countries like Germany, France, Italy, and China. In line with my own findings, the European students were quite satisfied with their academic experience. The two studies resulted in differences because of the targeted group of student participants. The results of this study strongly suggest that American students’ experiences diverge from the overall pattern of satisfaction and efforts to understand why and better manage this group if students’ expectations might therefore be valuable.

There were also a number of similarities found between the two studies. These included the top two factors international students experienced difficulty with: the cost of living and socializing with Norwegians. Again, these two factors aligned with my data results, however my data proved that the high costs of living were so well expected, that students were

pleasantly surprised by the reality of it; while this is a significant challenge, there is a good 'match' between expectations and experiences which means it does not seem to undermine satisfaction. Socializing and getting to know Norwegians was difficult for all students, regardless of home country or data study. Another interesting factor the SIU study learned was that students admitted their main source of information and knowledge about Norway and Norwegian higher education comes from the internet and Facebook. The results from my data also showed students got a majority of information from the internet and web sources.

While both groups of students had different motivations and expectations coming into this Norwegian semester, they could all agree that their initial expectations were largely met. The 'push' and 'pull' factors were varied for the European and American students, and these factors resulted in different motivations, expectations, and experiences that the two groups of students had had. The contrasts between the groups demonstrated in the analysis of the discussion groups acts as an important reminder of the role mobile students home country has on what the students choose, expect and experience: variations in what they are looking for in their educational experience as well as socially, and what they need to survive and thrive in a new country seems to be strongly shaped by home country. In line with the SIU 2016 study and my own study, there are emerging patterns between country of origin and student expectations. To glean deeper and richer data that could pinpoint more specific students, it might prove fruitful to conduct more research into these niche areas. While Norwegian higher education institutions cannot individual cater to each student from every country, their recruitment strategies and marketing can however be tailored to geographic areas around the world.

9.2 Implications

"According to institutional strategies of Norwegian higher education institutions, recruitment of international students is a priority, having highly qualified international students is seen as a means of stimulating and improving the academic environment and fields of study but it is up to the institution to integrate international students into the social and educational environments" (SIU, 2016, 9). Norwegian Institutions want to continue to increase the number of international students and by doing so, must take responsibility for these students wellbeing. In order to do so, these students must feel their experiences are satisfactory so that they can return to their home country and become a 'pull' factor for another international student. This is a symbiotic relationship that has the ability to work for both Norwegian higher education and for the individual students themselves. Research like this thesis, alongside

the SIU 2016 report, and other national surveys such as the Student Barometer administered by NOKUT, provide one way for Norwegian higher education institutions to receive accurate feedback from students and therefore develop a richer understanding of these students' motivations and satisfaction than can be gleaned from simple increases in numbers of students applying or attending. Nordic exceptionalism may be a perspective that could be put to work more in this area, as a theoretical perspective that raises awareness of the aspects of 'something different' that Norway offers to mobile students in comparison to other countries.

Another institutional responsibility is to offer ways to integrate these students into everyday Norwegian life, at least to some limited extent. "The purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students, within domestic learning environments" (Beelen and Jones, 2015 as cited in SIU, 2016, 7) sits high on the Norwegian higher education institutions' internationalization strategic plans, as 4 out of 5 Norwegians do not study abroad (SIU, 2016). Therefore, it is critical to utilize these international dimensions as fully as possible for the local students to develop international competencies in any capacity. As seen in both studies, international students, regardless of home country, tend to have a difficult time integrating with Norwegians in both a social and an academic environment.

The three main issues international students noted were: integrating into local society, academic culture shock, and the cost of everyday living. All students claimed to have a difficult time getting to know Norwegians. American students were disappointed in their academic experience and felt a type of academic culture shock. The cost of living and Norwegian prices were higher than students were used to, BUT they were not surprised by this. The differences between these three issues impact on overall satisfaction seems to hinge on the degree of preparation and knowledge dissemination that occurred before the students' arrival. All students were well aware of the high cost of living in Norway prior to arrival. Because they learned this ahead of time, they made the proper adjustments to support themselves by saving money, working extra hours, and doing what they needed to do. When they arrived in Norway, they were not only prepared but were surprised at how costs weren't as high as they expected. Academic differences were not something that had been spoken about with the students before they came to Norway. The Bologna process has aided in creating similarities within the European education systems, therefore the EU students did not experience drastic differences in their home university versus their Norwegian university. The American students did expect differences, but did not seem prepared for the nature of these differences. They were not aware of how a Norwegian

university course schedule was laid out, what the examination was like, how classwork was to be distributed, or the grading scale. The discussion groups do seem to support the expectancy-experience perspectives assumption that it is not the overall quality or 'good times' had by the individual student, but rather about the preparation and equippedness to deal with challenging and difficult aspects that are crucial to satisfaction. The clear case in point is the financial constraints that most students experienced, or would have experienced had they not been informed ahead of time the high costs that exist in Norway. This potentially difficult scenario students could have found themselves in was turned positive, as the students have been educated about said potential challenges and information had been disseminated appropriately.

International students' main motivation to come to Norway to study abroad isn't necessarily academically related, but there can be a better alignment created between expectations and experiences of their academic career. The more information that is distributed to students ahead of time, the more they can prepare and have legitimate, fact based expectations. The element of academic culture shock is not likely to be the reason why students don't decide to study in Norway. American and European students alike will continue to choose Norway as a study abroad destination regardless of academics. It would however benefit not only the student but also the reputation of the institutions if there was information on the education system and academic structure distributed prior to arrival. 'Expectancy matching' is the biggest implication to be taken from these data sets. Students' biggest concerns about studying in Norway can easily be lessened if given the proper information ahead of time.

A secondary implication from the study here is that Norway may well have opportunities to enhance its recruitment strategy for more international students by emphasizing the uniqueness and Nordic exceptionalism brand, essentially using this as a deliberate recruiting tool. In order to do this, the students need to be informed of what they are getting themselves into and what this decision will mean for them. American students tend to choose Norway for different reasons than their fellow students' reasons for choosing to study in London or Barcelona. Norway's uniqueness should also not only be understood in terms of environmental attitudes, and culture, but the widespread perception that visiting Norway is a chance to see a political and social environment that seems an increasingly radical contrast to those in many countries, and especially to the contemporary US . These differences allow the Americans students to be exposed to a new ideas and ways of thinking, and this is something that is critical in our current time. The idea that a desire to experience political difference, or even of contemporary American politics as a new 'push' factor for students, while only suggested in the data here, is an interesting one. The literature on student

sojourns between wealthy countries tends to assume it is largely an issue of 'pull' not push factors that motivates this movement, but there may be shifts in the dynamics in where American students choose to study in the coming years.

9.3 Suggestions for further research and development

In an attempt to enhance future European and American students' satisfaction in Norway and keeping in line with the strategies of Norwegian Higher Education institutions, further qualitative and quantitative research into the realm of international student satisfaction could be pursued.

There are also two specific recommendations for Norwegian higher education institutions that the study seems to support.

The first recommendation is to continue the buddy program. This program has shown to be imperative to international student satisfaction, regardless of nationality. The first weeks of being in the host country is the most critical time for the HEI to "capture their student audience and build a relationship. Is crucial to student retention, keeping student satisfaction sufficient, and immersing the student into the new culture" (Mol, 2014, 424). Both studies (this thesis and SIU) had nothing but positive feedback from the participants involved. They reflected very positively on this buddy week experience and it has proven to be critical for the institutions to continue this program.

The second recommendation is to create a more in depth marketing material packet to be sent to university study abroad offices around the world. Targeting partner universities and higher education institutions where study abroad alumni have come from would be the most logical first step, as students at said universities are already aware of Norway as a study abroad destination. It is impossible to change an entire system based on a relatively small amount of students, it is better to educate the international students before they arrive and even before they make their decision to come to Norway. Higher satisfaction levels could be achieved if more information was available to the students *before* their arrival in Norway and even before their acceptance into their study program. Norwegian higher education institutions need to create informational material to help students develop realistic expectations, and ease into life better in Norway. Topics could include, but not be limited to: the different types of educational systems in Norway, the examination system and what to expect, the protocol and etiquette of classroom management, ideas related to cultural differences, language barriers even whilst everyone is speaking the same language, even inexpensive shopping locations and items for students to bring beforehand. As mentioned

before, there is an extreme lack of legitimate information regarding studying in Norway that result in students using sites like Facebook for information. As this was one negative experience of both groups of students in my own study, information was hard to find and it was something that had to be done individually by the student. While social media is indeed one way to gather information, it would create a stronger professional image for Norwegian higher education to have a uniform message and strategic plan for knowledge dissemination. This would in turn recruit more “qualified international students” (SIU, 2016, 9) and assist in the decision making process for students to come to Norway. As one student stated, “Norway is the best kept secret in study abroad but more people should know about it because everyone loves it here” (Male, BI, U.S.).

Lastly, the analysis and discussion here makes the case that it is important to take into account results from both qualitative and quantitative research. The SIU study was conducted on a much larger scale and was able to give an overview of international students’ perspectives in Norway. Studies like this thesis, which deal with a smaller niche group, are able to take the data from quantitative studies and break beneath the surface to decipher what is taking place, and therefore offer more insights into potential strategies for improvement. While limited in scale, this study does offer some new understandings about what drivers are taking at work in the Norwegian student mobility world of today. The traditional ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors provide a useful baseline explanation for clarifying these trends, but it is crucial to utilize various lenses like human capital theory, expectancy theory, and Nordic exceptionalism to interpret trends occurring in specific countries, in particular in countries which, like Norway, are seen as offering ‘something different’ to typical study abroad destinations.

Reference

- Altbach, P., G., Knight, J. (2007). The Internationalization of Higher Education: Motivations and Realities. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11, 290-305.
- Altbach, P. G., & Teichler, U. (2001). Internationalization and Exchanges in a Globalized University. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 5(1), 5–25.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/102831530151002>
- Anderson, P. H., Lawton, L., Rexeisen, R. J., & Hubbard, A. C. (2006). Short-term study abroad and intercultural sensitivity: A pilot study. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 30(4), 457-469. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.10.004
- Beelen, J. and E. Jones (2015). Redefining internationalization at home. The European Higher Education Area, Springer: 59-72.
- Browning, C. S. (2007). Branding Nordicity: Models, Identity and the Decline of Exceptionalism. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 42(1), 27–51.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836707073475>
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi:9780199689453.
- Chirkov, V., Vansteenkiste, M., Tao, R., & Lynch, M. (2007). The role of self-determined motivation and goals for study abroad in the adaptation of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 31(2), 199-222. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2006.03.002
- DIKU Project database. (2018, Summer). Retrieved Autumn, 2018, from <https://espresso.siu.no/projects/;jsessionid=23nz35jgv71k8wncnk6w0yh8?0&program=noram&lang=en>
- Farrugia, C., Ph.D, & Sanger, J. (2017, October). *Gaining an Employment Edge: The Impact of Study Abroad on 21st Century Skills & Career Prospects in the United States* (Rep.). Retrieved December 7, 2017, from Institute of International Education (IIE) website: <https://www.iie.org/employability>.
- Fees. (2018, January 01). Retrieved September 28, 2018, from <https://www.udi.no/en/word-definitions/fees/#link-3592>
- Friedman, Z. (2018, October 26). Student Loan Debt Statistics in 2018: A \$1.5 Trillion Crisis. Retrieved October 29, 2018, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/zackfriedman/2018/06/13/student-loan-debt-statistics-2018/#11d09cff7310>
- Gillies, D. (2015). Human Capital Theory in Education. *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 1-5. doi:10.1007/978-981-287-532-7_254-1

- Gornitzka, A., & Gulbrandsen, M. (2008). Chapter 9 Crossing the Borders: Changing Patterns and Forces of Internationalization (L. Langfeldt, Ed.). In *Higher Education Dynamics, Borderless Knowledge: Understanding the "New" Internationalisation of Research and Higher Education in Norway* (pp. 171-184). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. doi:10.1007/978-1-4020-8283-2_9
- Hadis, B. F. (Aug 2005). Why Are They Better Students when They Come Back? Determinants of Academic Focusing Gains in the Study Abroad Experience. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 11, 57-70. ERIC: EJ891463.
- Hoffa, W., & DePaul, S. C. (2010). *A history of US study abroad: 1965-present*. Carlisle, PA: Forum on Education Abroad.
- Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277–1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>.
- Immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents. (2018, March 5). Retrieved Autumn, 2018, from <https://www.ssb.no/en/befolkning/statistikker/innvbef>
- King, R. (2002). Towards a new map of European migration. *International Journal of Population Geography*, 8(2), 89-106. doi:10.1002/ijpg.246
- Kleven, Thor A. (2008). Validity and validation in qualitative and quantitative research. *Nordic Studies in Education 03/2008 Volume 28*, pp. 219-233. https://www.idunn.no/np/2008/03/validity_and_validation_in_qualitative_and_quantitative_research
- Knight, Jane. (2012). Concepts, Rationales, and Interpretive Frameworks in the Internationalization of Higher Education. *The SAGE Handbook of International Higher Education* (pg. 27-42). Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452218397.n2>
- Kondakci, Y. (2011). Student mobility reviewed: Attraction and satisfaction of international students in Turkey. *Higher Education*, 62(5), 573-592. Doi: 10.1007/s10734-011-9406-2.
- Maassen, Peter; Vabø, Agnete & Stensaker, Bjørn (2008). Translation of Globalisation and Regionalisation in Nordic Cooperation in Higher Education, In Åse Gornitzka & Liv Langfeldt (ed.), *Borderless knowledge. Understanding the "New" Internationalisation of Research and Higher Education in Norway*. Springer Science+Business Media B.V... ISBN 978-1-4020-8282-5. Kapitel 8. s 125 – 141.
- Maxwell, J. (1992). Understanding and Validity in Qualitative Research. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62(3), 279–301. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.62.3.8323320856251826>
- Mazzarol, T., & Soutar, G. N. (2002). "Push-pull" factors influencing international student destination choice. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 16(2), 82-90. doi:10.1108/09513540210418403
- Michigan State University Office of Study Abroad (2004). "Why should I study abroad?" Retrieved 5 May 2017, from <http://studyabroad.msu.edu/shared/objectives.html>.

- Mol, C. V., & Michielsen, J. (2014). The Reconstruction of a Social Network Abroad. An Analysis of the Interaction Patterns of Erasmus Students. *Mobilities*, 10(3), 423-444. doi:10.1080/17450101.2013.874837.
- Ostergard, U. (2008). Cooperation among equals: Political Culture in the Nordic Countries. In *United in Diversity: European Integration and Political Cultures*. doi:9781845112325
- NUI Study Abroad Office (2000). A beginner's guide to study abroad through NUI. Retrieved 5 May 2017, from http://www3.niu.edu/niuabroad/Begin_Guide.pdf.
- Papatsiba, V. (2006). Making higher education more European through student mobility? Revisiting EU initiatives in the context of the Bologna Process. *Comparative Education*, 42(1), 93-111. doi:10.1080/03050060500515785
- Patton, Michael Quinn (1990) *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. 2 nd ed. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Pedersen, P. J. (2010). Assessing intercultural effectiveness outcomes in a year-long study abroad program. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 34(1), 70-80. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2009.09.003
- Relyea, C., Cocchiara, F. K., & Studdard, N. L. (2008). The Effect of Perceived Value in the Decision to Participate in Study Abroad Programs. *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, 19(4), 346-361. doi:10.1080/08975930802427551
- Sánchez, C. M., Fornerino, M., & Zhang, M. (2006). Motivations and the Intent to Study Abroad Among U.S., French, and Chinese Students. *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, 18(1), 27-52. doi:10.1300/j066v18n01_03.
- Schweide, L., & Terry, R. (2013). *American Community Survey (255th ed., 2010 CENSUS PLANNING MEMO)* (United States of America, Department of Commerce, United States Census Bureau). Retrieved Fall, 2018, from https://www.census.gov/content/census/en/library/publications/2013/dec/2010_cpex_255.html
- SIU. (2016). International students in Norway 2016 - Perceptions of Norway as a study destination / Alle publikasjoner / Publikasjoner / siu SIU. Retrieved June 27, 2017, from <https://www.siu.no/publikasjoner/Alle-publikasjoner/international-students-in-norway-2016-perceptions-of-norway-as-a-study-destination>
- Smith, J. (2018, April 26). Learning Agreement - Erasmus - European Commission. Retrieved September 28, 2018, from https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/applicants/learning-agreement_en.
- Smith, M. W. (1995). Ethics in Focus Groups: A Few Concerns. *Qualitative Health Research*, 5(4), 478-486. doi:10.1177/104973239500500408
- Snyder, E. E. (2016, September). Expectancy Theory. Retrieved December 1, 2017, from [https://wikispaces.psu.edu/display/PSYCH484/Fall 2016%3A Expectancy Theory](https://wikispaces.psu.edu/display/PSYCH484/Fall+2016%3A+Expectancy+Theory).

- Statistics Norway, Division for Education Statistics. (2017). Facts about education in Norway 2018 - Key Figures 2016 [Brochure]. Author. Retrieved September 5, 2018, from https://www.ssb.no/en/utdanning/artikler-og-publikasjoner/_attachment/335543?_ts=160b64995e0
- *Study in Norway: Guide to Higher Education in Norway* [Brochure]. (2005). Retrieved October 1, 2018, from <https://www.siu.no/publikasjoner/Alle-publikasjoner/Study-in-Norway-Guide-to-Higher-Education-in-Norway-English>.
- Sutton R. and Rubin, D., (2004) The GLOSSARI project: Initial findings from a system-wide research initiative on learning outcomes from study abroad. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* (2004, fall).
- UDI: Want to apply: Study Permit. (2018, Spring). Retrieved September, 2018, from <https://www.udi.no/en/want-to-apply/studies/studietillatelse/?c=usa>.
- UiO. (2016). University of Oslo Highlights 2016. Retrieved September, 2018, from <https://www.uio.no/english/about/strategy/highlights/uio-highlights-eng-2016.pdf>
- University of Oslo. (n.d.). [Brochure]. Author. Retrieved Spring, 2017, from <https://www.uio.no/english/about/facts/figures/uio-facts-2016.pdf>
- Weissman, D., & Furnham, A. (1987). The Expectations and Experiences of a Sojourning Temporary Resident Abroad: A Preliminary Study. *Human Relations*, 40(5), 313-326. doi:10.1177/001872678704000505
- Welsch, H., & Kühling, J. (2010). Pro-environmental behavior and rational consumer choice: Evidence from surveys of life satisfaction. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 31(3), 405-420. doi:10.1016/j.joep.2010.01.009
- Wiers-Jenssen, J. (2013). Degree Mobility from the Nordic Countries: Background and Employability. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 17(4), 471–491. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315312463824>.
- World Happiness Report. (2017, March 20). World Happiness Report 2017. Retrieved from <http://worldhappiness.report/ed/2017/>
- Zimmerman, Klaus F. 1995. *European migration: push and pull* (English). Washington, D.C.:The World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/243181468771111793/European-migration-push-and-pull>

Appendices

A. Student participant breakdown

American Students				
University	Area of study	Gender	SA before?	NO first choice?
BI	Business Admin	M	no	yes
BI	Business Admin	M	yes	no
BI	International Business	F	yes	yes
BI	Business Finance	F	yes	no
BI	Business Management	F	no	yes
UiO	Earth Science	F	no	yes
UiO	Natural Resource Mgmt	M	no	Yes
UiO	Social Ecology	F	yes	Yes
UiO	Communications	F	no	yes
HiOA/OsloMet	Child Development	F	no	yes
European Students				
University	Area of Study	Gender	SA before?	NO first choice?
UiO	Education	M	no	Yes
UiO	Education	F	no	Yes
UiO	Mathematics	F	no	Yes
UiO	Business Psychology	F	no	No
UiO	Sociology	F	no	Yes
BI	Finance	M	yes	no

B. Discussion Group Guide

1. Why study abroad?
2. Why Norway? What made you decide to come to the land of Vikings and fjords?
3. Economically speaking, how was this semester funded? (Parents, school scholarship, job, etc.)
4. Where there any resources you used during your planning process? (Returned students, University career services, websites)
5. Did these resources set expectations for you
6. Either from the resources or your own thoughts and ideas, what did you expect to gain from your semester in Norway
7. Did you experience any barriers to your decision to go abroad?
8. What personal qualities and/or resources did you use to help you during your adjustment abroad?
9. What were you the most excited about during this exchange semester?
10. What were you the most worried about during this exchange semester?
11. How were your experiences with: Cold Climate, Norwegian lifestyle and culture, Language, Keeping up an active social life, getting to know Norwegians, Dealing with the cost of living?
12. Academically, was this semester more challenging? Easier?
13. Do you think this semester will eventually provide a good job opportunity? Provide competences that will be useful in other areas of life?
14. Being an international student, do you feel like you were enriching your programs academic environment?
15. Did you participate in events with other international students? Norwegian students? Why or why not.
16. Now looking back, were you satisfied with your semester? Did it meet your expectations?
17. Do you have any further comments regarding any of the above questions? Anything else in general you would like to add?

C. Consent Form

Request for participation in research project

"Motivations and Expectations of a semester in Norway"

Background and Purpose

The purpose of the project is to see what the satisfaction level is of International students here in Norway. In the past years, there have been projects completed on 'why' students choose Norway but there hasn't been any follow up to see if the students were satisfied with their exchange experience. My Master's thesis, which will be completed at the University of Oslo, will delve into these levels.

The sample will be selected from International students coming to Oslo/Norway for a one semester exchange. The sample will partake in a focus group by the participants own choice. There are a number of 'international student' themed Facebook pages for students in Oslo and Norway, and I plan to advertise my focus group on these pages, asking for participants who will be international students for only one semester. The students will then contact me if they wish to participate.

What does participation in the project imply?

The focus group will be administered on campus. It will last approximately 1 hour and will be voice recorded. The questions will concern their reasons for wanting to study abroad in the first place, any challenges they've faced throughout the process, and if their expectations have been met. I will know their first and last name (as I will have seen it through Facebook) but will not ask for their email address, as there will be no need for further contact after the focus group has been conducted.

Overall, each student will partake in one focus group, lasting approximately 1 hour.

There will be no parental consent as all the students will be University level.

What will happen to the information about you?

All personal data will be treated confidentially and anonymously.

I will be the only person with access to this data. The data will be recorded on my personal device and later kept on my personal laptop, both of which are password protected but the recording will be deleted as soon as the anonymized transcript is written.

The project is scheduled for completion by December 2018. After this date, the data will have already been made anonymous and will be deleted after my thesis defense is complete.

Voluntary participation

It is voluntary to participate in the project, and you can at any time choose to withdraw your consent without stating any reason. If you decide to withdraw, all your personal data will be made anonymous.

If you would like to participate or if you have any questions concerning the project, please contact Julie Schiering at +47 922 25 706. Or, my supervisor, Rachel Sweetman, +47 228 52897.

The study has been notified to the Data Protection Official for Research, NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

Consent for participation in the study

I have received information about the project and am willing to participate

(Signed by participant, date)

D. Student Informational Survey

- Nationality:
- Gender:
- Native language:
- Year in college:
- What are you studying?
- Where did you live i.e student housing, apartment, homestay, etc.?
- Have you studied abroad before? If so, where and how long?