

Analysis of the Relationship Between Undergraduate Graduation Abroad and University GPA: An Updated Version—A Case Study of Economics and Finance Majors in a Beijing Municipal University, Class of 2019

Zhaohan Ge*

North China University of Technology, Beijing 100144, China

**Corresponding Author.*

Abstract: With the development of The Times, the competition pressure for pursuing a postgraduate degree in China has gradually increased, and studying abroad for a postgraduate degree has become a popular choice. This paper uses descriptive statistics and comparative analysis methods to summarize the relationship between the grade points of English, mathematics, and professional courses in the 2019 graduating class of economics and Finance at a municipal university in Beijing and the situation of undergraduate students studying abroad. The average grade points of students who went abroad and all their classmates were specifically compared, as well as those of students who went to different countries and all their classmates who went abroad. At the same time, the current situation and trends of studying abroad and returning to China were analyzed, providing a reference for students who have graduated from undergraduate studies and are planning to study abroad.

Keywords: Studying Abroad; Motivation for Studying Abroad; GPA

1. Motivation and Background for Studying Abroad

In the context of globalization, international education has become increasingly accessible, and studying abroad has become an important channel for young Chinese students to broaden their horizons and enhance their knowledge.[1] Educational internationalization is a global trend, an inherent requirement for achieving educational modernization, and a necessary choice for cultivating international talent. With the growing trend of internationalization in higher education, pursuing postgraduate studies abroad has become a common choice for many

undergraduates.[2] In recent years, the increasing number of college graduates has intensified employment pressure, leading many students to pursue further education to enhance their competitiveness.[3] However, compared to studying abroad, the entrance examination for domestic graduate programs is more difficult and competitive, leading some students to set their sights on overseas postgraduate education.

2. Grade Point Average (GPA)

The Grade Point Average (GPA) is a measure of the quantity and quality of student learning, using credits and grade points as calculation units. It serves as a criterion for graduation and degree acquisition under a flexible educational system.

Statistics show that 47% (18/38) of the 2019 Economics and Finance undergraduates chose to study abroad after graduation. In applications to foreign universities, GPA is often a key indicator of academic ability. A high GPA is generally seen as reflecting strong learning ability, self-discipline, and academic potential, thus playing a crucial role in the application process. Many top universities set minimum GPA requirements, sometimes using them as a primary filter. Analyzing the role of GPA in study abroad applications and its impact on outcomes will provide valuable insights for students considering overseas education. Therefore, this paper explores the relationship between four-year undergraduate GPA and the decision to study abroad, conducting comparative analyses.

3. Data Statistics and Result Analysis

The study finds that students who studied abroad had higher average GPAs in English, mathematics, and major-specific courses over four years compared to the overall cohort, as

shown in Figure 1. Supporting this, a study by the Department of Macromolecular Science at Fudan University on the correlation between student intentions and GPAs for the classes of 2010–2012 found that 78.9% of students studying abroad had GPAs above 3.00, consistent with trends from the 2006–2009 cohorts.[2] This suggests that students intending to study abroad still generally need a GPA above the average to secure admission offers from foreign institutions.

Further comparison of the four-year average GPAs of students going to different countries with the overall average of all students studying abroad reveals that, except for Germany (with only one student and thus limited reference value), students going to other countries generally had GPAs at or above the average level of all students studying abroad, as shown in Figure 2. Specifically, students going to Hong Kong had the highest average GPA in English courses; those going to Australia had the highest in mathematics; and those going to the UK had the highest in major-specific courses. This suggests that Hong Kong may place higher emphasis on English scores, Australia on mathematics, and the UK on major-related courses.

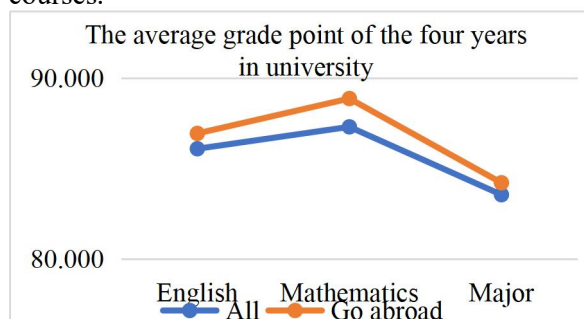


Figure 1. Line Chart of the Average Four-Year GPA of All Students and Those Who Studied Abroad after Graduation

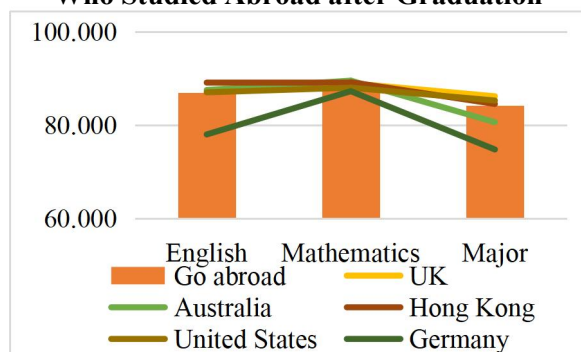


Figure 2. Clustered Column-Line Chart of the Four-Year Average GPA by Destination Country and All Students Studying Abroad

4. Basic Planning for Studying Abroad

However, many graduates lack a clear understanding of how to improve their chances of admission, leading to vague goals during the application preparation stage.[2] Studying abroad requires meeting certain requirements in academic background, language proficiency, visas, financial capability, life skills, and psychological readiness. This paper focuses on the academic performance factors. A high four-year undergraduate GPA is crucial in the application process. Requirements vary by country and institution, but top-ranked universities generally have higher GPA standards, and scores in core courses related to the applied program may be specifically considered. For example, University College London's MSc in Economics requires applicants to demonstrate academic rigor and the ability to apply technical tools to economic problems, with a GRE quantitative score above 162 and a minimum weighted average of 85%. UC Berkeley's Economics program requires a minimum GPA of 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale) and preferably at least three recommendation letters.[2]

Therefore, students should prioritize academic performance from their first year, develop a reasonable study plan, and maintain a high GPA each semester. In addition to improving the overall GPA, they should also aim for excellence in core courses related to their target field. It is advisable to clarify post-graduation plans early, understand the specific requirements of target countries and institutions, and begin preparations 1–2 years in advance, including participating in research projects or internships, preparing for standardized tests, and accumulating extracurricular experience. Furthermore, a linear regression model from East China Normal University indicates that a high GPA significantly increases admission chances. For students from lower-ranked universities, TOEFL scores, personal statements, and research experience significantly impact admission rates; for those from higher-ranked universities, recommendation letters are more influential.[2] Thus, alongside improving GPA, enhancing soft skills is also key. Finally, attention should be paid to application deadlines to ensure timely submission. Systematic planning and thorough preparation are essential for a successful application.

5. Current Status and Trends in Studying Abroad

5.1 Global Trends in Studying Abroad

Rapid changes in the international landscape have introduced uncertainties, leading to shifts in global study abroad patterns. According to the latest UNESCO data, the number of international students worldwide has grown significantly. In 2022, there were 6.86 million international students, a 2.3-fold increase from 2.11 million in 2000 and a 6.5% increase from 2021.[6]

5.2 Trends in Chinese Students Studying Abroad

Studying abroad remains an important channel for cultivating high-level international talent in China. Driven by policy support, economic development, and educational disparities, more students are opting for international education to enhance cross-cultural understanding, experience diverse educational systems, and improve their overall competencies. Since 2020, employment prospects have strongly influenced students' choice of study destinations. In 2024, the proportion of Chinese students aged 18–21 intending to study abroad rebounded sharply to 50%, while the intention among those aged 22–24 began to decline. The undergraduate stage remains the primary phase when Chinese families consider studying abroad, accounting for over 40%. In 2022, the number of Chinese students in overseas higher education institutions was 1.052 million, a 1.3% increase from 2021, essentially returning to 2019 levels.[6] Popular destinations remain concentrated in developed countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and South Korea. However, the number of students going to the U.S. and Canada has declined significantly, while numbers going to Europe, developed Asian countries and regions, and Belt and Road Initiative partner countries have increased noticeably. Chinese students' field of study is concentrated in STEM, business administration, and social sciences.[5]

6. Recommendations for Study Destinations

This section provides analysis and recommendations based on the countries/regions mentioned above and their current study abroad landscapes. According to the New Oriental Study Abroad Book Editorial Board, the top five

preferred destinations for Chinese students in recent years are the United States, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Hong Kong,[10] aligning closely with the choices of the 2019 Economics and Finance graduates from the Beijing municipal university studied here.

6.1 United States

In the 2023–2024 academic year, the number of Chinese students in the U.S. decreased significantly, with a continued decline in undergraduate enrollments, though OPT participants increased. The proportion of Chinese students studying mathematics, computer science, physical sciences, and life sciences is rising.[7] However, U.S. policies toward international students remain uncertain, so cautious consideration is advised.

6.2 Canada

The number of Chinese students in Canada is slowly recovering but remains lower than before; 77.4% are concentrated in Ontario and British Columbia. Business administration, mathematics, computer and information sciences, and social and behavioral sciences are the most popular majors. In 2023, Canada introduced policies to encourage international students to integrate into the local job market post-graduation, supporting labor market needs and long-term economic development. This welcoming attitude and potentially greater post-graduation employment opportunities make Canada a recommended destination.[7]

6.3 Australia

Australia offers post-study work visas to eligible international students. In the 2022–2023 fiscal year, China ranked third in the number of such visas granted, aiding post-graduation work and development. Chinese students are mainly concentrated in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, and the Australian Capital Territory. Compared to other countries, the impact of the pandemic on Chinese student enrollments was relatively small. However, in 2024, the Australian government increased student visa application fees, potentially adding financial burden. It also announced caps on new international student enrollments for 2025,[8] which may increase application difficulty. Prospective students should consider these factors comprehensively.

6.4 United Kingdom

The growth rate of Chinese students in the UK has slowed, but total numbers continue to rise. Taught postgraduate programs in the UK are popular among Chinese students due to their short duration and high practicality. Policies for study and high-skilled work visas have been relaxed, improving short-term job market prospects. However, the UK government may systematically reduce immigration in the long term, which requires further observation. Entry policies have been simplified, and scholarship opportunities expanded, but admission standards have risen, increasing application difficulty, academic challenges, and costs.[9] Favorable policies are accompanied by the need for stronger academic ability and greater financial support.

6.5 Hong Kong, China

Both Jinjili Education and New Oriental note that in 2025, the Hong Kong SAR government officially announced optimized visa policies, providing a more favorable environment for international students to stay and work. The

Hong Kong Education Bureau also significantly raised the enrollment quotas for mainland students in six self-financing institutions, leading to a surge in applications. However, admission standards for top Hong Kong universities are rising, with intense competition for popular majors and low admission rates. Non-popular majors have relatively relaxed policies, and interdisciplinary programs may become a trend. Although tuition fees are increasing, employment prospects are generally optimistic, with numerous opportunities in the Greater Bay Area and competitive starting salaries.

This paper further calculates the comprehensive average GPAs for English, mathematics, and major-specific courses, as shown in Table 1. Students applying to Australian universities have comprehensive average GPAs above 84; those applying to the U.S. have averages above 86; and those applying to the UK or Hong Kong have averages above 87. Therefore, considering the study abroad policies of different regions and the overall comprehensive GPAs, students can better plan and select their target countries/regions and institutions.

Table 1. Comprehensive Average GPAs for English, Mathematics, and Major Courses by Destination (UK, Australia, Hong Kong, United States)

	English	Mathematics	Major	Comprehensive GPA
UK	87.027	88.944	86.159	87.377
Australia	87.500	89.500	80.619	84.012
Hong Kong	89.083	89.167	84.524	87.591
United States	87.000	88.000	85.250	86.750

7. Post-Return Development of Returnees

Returnees are an important part of China's talent pool. Attracting them back to work or start businesses is a key strategy for strengthening the talent team, building an innovative nation, and implementing the national strategy of revitalizing China through science and education and strengthening the nation through talent.[10] In terms of policy, the 2024 "Opinions on Further Improving the Service for Returnees" fully acknowledges the value of overseas talent, explicitly incorporating them into the national employment policy system to promote high-quality, full employment.[6]

Returning to China for employment remains the mainstream choice for contemporary returnees. Master's and doctoral graduates show a stronger willingness to return immediately after graduation compared to undergraduates. In 2024, the industries most preferred by prospective returnees were finance/banking,

education/training, and IT. However, the proportion choosing finance/banking has been declining over the past five years. In 2023–2024, 84% of employers expressed recognition of overseas education, indicating a favorable overall trend for returnee employment.[10] Over 90% of returnees find employment within six months, mainly in information transmission, software and IT services, finance, scientific research and technical services, etc. The proportion working in universities or research institutions has increased significantly, while those in foreign-invested enterprises, government agencies, Party/state organs, social organizations, or self-employment has declined.[6] Salary-wise, in 2024, employers generally offered higher salaries to returnees than to domestic graduates, particularly in the monthly salary range of ¥15,000 and above.[10] Job satisfaction among returnees is also rising, though the alignment between their jobs and their field of study is decreasing.[11]

8. Conclusion

In summary, students should plan their future early during university. Those intending to study abroad should prioritize their GPA, performance in key courses, and relevant research and internship experiences. Additionally, comprehensive consideration is needed when choosing a study destination, institution, and major. Overall, the outlook for studying abroad is positive, and returning to work in China after studies offers advantages. This paper aims to provide a reference for undergraduates considering postgraduate studies abroad.

References

- [1] Tao Ran. Analysis of the Employment Situation of Overseas Returnees [J]. *China Employment*, 2024, (12): 46-47. DOI: 10.16622/j.cnki.11-3709/d.2024.12.021.
- [2] Zhang Yuhuo. Analysis and Research on Factors Affecting College Students' Admission to Study Abroad [J]. *Knowledge Library*, 2023, 39 (15): 179-182. Bao Han, Wang Fang.
- [3] Fu Saifei. The Intensification of College students' Postgraduate Entrance Examination: Manifestations, Causes and Adjustment Strategies [C]// Peking University Press Co., LTD. Proceedings of the 2024 Forum on the Construction of College Counselor Teams and Career Development. Hebei Normal University 2024: 300-303. DOI: 10.26914 / Arthur c. nkihy. 2024.026696.
- [4] Bao Han, Wang Fang. A Study on the Correlation between Early Academic Performance and Later Career Development of College Students: A Case Study of Undergraduate Students from the Department of Polymer Science, Fudan University [J]. *Career Development Education Research*, 2015, 11 (03): 124-131.
- [5] China Overseas Students Association (China Association of Overseas Students), Center for China and Globalization (CCG). *China Study Abroad Development Report (2024-2025) No.9* [M]. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press. 2025.
- [6] Wang Huiyao, Miao Lu, Zheng Jinlian. The Current Situation and Trends of Studying Abroad in China in the New Era [M]. China Overseas Students Association (China Association of Returned Overseas Students), Center for China and Globalization (CCG) China Study Abroad Development Report (2024-2025) No.9. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press. 2025 :1-38.
- [7] Zheng Jinlian, Jiang Jingrong, Zhang Yuxuan. Analysis of the Current Situation of Studying Abroad in Popular Countries in North America [M]. China Overseas Students Association (China Association of Returned Overseas Students), Center for China and Globalization (CCG) China Study Abroad Development Report (2024-2025) No.9. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press. 2025 :39-71.
- [8] Xu Zeyang, Feng Wenyuan, Guo Tengda. Analysis of the Current Situation of Studying Abroad in Popular Countries in Oceania [M]. China Overseas Students Association (China Association of Returned Overseas Students), Center for China and Globalization (CCG) China Study Abroad Development Report (2024-2025) No.9. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press. 2025 :141-164.
- [9] Xu Zeyang, He Hangyu, Feng Wenyuan. Analysis of the Current Situation of Studying Abroad in Popular European Countries [M]. China Overseas Students Association (China Association of Returned Overseas Students), Center for China and Globalization (CCG) China Study Abroad Development Report (2024-2025) No.9. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press. 2025 :72-112.
- [10] New Oriental Overseas Study Books Editorial Board. Analysis of the Development of Chinese Students Studying Abroad: Based on New Oriental's Ten-Year Market Research Data Analysis and Insights [M] China Overseas Students Association (China Association of Returned Overseas Students), Center for China and Globalization (CCG). *China Overseas Study Development Report (2024-2025) No.9*. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press. 2025 :263-299.
- [11] Cao Chen, Zhang Lin. Analysis of the Development of Overseas Students Five Years after Their Undergraduate Graduation from 2014 to 2018 [M] China Overseas Students Association (China Association of Returned Overseas Students), Center for China and Globalization (CCG). *China Overseas Study Development Report (2024-2025) No.9*. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press. 2025 :165-174.