

Texas Tech Study Abroad Re-Entry Tool Kit Spring 2020

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Photo Credit: Caleb Moushon, France 2018

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I. Re-Entry Exercise

The following exercise is meant to help you reflect on your study abroad experience. As this is for you and your eyes only, be as honest as possible.

A) Answer the following questions:

- **Name 3 things you were most looking forward to before studying abroad.**
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)

- **Name 3 things that worried you the most about going abroad.**
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)

- **Name one thing that you expected to miss while you were abroad.**

- **Name one thing you expected to miss the least while abroad.**



- **What did you think your single greatest challenge would be before you went abroad?**

B) Answer the following questions:

- **What is one thing you enjoyed most about studying abroad?**

- **What is one thing that bothered you or that you struggled with while you were abroad?**

- **What is one thing you missed most about your life in the US while you were abroad?**

- **What is one thing you missed least about your life in the US while you were abroad?**

- **What was your single greatest challenge while abroad?**

C) Compare the 2 lists of answers:

- **Based on your comparisons, do you think you romanticized your expectations?**

- **How far off were your initial perceptions or predictions?**

Often times people have preconceptions about how something will feel or be like. Just as you might have had preconceptions about study abroad (it delays graduation, I can't use financial aid, etc.), you probably had a picture you painted in your head of what your experience would look like. Do you think your preconceptions or predictions had an effect on your experience?

D) Think back to the first few days after you arrived back in the US:

- **How has your re-entry been in 3 words? Why? Could any of these responses exist because of possible preconceptions?**

- **When you look back at your experience in its entirety, what do you feel you learned about yourself? How do you plan on using this new knowledge in your daily life?**

- **What new insights do you feel you have in today's global community?**

- **What is the most interesting thing you learned while abroad? What specific occurrence helped you gain that knowledge?**



Photo Credit: Caitlin Reeve, Czech Republic 2018



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II. Reverse Culture Shock

The following information is all about culture shock; what to expect, strategies, and tips.

Reverse Culture shock is defined as the emotional and psychological distress that people suffer when they return back to their home after being abroad for a certain amount of time. There are an indefinite ways reverse culture shock can affect someone, however people normally go through 4 stages.

- 1) Disengagement: While a person is in their host country, they might begin to feel sadness at the idea of saying goodbye to the friends and connections they made while abroad. Most people are sad to leave and wish they could stay longer.
- 2) Initial Euphoria: Upon returning to a person's home country, they also might feel a sense of excitement; sometimes there is a level of comfort when one returns home and that thought can be soothing.
- 3) Irritability & Hostility: After returning to a person's home country, there can often be a feeling of disorientation, frustration, and depression. Sometimes people feel that 'home' is different than how they envisioned it.
- 4) Readjustment & Adaptation: Eventually the student will reacclimate and find comforts in old routines performed before the study abroad experience.



Photo Credit: Cody Otterbine, Japan 2018

While every person experiences reverse culture shock differently, there are thought to be common signs or symptoms:

- 1) Withdraw
- 2) Resistance towards loved ones
- 3) Boredom
- 4) Reverse homesickness
- 5) Negativity
- 6) Un-familiarization
- 7) Difficulty connecting or reconnecting
- 8) Misunderstanding of changes
- 9) Hyper-criticalness

Below are some real examples of re-entry frustration that past students have shared:

- Upon returning to the states, things are different than when I left.
- My friends and family have a lack of interest in my experiences that I had abroad. They don't see how important it was to me.
- I feel so many emotions about my study abroad experience, but I find I'm struggling to put those emotions into words.
- I'm so bored. I made a point to explore in my host country and now that I'm back, I just feel like I have nothing to do.

- My friends and family think I'm being condescending when I talk about my life in my host country; they think I'm saying it is better than the states. This is very far from the truth, I'm not saying one is better than the other, just different.

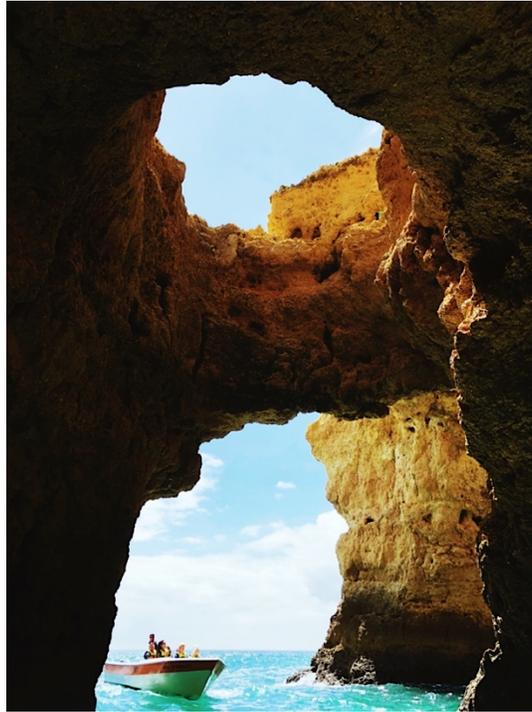


Photo Credit: Bibianna Faia, Portugal 2018

Studies have shown that the better adapted students were to their host country, the more difficult it was to return to life in the States; however that is not to say that if you hadn't fully adapted to your host country that you will have an easier time adapting to US life.

It's very possible that some of your values, attitudes, ideas, habits, likes, views, and more have changed. Additionally, the situation back in the United States has undoubtedly changed since you have been here.



Photo Credit: Kortney Klepac, Denmark 2018

Healthy Coping Strategies

While this list of strategies is not exhaustive, it is a start. Please remember to practice *healthy* coping strategies.

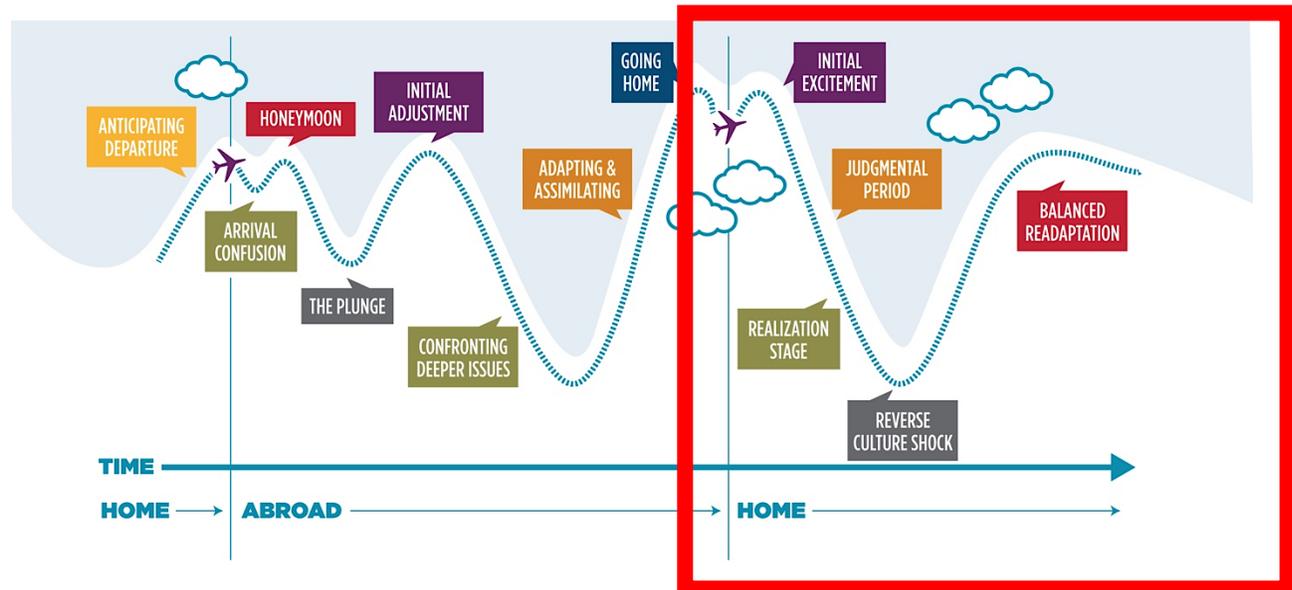
- Acknowledge there is an adjustment and that it won't come automatically. It might be difficult to adjust, and that's okay.
- Plug into a network of returning study abroad students (the Facebook group we created for you is for this purpose!)
- Share your experiences with others
- Stay connected with your host country by reading magazines, reading the local news, watching movies from your host culture. Listen to local music from your host country.
- Continue to communicate with your friends you made abroad
- Take time to acclimate being home: physically, mentally, emotionally
- Maintain a sense of humor
- Make a dish from your host culture for your friends and family back in the United States
- Once campus opens up, join a cultural student organization
- Allow yourself time; time to breath, time to grieve, time to reconnect
- Understand that what used to feel familiar, might not anymore



Photo Credit: Emily Boyes, United Kingdom 2018

Cultural Adjustment Curve

You might remember seeing a version of the cultural adjustment curve below in your Pre-Departure Orientation. Take some time to identify memories you have at each point in the beginning and middle portion of the curve. As you are now in the last portion, look at the stages you can expect to go through.



Resources

Remember, you are not alone! Please reach out if you need someone to talk to you or require any sort of assistance.

- **Texas Tech Study Abroad**
 - o While we are not in the office, we are still working and happy to take your phone call!
 - o 806-742-3667
 - o studyabroad@ttu.edu
- **Texas Tech International Engineering Programs Office**
 - o If you are an engineer, please feel free to reach out to your Program Manager
 - o 806-742-3541
 - o iep.coe@ttu.edu
- **Texas Tech Counseling**
 - o Virtual appointments available to those in the United States
 - o <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/scc/>



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III. Marketing Your Experience

The following information is meant to help you articulate your experience into marketable skills for future employers.

No matter what your future career aspirations are, you will at some point work or interact with others that are different than you. This difference can be in the form of communication style, culture, upbringing, faith, and an infinite amount of identities. During your study abroad experience, you met people from different countries, different backgrounds, different cultures, and more. Being able to work together past any differences will be a vital skill set in your job. Being able to articulate this skill is important. Thinking about the questions below will help you transform your study abroad experience into something your future employer can utilize.

What are some ideas you gained and observations you made that could be valuable in your career?

What personal qualities do you believe you gained or develop while abroad and how will you mold those qualities into skills?

Below is a non-exhaustive list of skills students tend to gain while abroad that are useful in the workplace:

- Work ethic
- Problem solving skills
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Leadership
- Independence
- Initiative
- Critical thinking
- Adaptability & flexibility
- Resourcefulness
- Sensitivity
- Cultural awareness
- Self-awareness
- And more!

Think about specific examples or memories from your time abroad that helped you gain some of the skills mentioned above. Even things that were seen as negative while abroad helped you gain a skill! Below is an example from a previous study abroad student:

“When I studied abroad, I lost my passport a few days before I was set to leave my host country. I had to do some research as to where the nearest embassy was, and I had to work to get an appointment to get a new, expedited passport before I set to leave. In those moments, I learned problem solving skills, independence, and resourcefulness.”

- *SIT Study Abroad Student*



Photo Credit: Chad Flegel, Japan 2018

It is usually a good idea to come up with an ‘elevator pitch’ that summarizes your experience for your friends and family, but you should also come up with a pitch that summarizes your skills and attributes that you learned for any potential interviews.

Your study abroad experiences surrounding COVID-19 are unique; use it to your advantage! There are many skills that you likely learned in the time between when you were told you needed to come home, to the time that you



reacclimated back to US culture. Identify those memories and figure out which skills and attributes you learned from them.



Photo Credit: Kelia Smoot, Ireland 2018

Presenting your skills:

Cover Letter:

Provide a statement about your diverse experience within a sentence or two. Be sure to mention where you studied abroad. Tie your experience to your skills and clearly articulate what you learned. An example is below.

*“Collectively, my coursework, study abroad experience, and co-curricular involvement have prepared me well for the **Senior Manager at X Company**.*

*While studying in **Host Country** in the Spring of 2020, I had the opportunity to hone my **skill** and gained insight into how to work effectively in a cross-cultural*



*situation in the context of **career**. I believe this skill will prove beneficial in working at **X Company**.”*

- *SIT Study Abroad Student*

Resume:

In your resume, you will list where you received your education however you should also list where you studied abroad. Most people list this experience under the “education” section of a resume, because it was a study abroad experience. You can also create an “international experience” section in your resume if you wish. Be sure to list the skills you gained during your study abroad experience under the “skills” section. An example is below, of course, your resume will look different, but should include relevant information to your study abroad experience.

Sample Resume Sections

John Doe	
EDUCATION	
Texas Tech University	Lubbock, Texas 05/2019
<i>Bachelor of Science in Psychology</i> <i>Minor in Sociology</i>	
University of New York in Prague	Prague, Czechia 01/2018-05/2018
<i>Cross Cultural Management and Psychology</i>	
INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE	
University of New York in Prague	Prague, Czechia 01/2018-05/2018
<i>Cross Cultural Management and Psychology</i>	
SKILLS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Microsoft Office Suite - Photoshop - Cultural Awareness - Adaptability - Resourcefulness 	



Interviews:

It's possible your interviewer won't mention or ask about your study abroad experience at all, or they might ask several. Be prepared to answer any questions about your study abroad experience positively. Below are a few examples of questions you may receive and a sample of an answer.

- 1) Why did you choose to study abroad?
 - *I chose to study abroad to enhance my cultural awareness and global competency. As we live in a global society, I recognized that studying abroad would help me. I also wanted to learn how X culture practiced Public Relations.*

- 2) What skills did you learn during your study abroad? How will these skills be beneficial at my company?
 - *During my study abroad experience I learned critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, independence, adaptability, and cultural awareness. Critical thinking skills, independence, and problem-solving skills are important aspects of any professional; being able to think through a problem for a solution without immediately going for assistance is meaningful. Cultural awareness is incredibly necessary in any career; it's possible to have many clients from many different backgrounds and you want to make sure you are respecting them. While I don't have experience with every culture I'll encounter, my experience abroad helped me recognize that there are many cultural differences, and those differences aren't wrong, they're just different.*

- 3) Tell me about your most challenging situation in college and how you handled that situation.
 - *When I studied abroad, I missed my train on my first day in my host country. I didn't speak the language, my phone was dead, I had all of my luggage, and it was late at night so there were not many workers around. I had to find a stranger to ask for help, hope they spoke English, and eventually got a new ticket for another train. I was terrified in that moment because I was in an entirely new situation without assistance and I had to think on my toes. Thinking back, it wasn't an 'end-all' situation but in that moment, I thought it was. It's helped me realize that I'm going to have struggles, but I will get through them eventually.*



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IV. References & Resources

SIT Study Abroad

<https://studyabroad.sit.edu/>

Johnson & Wales University

https://studyabroad.jwu.edu/_customtags/ct_FileRetrieve.cfm?File_ID=040673734F7B0674057671720F1F04010D0F1B7B7608776B740500017602750B7504027771767475

Texas Tech Center in Sevilla

<http://www.depts.ttu.edu/international/studyabroad/ttu-center-sevilla/>

United States State Department

<https://2009-2017.state.gov/m/fsi/tc/c56075.htm>

Texas Tech Student Counseling Center

<http://www.depts.ttu.edu/scc/>

The Forum on Education Abroad

<https://forumea.org/>

Diversity Abroad

<https://www.diversityabroad.com/>

NAFSA

<https://www.nafsa.org/>

Texas Tech Study Abroad

<http://www.depts.ttu.edu/international/studyabroad/>



Photo Credit: Taylor Rushing, Australia 2018