

**Office
of
International Affairs**

Orientation Guide

**Get Ready to
Study Abroad**



What you need to know before you go abroad

- Logistical Matters
- Travel
- Healthcare Issues
- Academic Issues
- Safety and Legal Issues
- Cultural Adjustment
- Return Adjustment

Introduction

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“So the journey is over and I’m back where I started, richer by much experience and poorer by many unexplained certainties. For convictions and certainties are too often the concomitants of ignorance. Those who like to feel they are always right and who attach a high importance to their own opinions should stay home. When one is traveling, convictions are mislaid as easily as spectacles; but unlike spectacles, they are not easily re-placed.”

Aldous Huxley

So the time has finally arrived for you to embark on the great adventure that is studying abroad. You are ready to discover new countries, interact with new cultures, and experience a life-changing adventure.

What is the most important pre-departure tip we can give you? **DO YOUR HOMEWORK!!!** Before you leave, do some basic research about the country and the city where you will study. There is no substitute for preparation. Many things you take for granted—transportation availability, food choices, interaction with others—will be different abroad. You will have to expect the unexpected. Being knowledgeable about your host country won’t prevent difficult situations from arising, but it might make it easier to resolve them.

Remember, your studying abroad experience will be what you make of it. Each person will have a unique journey, and even students attending the same university will come back with very different perceptions and stories.

Try to keep an open mind, a lot of patience and a good sense of humor. Don’t think in terms of “right or wrong”. Just recognize that other cultures may see the world in ways that are unusual to you. Be willing to talk about all aspects of American life; be ready to be questioned by others and to even question your own beliefs.

The Office of International Affairs can offer advice and guidance, but these are just a part of the equation. Remember, you are the main factor in how successful your experience abroad will be.

Logistical Matters

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Passports and Visas

Whenever you are traveling while abroad, keep your passport with you!

You should apply as soon as possible for your passport to allow enough time for processing and so that you will have your passport at least four weeks before your departure date. If you already have one, make sure that it will be valid for at least six months beyond your expected return date.

Make two copies of your passport; leave one with your parents or responsible person and take the other one with you. Do the same with any official documents, including your visa, the acceptance letter from your host university, credit cards, traveler’s checks, and immunization records.

Students are responsible for obtaining their own visas. A visa is stamped in your passport and authorizes you to remain in a certain country for a specified length of time. Each country you visit will have its own visa regulations. You should contact the nearest consulate for your host country regarding specific visa requirements. There may be a fee attached to the application. Because visa applications can take several weeks to process, you should begin applying for your visa as soon as you receive your acceptance letter and orientation materials from your host university.



International Student Identity Card (ISIC)

The International Student Identity Card (ISIC) is the only internationally accepted student ID card. With access to a global network of affordable and specialized student services, the ISIC provides discounts at museums throughout the world and can be used to obtain reduced fares for train and bus travel.

You may obtain an ISIC application from the International House. You may also purchase the ISIC online at www.statravel.com. The cost is currently \$22.

International Calling Cards, Cell Phones, Skype

You can check the US long distance carriers about getting a phone card before you leave. AT&T Direct Service, Sprint and MCI are among the telephone companies that offer easy ways to call home. Dial the access number for the country you are calling from, then dial the phone number you are calling and your calling card number. Remind friends and family at home that you may not have a phone immediately available and that you may not be able to call them as soon as you arrive.

Pay as you go cell phones can be purchased relatively inexpensively abroad. These are best utilized to make in-country phone calls while you are outside of the United States. If you have a U.S. cell phone, you can also inquire about purchasing a SIM card from your provider to make international phone calls from abroad.

Skype is excellent alternative to make international phone calls back to family and friends in the U.S. You can download Skype onto your computer at www.skype.com. If you and your loved ones have Skype, you can make computer to computer calls for free. You may also purchase Skype credits to call phones and mobiles for as little as \$.02/minute.

Mail, Fax, E-mail

Sending letters back and forth can take about a week. International postage is also more expensive than domestic postage.

Faxing mail and other documents home is a good alternative. Faxing is cheaper than long distance phone charges, but far more expensive than e-mail.

E-mail contributes to saving time when dealing with practical matters such as getting new courses approvals for a switched class or for relaying campus information to students. We encourage you to stay in contact with your academic advisor at ECU and with Brandi Dudley, Education Abroad Advisor, at the Office of International Affairs (dudleyb@ecu.edu). While we encourage you to stay in touch, we also caution you to avoid the temptation to sit at your computer all day instead of exploring daily life in your host country. Don't let your real experience become a virtual study abroad.

Banking and Budgeting

Before you go:

Budgeting

You need to find out the estimated expenses for your program. **Keep in mind that you may not be able to work while you are on the student exchange program and budget accordingly.** Remember that how much you spend abroad ultimately depends on the choices you make about travel, food, entertainment, and shopping. If you are going for a semester or year, you should take at least enough money to help you settle into your new environment.

When you arrive in your host country, you should bring about \$100 in the local currency to pay for incidentals (taxi or public transit fares, snacks or meal...). You can go to most banks to purchase foreign currency. In some cases, smaller banks may need a week to process your request. **Make sure to tell your bank you are leaving the country for an extended period!** Otherwise, you may find yourself overseas with your accounts frozen due to unusual activity. A simple phone call will keep your accounts active while abroad.

Keeping track of valuables

Write the customer service telephone numbers and account numbers for credit cards and travelers checks before you leave. Keep this information with you and copy with a responsible person at home who will accept a collect call from you in case of an emergency. Find out in advance how to replace your traveler's check and if you need to file a police report to replace them if they get stolen.

While abroad

Keeping a budget and planning ahead

Arranging to have sufficient funds for your time abroad, straightening out all the red tape at home, and finding a suitable means of transporting your money across the ocean is only half of the work involved in a successful study abroad. The other half involves carefully budgeting your money and keeping a record of your expenses while you are living abroad. By making a journal and keeping a record of your expenditures, you can minimize overspending and itemize your costs.

Dividing the amount of money you have for your time abroad by the number of weeks you'll be abroad will give you an average weekly budget will help make your money "go the distance." Buy yourself a small pocket notepad to track your expenditures. At the end of each day, write down what you have spent. Among the costs you may want to consider are:

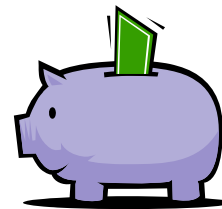
- Meals
- Special course fees
- Books and/or photocopying
- Local transportation
- Personal expenses
- Vacation expenses
- Return travel



Accessing money

Do not count on anyone sending you money via a personal check. Foreign banks normally send all personal checks drawn on American banks back to the U.S. in order to clear, and so it can take six weeks before you have your money. In order to make your financial transaction easier while abroad, you may want to arrange for a relative or other responsible person to have your "power of attorney." This person can then act on your behalf in your absence by withdrawing or making deposits into your bank account, arranging for money to be transferred into your foreign account, making credit card payments and handling any outstanding bills as necessary. Paper work for assigning power of attorney to someone can be completed at your bank. There are several sufficient means of getting money from the U.S. to you in your host country:

- ATM – Check with your bank for a list of countries where you can use your ATM card.
- Bank Draft – If your bank has an office in your host country, you can request that they issue a draft drawn from that office.
- Wiring Money – Western Union and American express will (for a fee) wire money to you anywhere in the world quickly. The money is usually available in about 3 days.



Depending on how long your exchange lasts, you may or may not want to open a bank account. Procedures for opening a bank account will vary from place to place. Check with the international student office at your host university and to study abroad alumni for their recommendations.

Money and Travel

If you travel to other countries during your program, keep in mind the following tips for exchanging money:

- You can exchange money at banks, airports, railroad stations, some tourist information offices and travel agencies, and at American Express offices.
- Many exchange offices are closed on Sundays and holidays. Know the holidays and working hours of the countries you'll be visiting!
- Your passport is usually required as identification for exchanging money.
- When traveling, try to anticipate how much money you will need for a particular country and exchange it all at one time.
- You will not be able to exchange coins when you exit the country

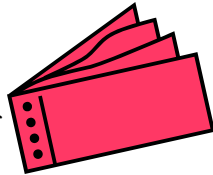


Travel Arrangements

Most programs do not provide travel arrangements, so you need to arrange your own transportation. You should book your tickets well in advance, especially if you plan to travel during the summer or any other period when air travel is heavy. Contact the international student office at your host institution to find out what arrangements have been made for the arrival and new student orientation before finalizing your flight reservations. Often a designated meeting place and time are established so that the program staff can greet students upon their arrival. Many countries list a round-trip ticket as one of their entry requirements.

Even though you may not know when you want to return home and you may have to pay a surcharge to change your return ticket, it is still cheaper to buy the round-trip ticket instead of buying two one-way tickets. Shop carefully to find a flight that best suits your needs. There are several student-focused travel agencies that offer discounts. These include Council Travel, Student Travel Association (STA), StudentUniverse, and others.

If you lose your airline ticket, contact the airline, travel agency or any other agency from which you purchased the ticket. If you bought your ticket from an airline, you will have to fill out a claim for a lost ticket and buy a new ticket. You'll be refunded the cost of the replacement ticket, minus a fee. The fee varies with each airline and it takes about six months to get your refund.



Packing

Try to start packing at least one week in advance. Set out all of the things you want to take and then reduce that amount by about half. You won't need all of it once you are there, and more than likely you will buy a lot of things while abroad. Most airlines allow you to check two suitcases of approximately 70 pounds each. However, due to rising fuel costs, many airlines are now charging extra for checked baggage (check with your air carrier for prices). Your carry-on items are limited to two bags—including a purse—and must fit under the seat in front of you or in the overhead compartment. Even if you have a total of 140 pounds authorized, "DON'T TAKE THAT MUCH!"

You will be able to buy most of the things you need wherever you are going, so pack sensibly. You may not be able to purchase certain medications like birth control, allergy medicine or some prescriptions. Note that some countries will not allow you to import certain medicines, even if you have a prescription to take those medicines. If you have questions, it is best to contact the Office of International Affairs.

Hints for effective packing:

- Keep at least a change of clothes in your carry-on in case your luggage is misdirected or lost.
- **NEVER PACK VALUABLES AND IMPORTANT PAPERS IN YOUR CHECKED LUGGAGE!!!** Keep them with you at all times in your carry-on luggage.
- You may want to divide your things and pack them in two bags. This way you will have an empty suitcase to bring back for the items you might have bought while abroad.
- Bring a backpack or some type of small versatile bag for short term or week-end travel.



Make sure your luggage has your name, home address, and telephone number not only on the outside but also on tags in the inside.

Upon Arrival

Once you arrive at the airport, you may still have some miles to cover. In most cases, you will know what your next move is – bus, train, or metro. That is something a travel agent or the airport information booth can also help you, so ask for assistance. Make sure you know your options to avoid unnecessary costs.



Traveling Abroad and Back to the U.S.

Vacations, weekends and holidays are great for traveling! It is recommended that American students not return to the U.S. for the holidays. Not only is it expensive, but the cultural adjustment period is often worse when you return. You may also want to travel before leaving the country to return home, or have your family and friends join you. You will be the “expert” on your host country and its culture! Pay attention to the end-of-term dates; you may not need to stay for the entire period of exams. Call the airline office to confirm your return tickets – most airlines require 72 hours advance notice to confirm.

Eurail Pass

Trains are one of the most widely used mode of transportation in many countries. Buying a rail-pass in the United States prior to departure can greatly reduce costs. Rail passes, such as the Britrail Pass or Eurail Pass, can be obtained from most travel agents. These passes usually offer unlimited travel for a specific amount of time. See www.raileurope.com for more information.



Immigration and Customs

When you arrive to your host country, immigration officials will ask you the purpose of your visit and how long you propose to stay in their country. They will examine your passport, as well as visa and immunization certificates if they are required. They may or may not then stamp your passport, and you are free to enter the country. Depending on local practices, and sometimes the season and time of your arrival, this procedure can range from being quick and cursory to laborious and time consuming. Even though you will be eager to exit the airport, it is important to be patient and respond very politely to any questions.

After you pass through Immigration, you will have to go through Customs. You will be asked to declare (perhaps in writing) if you are carrying certain items in your luggage. Be sure to declare any restricted items, as luggage may be opened and checked. **ALWAYS** be respectful and polite. **NEVER** make jokes about bombs or illegal drugs. This kind of behavior can get you detained by the police.

Clearing Customs on Return

When you come back to the United States, you must pass through U.S. Customs, where you will be asked to declare the value of items that you purchased abroad that you are bringing back with you. Certain items are illegal to bring back into the United States, and some require that you pay an import tax or duty. Currently, you can bring in souvenirs and gifts worth up to \$400 without paying any duty. For items costing between \$400 and \$1,400, the import duty is 10% of fair market value. Above that amount, duty varies depending on the item.



Health Insurance

The UNC system requires all students who participate in its exchange programs, including UNC-EP and ECU bi-lateral exchanges, to purchase health insurance. More information about the insurance is included in your orientation packets. Once you have finalized your travel dates, you should purchase insurance coverage from the Office of International Affairs.

Personal Health Evaluation

Check to see what health exams, tests, shots are required for participation in your program. If you are required to obtain a visa, there may be a medical evaluation component as part of the visa requirements. Try to complete all health requirements for both your program and visa at the same visit to the doctor. Even if a health evaluation is not required, it is recommended that you have one prior departure anyway.

Packing and Planning for Good Health



If you take any medication or vitamins regularly for any reason, take an adequate supply to last for your entire stay abroad and some extra, in case emergency delays your return home. If you are taking medicine that is perishable, check with your physician to find out the best way to re-order your medication. Be sure to label all medication and keep it in containers that clearly show the prescription on the label. This not only makes it easier for you to enter and exit countries, it also allows you the option of re-ordering medication from your doctor at home or a physician in your host country. Note that some countries will not allow you to import certain medicines, even if you have a prescription to take those medicines. If you have questions, it is best to contact the Office of International Affairs.

If you wear glasses or contact lenses, take an extra pair with you. You may also want to consider bringing a copy of your prescription from your doctor in the event you had to get a pair quickly.

Gastrointestinal disorders, sore throats and colds often occur more frequently in a foreign country than at home, particularly soon after your arrival. In some cases, over-the-counter medicines that treat digestive disorders and common colics may not be as available as you think. It is recommended that you bring a first aid kit customized to your needs.

Special Needs

If you have any medical or psychological condition that may require attention from a physician or psychiatrist while you are abroad, you should inform the Office of International Affairs. Because some conditions may be exacerbated or reactivated by the experience of living in a new country and culture, you may want to report earlier conditions for which you have successfully been treated (depression, eating disorders...). If you have any doubts about these matters, please check with your personal physician and/or psychiatrist and discuss them with the Office of International Affairs at ECU.

Staying Healthy While Abroad

Upon your arrival and throughout the first few days or weeks of your program, try not to overdo it. You will be going through a process of change, both of physical environment and of mental or emotional adjustment. Allow yourself to acclimatize to your new environment. Eat reasonably, and drink plenty of water. Give yourself time to do all the things you want to accomplish. Listen to your body and sleep if you are feeling tired. The adjustment you will go through is both emotionally and physically exhausting.

Host Country Medical Services

Information on local available health services, or medical care, should be provided to you by your host institution either before or after your arrival in the host country. If you are not advised by your program, you might want to consider researching the topic on your own or contact a returnee of the program.

REMEMBER: ONCE YOU LEAVE THE USA, YOU ARE NOT PROTECTED BY US LAWS

You are required to follow the law in your host country, so inform yourself as to what the law is, since a “I didn’t know it was illegal” will not get you out of jail. There is very little anyone can do if you are caught with drugs or committing a crime.

If arrested on a drug or criminal charge, it is important that you know what can and cannot be done.

The USA Consular CAN:

- Visit you in jail after being notified of your arrest. Always use your one phone call to call the nearest US Embassy or Consulate.
- Give you a list of local attorneys.
- Notify your family and/or friends and relay requests for money or other aid – but only with your authorization.
- Intercede with local authorities to make sure your rights under LOCAL law are fully observed and that you are treated humanely.
- Protest mistreatment or abuse to the appropriate authorities.

The USA Consular Office CANNOT:

- Demand your immediate release or get you out of jail.
- Represent you at trial or give legal counsel.
- Pay legal fees and/or fines with US Government funds.

Although drug and crime laws may vary in each country you visit, it is important to realize that foreign countries do not react lightly to drug and criminal offenders. For instance, anyone who is caught with even a very small quantity of drugs for personal use may be tried and receive the same sentence as a large-scale trafficker.

Safety While Abroad

Take steps to protect yourself from crime or theft. Follow the same commonsense precautions you would exercise at home:

- Do not take valuable items with you. Carry traveler’s checks and major credit cards, not large amount of cash
- Hide your valuables on your person.
- Take a copy of the identification page of your passport with you, keeping it separate from the rest of the passport itself.
- If you are alone at night, stay in well-lit areas.

Be especially alert in crowded shopping areas, airports, train stations and subways. Don’t allow yourself to become distracted.

Women Abroad

Appropriate behavior for young women varies from country to country, and even within countries. Some countries have well-defined gender roles. Others restrict certain activities for women, such as driving and meeting with men who are not relatives. You may find behavior and dress that are acceptable in major cities are inappropriate in rural areas. Sometimes, though, just the opposite is true, and behavior is more relaxed outside of metropolitan areas.

Observe how local women your age act and dress and try to do likewise. In some countries, women are routinely whistled at and even grabbed -- especially foreign women. This may be because, in some countries, the cultural stereotype of western women is that they are promiscuous. You can minimize unwanted attention by taking the following steps:

Dress modestly. Try to dress in the same style as the local women. Avoid making eye contact with men in the street. Watch the local women; see how they avoid and turn away unwanted attention, and mimic their behavior. Take a friend with you when you go out at night or to an unfamiliar area. Arrange a public meeting place when you get together with people you don't know well.

Sexual Orientation

It is advisable to do some reading before departure regarding culture-specific norms of friendship and dating for relationships between people of any sexual orientation in the country where you are headed.

Knowing about the culture-specific norms of friendship and dating for relationships between people of any sexual orientation in the country where you are headed is especially essential. Laws regarding same-sex relationships differ from country to country so you should inform yourself about those before your program begins. Travel guides and web resources can provide valuable information. For a bibliography regarding sexual orientation issues in countries outside the U.S, check the following Web site maintained by NAFSA:

<http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay>.

Preparing to be 'the American' Abroad

As you deepen your learning about your new culture, you should also be aware that in a foreign environment you will occasionally be put in the position of being a spokesperson about the United States and American culture. News accounts of happenings in the U.S. or foreign policy that moves around the world will cause some of your foreign friends and contacts to ask you searching questions. Are you sure you know enough about your own country? Returned study abroad students often remark on how they sometimes had a difficult time explaining the history, politics, and culture of the United States when pressed by their friends, much less in an academic classroom. They say they wish they had done some boning up on American history and looked at their own cultural values more critically before they went abroad. What are the American values? Will you be able to describe the characteristics of the American people to someone overseas -- our social structures, our political system? Be prepared with some answers!

Cultural Stereotypes

Frequently, the overseas stereotype of the American is far from complimentary: the boorish tourist who expects everyone to speak English, the arrogant patriot who thinks every country in the world should pattern itself after the United States, the rich American who lives like a movie star, the spoiled teenager with the carefree lifestyle – all have contributed to the development of these misleading but nevertheless convincing images in the eyes of those who may not have had much experience with other, more typical Americans. Americans are often seen to be:

- Outgoing and friendly
- Informal
- Loud, rude and boastful
- Immature
- Hard working
- Extravagant

- Overconfident
- Disrespectful of others
- Racially prejudiced
- Wealthy
- Promiscuous
- Always in a hurry

While every stereotype contains a grain of truth, it's obvious that few Americans fit all or most of the above descriptions. The challenge is to try to behave in a manner that will convince local hosts that the stereotypes do not quite fit.

Learning and Respecting Local Customs

'When in Rome, Do as the Romans Do' is not legal counsel, but rather seasoned advice to newcomers. Observe how others behave in your new host culture. You should note that what may be appropriate behavior in the US can be seen as disrespectful in other cultural contexts. In many countries, for example, women traditionally cover certain parts of the body, such as the head, arms, and legs. In others, it is frowned on for couples to hold hands or display other types of physical affection in public. Most countries have customs associated with religion and sacred places. In certain Islamic societies, non-Muslims may not enter sacred sites. In Thailand, Buddhist monks must carry out an elaborate purification ritual if a woman touches them, including sitting next to them on a bus!

Understanding local customs will help you feel a part of the new culture and avoid potentially embarrassing situations. Especially if you are not fluent in the local language, your body language is often what expresses you. Saying hello or goodbye via a simple hand gesture is, for example, done quite differently from place to place, even within Europe. When to shake hands or kiss is signaled between people in different ways from country to country. How close to sit or stand when talking also varies greatly. These are just a few of the many simple habits for you to learn and then follow in order not to give unintended offense.

A lot of books and guides are available to get more information about "intercultural living" and studying abroad. Just check your local bookstore to see what is available.

Intercultural Contact

Entering the Host Culture

As we travel abroad, we anticipate learning a lot about the host culture. What we do not always imagine how much we will learn about our own culture. Entering a new culture is an experience which causes us to think about what we have always taken for granted. Consequently, learning about other people and their culture is also learning about oneself and one's own culture.

Because we are so unaware of how our own lives are mediated by culture and language, we often find it more difficult than we expect to accept another culture, despite our recognition of what may be considered appropriate behavior in the host culture. We believe that our way of doing things is "superior" or "right." This attitude is called *ethnocentrism*, a tendency to view one's own culture as superior to all others and as a universal way of behaving. If we hold tightly to ethnocentric views, we make it all the more difficult to enter a new culture with curiosity and interest, and to be willing to accept other ways of doing things as equally valid possibilities.

Contact between one's own world view and the new may result in a series of adjustments that occur as the newcomer moves through certain stages. Some common phases range from euphoria to conflict or shock. The next stage in the adjustment process often involves comparison and evaluation. At a later stage, there may be acceptance of the host culture on its own terms, in which case, judgments are no longer made based on the way things are back home.

Viewing the host culture as an outsider, or from one's own cultural perspective, often gives an inaccurate and greatly distorted view. In contrast, the view which the host country nationals take of their own culture is one which often takes a considerable period of time for the "foreigner" to acquire aided by appropriate interest and attitude.

As you enter the host culture and learn its language, you may find yourself in transition from your own culture and language to the new. That is, you probably have learned to do new things but your way of behaving and speaking is probably not like that of your hosts. This transitional stage may be called *interculture* and *interlanguage* to capture the idea that you are not behaving like you would at home, but neither are you behaving like your hosts.

How far you move toward behaving increasingly like your hosts is up to you. Obviously, a certain degree of adaptation is highly desirable just in terms of being acceptable to your hosts. Whether you desire to behave like them is your choice; on the other hand, whether that is permitted by the host culture is a matter which is not in your control. Your motivation may be viewed on a continuum, from survival motivation or a motivation to be just like your hosts, whom you probably admire enormously in the latter case.

In any case, cultural rapport is partially up to you. How far you go in entering and adjusting to your host culture is also up to you. As with any other social encounter, the options include:

- Rejection of the host culture which, in turn, usually causes rejection of you.
- Adaptation to some extent, retaining your identity but adjusting to obvious aspect of the culture.
- Integration or assimilation to the host culture, which sometimes means rejection of your own culture, or at least temporary abandonment of it.
- Becoming bicultural and bilingual, which assumes that you learn to adapt successfully to each of the two cultures and languages so that you are accepted as a member of each by its members.

Integrating yourself into the Host Culture

One of the ways that your experience may be described is in terms of general patterns of behavior:

Culture Entry Adjustment

- | | |
|---------|-------------------|
| Stage 1 | Spectator |
| Stage 2 | Defensive Contact |
| Stage 3 | Recovery |

Culture Learning

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Stage 4 | Establishing Bona Fide Contacts |
| Stage 5 | Sorting out Meaning |
| Stage 6 | Establishing a Role |
| Stage 7 | Knowledge of Self |
| Stage 8 | Development of Needed Attributes and Skills |
| Stage 9 | Development of Meaningful Relationships |

Re-Entry

- | | |
|----------|-----------------------|
| Stage 10 | Post-sojourn Re-entry |
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Development and Cultural Adjustment

As you enter a new culture, a period of adjustment is needed. All of your familiar signs and symbols of social interaction are gone, and you may begin to feel disoriented and anxious. In your journey overseas and as you read and progress through these stages, it is important to remember the following points:

- Development can be described in terms of progress through a sequence of stages.
- A stage is identified by a task or tasks which must be negotiated.
- While the theme of one stage always predominates, several stages may be negotiated simultaneously as you shift back and forth within a certain range of exploration.
- Your progress will proceed at its own pace though norms may prescribe a time frame for negotiating individual stages or the entire developmental sequence.
- Although a specific task is identified with each stage in a developmental sequence, you will solve each in your own unique way.

Stage 1: Spectator

During your first few days or weeks, you may be insulated from in-depth contact with host nationals and the new cultural environment. You may associate with people who speak your language, as a guest or “tourist,” you may feel special and elated by the signs and newness of it all. In addition to the cultural insulation which others provide, you too may be fascinated with all the new sights and attractions. You may be more attuned to noticing similarities with home than perceiving the differences that contrast with your home culture. These similarities reinforce your sense of cultural identity. Your language facility may be minimal but perhaps adequate for the superficial interactions that are necessary.

Stage 2: Defensive Contact

After you have been in the new culture for a period of time and are less insulated and no longer treated as a guest, there may be increasing demands on you to interact with host nationals and to find ways to cope with daily needs. At this point, you will begin to notice differ-

-ences between your home and the host culture. Your initial observations, excitement and curious interest now, with more in-depth involvement in this second stage, result in reactions of disbelief, alarm, and amazement. The new culture may appear strange, bizarre, and incomprehensible and social transactions may become confusing and ambiguous. The continual uncertainty regarding cultural norms and expectations may cause you to feel disoriented and personally inadequate, and just when you need help in establishing interpersonal bonds, your language fluency may decline and seem inadequate, and your ability to solve problems can be at a minimum. As it becomes more difficult for you to cope with all these unpredictable and meaningless events, you may develop a growing sense of being different and isolated. You may reluctantly assume the role of “foreigner” with all of the negative connotations of ostracism and loneliness that that role signifies.

Stage 3: Recovery

Before entering this stage, you are confronted with a choice—either reduce tension by involving yourself in the culture or reduce tension through retreating to more superficial levels of contact. If you choose to become more involved, then this stage is a period of intense emotions. Things which previously frustrated you and which you blamed on others must now be acknowledged as your own inner conflicts. Also, you may begin to rely less on fantasy reunions with those you love in your home culture and begin to acknowledge the gulf that accompanies the painful separations. As this mourning process occurs, you will begin to re-examine relationships with your family and the meaning of previously unquestioned cultural values. In contrast to the first three stages of culture entry or “culture shock,” the six following stages of culture learning are an adaptive response which requires your active commitment and participation within the host culture. In general, culture learning refers to your process of evolving a new cultural identity as a result of integrating aspects of the new culture while retaining core aspects of your primary cultural identity.

Stage 4: Establishing Bona Fide Contacts

Once your basic survival needs are met, your focus will shift to building relationships and social affiliations. You may experience a strong need to find a friendly host figure who accepts you despite your differentness and provides empathy, feedback, and guidance. This feeling of belonging may cultivate a sense of willingness and optimism to initiate new behavior and sustain your morale in the face of failure and ridicule. You need to feel worthy of friendship and take risks in reaching out to strangers.

Stage 5: Sorting Out Meaning

At this stage you become involved in the activities of the new culture and begin the slow process of developing an understanding of the host culture from the perspective of an insider. With the hope of gaining an inside perspective, you deliberately enter new social interactions which may precipitate anxiety, failure, and censure. To cope with the social blunders and errors which will inevitably occur, you'll need humility, a sense of humor, and self-confidence.

Stage 6: Establishing a Role

In order for you to become a participating member of the new culture, you must assume a social role and this must be one acceptable within the new culture. To take on such a role, you need to learn the appropriate behavior of that role, and you are forced to acquire a new repertoire of behavior appropriate for the role you'll assume. For example, as a participant in a university exchange or study abroad program, you are faced with having to learn the appropriate behavior of a student at the university. You will need to learn to cope with uncomfortable feelings associated with assuming new behaviors and with social pressure to conform as well as feelings of inauthenticity associated with behavior that is unfamiliar to you. Aside from the difficulties associated with adopting a new role within the role structure of your host culture, you must also contend with the bicultural role. As you integrate aspects of the second culture and relinquish aspects of your home culture, you may feel that you have lost the ability to fit completely into any one culture for the moment and feel like a hybrid.

Stage 7: Knowledge of Self

Your advancement toward greater cultural learning at this point depends upon your ability to experience in-depth personal growth. The following areas are component of this growth:

- Growth in awareness of your personal identity
- Growth in self-awareness
- Growth in cultural self-awareness
- Growth in personal responsibility

Stage 8: Development of Needed Attributes and Skills

Once you are self-aware and able to function with the new culture, the next step is to begin internalizing attributes from the second culture which will facilitate participation. First, you need to become aware of the skills that are needed, and next you must commit yourself to the conscious development of the needed attributes and skills.

Stage 9: Developing Meaningful Relationships

Now you are aware of being the product of one primary culture while also being aware of being affected and enlarged by participating in a second culture. Your new skills and adaptive behavior become spontaneous, you feel as if you "belong" and you experience independence. You are able to accept and be nourished by cultural differences and similarities and are able to view yourself and others as individual human beings who are influenced by culture and upbringing. Most important, you are capable of undergoing further transition experiences which enable you to continue exploring the diversity of human life.

Stage 10: Re-entry

You enter this stage at the point in your overseas experience in which plans to return to your home culture become imminent. Because the re-entry phase is contingent upon departure plans, it will typically interrupt other stages.

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Upon returning home, you may experience an increase in self-confidence combined with an inability to utilize or apply much of what was learned abroad. In re-adjusting to your native lifestyle, you may experience role conflict, feelings of aimlessness, a sense of disillusionment and inner discontent with popular culture values in your home culture. Your re-entry period may be slightly more difficult than the initial entry adjustment and you may devise similar strategies to cope with the stress and the feeling that "I'll never fit in here again."

The following are some issues and tasks that might be areas of difficulty for you:

- Cultural Identity
- Adjustment to changes in lifestyle
- Pressure to conform
- Feeling of superiority due to international experience
- Uncertainty in interpersonal relationships
- Social alienation as a result of the sojourn
- Dissatisfaction with local customs and ritualized patterns
- Frustration as a result of conflicting attitudes
- Feelings of strangeness and/or isolation
- Unfamiliarity with new styles
- Inability to communicate or apply what has been learned overseas.

Remember those skills you developed in adjusting to the new culture overseas? Perhaps those same skills will be helpful to you as you re-adjust to your home culture.



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Reverse Culture Shock

As odd as it may sound, you should prepare yourself for a period of cultural adjustment -- or reverse culture shock -- when you come back to the United States. Returning travelers experience the same physical and emotional upheavals as in the early stages of life abroad.

In fact, many returning students are surprised to find that adjusting to life "back home" is more difficult than the adjustment they made to life in a foreign country. Why is this? While students understand that study abroad is a life-changing experience, many of them are not immediately aware of how they changed or how their experience abroad has caused them to look at life in the United States through different lenses. You may also experience a sense of loss after leaving your new friends and the life that you led while abroad.

After return, you may feel out of sync with friends and family, who may express only a polite interest in the experiences that you found fascinating. You might experience boredom and a lack of direction. You may also return to find that problems that were on hold while you were abroad -- personal issues or career questions -- are still waiting for you.

Some returning students experience particular difficulty reintegrating into the structure and expectations of academic studies. For that reason, it is advisable to allow some time between returning home and starting classes, if this is feasible.

Build on Your Experience

Even after you have readjusted to life and studies at home, you may want to build on your study abroad experience. Here are some options: Become a peer counselor for students who are considering study abroad, and help them make good planning choices. Volunteer as a "past participant" at orientations your study abroad advisor may be organizing for the next group of outbound students. Polish the language you learned by taking advanced language classes or joining a language club. Become involved with an international student as a roommate or tutor. Join an international organization. Pursue other opportunities to study, work, or travel abroad.

Your study abroad experience may propel you to begin searching for an international career as soon as you return home. The following

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will help you in this: Consult publications on working abroad, and pay attention to immigration policies in the countries that interest you. While you are abroad, make a list of contact information for anyone you meet who works in an area in which you're interested. Once home, write to them to let them know that you are interested in returning abroad to work after you graduate. Prepare a resume. Be sure to include your study abroad experience, language skills, and cross-cultural adaptation skills. Find out if agencies and companies with offices abroad recruit on your campus. Investigate jobs in the United States that have an international focus. Look into teaching English as a Second Language abroad.

Preparing to Return to ECU

Pre-Registration


An important element to think about before you leave the country is which courses you will need to take on your return. Students can register through OneStop while overseas or they can complete the paperwork prior to leaving and are then actually registered for their classes by the students' academic advisor. Previous students have used both online and telephone registration. Make sure you know what classes you will need to take before you leave—both abroad and when you get back—, check with your advisor about what is available and what you are allowed to take, and get your online pin/registration code prior to departure.

Keep in Touch

You should frequently check your ECU e-mail account to remain informed about pre-registration and other information that will affect you after you return to campus. We also encourage you to stay in contact with your academic advisor and with the Office of International Affairs, to let us know about your courses and how you are doing. After your exchange ends, we encourage you to remain involved with international activities on campus. On Fridays, International House sponsors cultural events and at the start of each semester, we are looking for volunteers to help introduce newly arrived international students to ECU and Greenville

Notes

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