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BEING BACK

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Like all good things the study abroad experience, whatever its duration, however much enjoyed or merely endured, at some point comes to an inevitably conclusion and you will return home. While you will invariably look with eagerness to the moment when you will be back on American soil, you may also want to hold on to the richness of your overseas experience for as long as possible and may even begin immediately to make plans to return. As you will have discovered, living and learning on overseas soil usually brings unanticipated dimensions of intellectual and personal maturity, independence, and an invigorated sense of direction and involvement. Besides this, it was more likely than not, fun! But, since none of the other things would have been possible had Amherst College and your program not made it possible for you to live and learn in a foreign country as a means of earning credit toward the Amherst degree, there are a variety of pragmatic ends to tie up before you resume campus residence and new studies.

Evaluation of Work Done Abroad

Review of the Transcript

As noted, you or your program should make sure that an official transcript of your course work is being sent to Amherst College Registrar, Gerald Mager, as soon as possible after the conclusion of your study program. Once this transcript is reviewed, credit will be granted and a copy will be forwarded to your department. Remember that all courses must be taken graded and passed with a C (or its equivalent) or better. Credit for your semester abroad will not be given officially until the transcript is received and processed and you have begun your next semester's courses at Amherst.

Incompletes

Professors overseas often will not accept papers and other work after the regular deadline. Because of the difficulties in handling such cases, you are urged to avoid

taking incompletes if at all possible. If you were unable to complete the course work, due to illness or other factors, the director abroad may grant an incomplete on the recommendation of the instructor.

Course Crediting

As stated, you were expected to have taken the equivalent of one Amherst semester of course credits during a semester abroad, and two semester's worth of credits during a year abroad. Keep in mind that few overseas programs follow the same format and calendar as Amherst, and distribution of credit over courses completed overseas may be very different from what you are accustomed to. Some "translation" of your transcript may be necessary; please speak with the Registrar if you have any questions regarding your academic standing.

The number of courses required of an Amherst student on a study abroad program may be different from the requirements for other participants on the same program. You will not receive more than the normal number of Amherst course credits per semester, even if you take more than the equivalent of four courses. A program that is significantly shorter than the standard 15-week Amherst semester may also result in less than four Amherst course credits, depending on the circumstances and course load. An Amherst course is the equivalent of six quarter hours or four semester hours of transferable credit. At least 15 semester hours or 24 quarter hours are therefore required to equal four Amherst course credits.

You are responsible for observing and following all necessary regulations. Ideally, you will have kept a record of all work done abroad and made copies of all your written work before turning it in, as professors abroad frequently do not return papers and examinations. You may be required to submit copies of your work in order to receive Amherst credit.

Overseas Grades

The grades you received in courses taken abroad will only be noted on your transcript from the institution of record for your study abroad program. They are not recorded on your Amherst transcript and are not used in calculating your Amherst grade point average. You must ensure that the Amherst College registrar receives the official transcript for your study abroad work. Your Amherst transcript will list only the foreign program and the courses accepted for transfer credit. Graduate schools and many employers will want to see the complete record of your work abroad, including your grades. In those cases, you will have to request transcripts from both Amherst College and the institution of record for your program. Students who believe they have grounds to dispute a grade for a course completed abroad should contact the program as soon as possible after return.

Although your study abroad courses will not be considered Amherst College courses, your decision to go away will not aversely affect your academic standing. Each year a significant number of students who have studied abroad win departmental prizes and graduate with departmental honors and as members of Phi Beta Kappa.

Evaluating your Program

You are required to complete a written evaluation of your study abroad program. Before you departed for the trip home or shortly after your return, you will have received an electronic version by email and are encouraged to fill it out and return it promptly. Hard copies are available in the Career Center. Please note that you will not be able to formally register for next semester classes until you submit this program evaluation.

Your candid evaluation is extremely important. Since students interested in studying overseas base their program choices in part on these evaluations, as perhaps did you, it is essential that they be as informative and thorough as possible. In addition, well-considered program evaluations are invaluable in the advising process and instrumental in determining whether a program should remain on Amherst's list of approved programs. Be assured that your honesty will help us help other students, but will not affect your transfer credit. If you believe the program you attended is not worthy of Amherst credit in the future or you have criticism about the way it was administered, please say so. If you gained new ways of learning and/or new knowledge as the result of your overseas experience, please say so. If you think it enriched your studies, career path, or personal maturation, please say so.

Cultural Readjustment and Reverse Culture Shock

Just as you will have had to brace yourself for a period of psychological disorientation when you left the Amherst campus and the USA, you should know that after your time abroad, you may also have to prepare yourself for a parallel period of readjustment when you return "home" (and especially to the Amherst campus). Why? Simply put, many students who have a full experience living and learning overseas find they have changed some during the process. The place you return to may also appear different than when you left it. While these changes are seldom huge, and may or may not be apparent to others, you are likely to be very aware of them. This can be confusing, particularly if you did not expect it.

Experience suggests that most returned students have strongly positive memories of what they have seen and done. Even the most difficult periods of life abroad get transformed in memories, becoming important learning experiences. With this recognition comes an inevitable sense of loss for the foreign environment that produced this evolution. Students who truly managed to settle into the new culture often describe returning as "having to become themselves again, only different." You will be aware that memories—the sights and sounds, foods and habits, acquaintances and friends that became part of your daily consciousness abroad—are fading fast.

Immediately after your return, you can probably expect to go through an initial stage of euphoria and excitement. Most people are overwhelmed by the sheer joy of being back on their native turf. But as you try to settle back into your former routine, you may recognize that your overseas experience has changed some or many of your perceptions and assumptions, your ways of doing things, even what it means to be yourself. You

might have become, in a sense, a somewhat new person. After all, that is what education is all about! But this intellectual and personal growth means that you can expect a period of disorientation as you adjust to the "new" environment at home.

The re-adjustment period is usually rather short-lived, since home will never be as foreign to you as the foreign environment you adjusted to overseas. Also, your experience of dealing successfully with culture shock abroad will have provided you with the psychological tools for dealing with the challenges of readjustment. Obviously, the more you have changed--often a by-product of the time you were away and how deeply you immersed yourself--the more difficult it will be to have things go back to a previous notion of normality. However, if you are aware of the changes (and seek to learn from them), smooth adaptation is more likely.

We suggest that you ake another look at "What's Up With Culture?," found at: http://www3.uop.edu/sis/culture/index.htm?page=/sis/culture/ Work though the modules on re-entry. This isn't a matter of "survival" as much as it is a way of exploring and processing what you have experienced and learning from it.

You may conclude that you seem to have little in common with your old friends; that beyond polite inquiries, few seem very interested in listening to you talk about your experiences abroad; that attitudes of your family and friends seem parochial; and that there is seemingly no place to go with the knowledge and skills they feel you have learned abroad. Life at home and at Amherst may seem restrictive and unexciting. There is also likely to be the fear that no one can understand what you have lived at first hand or see the changes that have come about in your outlook. Thus, while there will be an eagerness to again be home, there may also be some hesitation over resuming all the rhythms and values of Amherst academic life. Now that you are one step closer to graduation, you may have renewed anxieties about the impact of this sojourn on career and other life plans.

To some degree or another reverse culture shock is predictable. Not everyone will be hit by it, so its impact will vary. You will have matured and grown in self-reliance while abroad. You will have become accustomed to looking at the world through a different set of cultural glasses. This can result in new ways of thinking, feeling, talking, seeing. You will have met different types of people and had different kinds of conversations. You may have adjusted to a different pace of life or a different set of social norms. You may come home dressing more fashionably, slurping your soup, or arriving late for appointments, as is customary and even appropriate in some other lands. But the real changes are likely to be internal.

Some changes (e.g., in dress, manner, etc.) will be evident to parents and friends, but perhaps not to you. Other changes which you feel inside (e.g., intellectual, personal, political values) will not be obvious on the outside and may take time to become evident. Many changes will prove to be temporary, but some will endure. Long after graduation, many students who studied abroad report that the overseas experience had a greater impact on them as individuals than did anything else during their undergraduate years. But whatever valuation they put on it immediately upon their return, the recognition that

something truly important has happened to them is likely to be much clearer than what it ultimately will mean.

As you try to settle back into your former routines, you may recognize that your overseas experience has changed some of your previously held social perceptions and cultural assumptions, or even what it means to be yourself. You may seem for a while to have become, in a sense, a somewhat new person. You may not only proud of your new-found growth and independence but worry that, now, back on home ground, you may lose it, as your former life once again surrounds you.

The intensity of these “growing pains” is usually rather short-lived, since home will never be as foreign as the foreign environment you adjusted to overseas. Further, your experience of dealing successfully with culture shock abroad will have provided you with the psychological tools for dealing with the challenges of readjustment on native ground. Obviously, the more you have changed, the more difficult it will be to restore your equilibrium. However, if you and they are aware of the changes and seek to learn from them, smooth adaptation will likely follow. The key is to find strategies which integrate the growth which has taken place into your ongoing studies, career paths, social and personal relations.

After this initial period of readjustment, most students who have studied abroad readjust rather rapidly to the familiar rhythms and routines of American academic life. The experience of learning within a quite different educational system and cultural environment often has a liberating and confidence-building effect. You may even conclude, as others have done, that the overseas experience has helped you "learn how to learn" and take responsibility for your own education. Believe it or not, this is something that Amherst College hopes is the case!

You may find yourself quite eager to work hard and take advantage of the high quality of Amherst teaching and resources, something you may or may not have fully appreciated previously. You should consider informing your teachers that you have been abroad and have special expertise or perspectives to share in class. Faculty may notice significant differences in the depths of your interests, knowledge, and motivation. Find ways to incorporate some of what they have learned into your current courses. It is a general truth that returned study abroad students usually perform at a higher level of academic achievement and your grades may reflect this.

As a means of readjusting and staying in touch with the international scene, you may want to consider contacting students who have been abroad, who are currently abroad, or who are thinking about going abroad. There are many ways of maintaining contact with friends you made overseas, foreign and domestic, and also of remaining in touch with the culture you entered and now have left--via letters, e-mail, phoning, magazines, books, etc. and other modes of international communication. Discussing things and sharing experiences with others is almost always worthwhile. Remembering what it was like for you to have been, for a time, a “foreigner” should inspire you to try to get to know the many international students and scholars on the Amherst campus or native students from

“minority” backgrounds, who may themselves be feeling some of the same social dislocation and alienation you once felt when you were overseas.

The key is to build on the cross-cultural coping skills you now possess and to find conscious ways of integrating your new “self” into your evolving personal and academic life, not seeing it as a “dream” or something irrelevant to your future. Try to avoid comparing every aspect of American life to that in your host country. Such continual comparisons will be as detrimental upon your return as they would have been abroad. As a study abroad returnee you will be a valuable source of information for students learning about the various programs.

Suggested Readings and Resources:
Back in the USA: Reflecting on Your Study Abroad Experience and Putting It to Work. Dawn Kepets. 1995. 34 pp. NAFSA. $5 (plus shipping)

Cross-Cultural Re-entry: A Book of Readings. Clyde N. Austin. 1986. 284 pp. ACU Press. $14.95

Becoming A ‘Global Citizen’

Noted ‘interculturalist’ Milton Bennett has developed a developmental model of what he terms ‘Intercultural Sensitivity.’ Understanding where you are along this continuum can sometimes help you to see how far you have come during your time away and what you might yet need to work in order to become a truly ‘global citizen.’ Bennett puts ethnocentricity, the idea that one's own culture is superior, at one end of a spectrum, with "ethnorelativism," a successful blending of more than one culture, at the other end. The model has many stages and people often move subconsciously through these stages as their international and intercultural experiences grow.

He describes the following ***ethnocentric*** states:
I. Denial of Difference. No recognition of cultural difference because of isolation or intentional separation. Attribution of deficiency in intelligence or personality to culturally deviant behavior. Tendency to dehumanize outsiders.

II. Defense against Difference. Recognition of cultural difference coupled with negative evaluation of most variations from native culture - the greater the difference, the more negative the evaluation. Evolutionary view of cultural development with native culture at the acme. A tendency towards social/cultural proselytizing of "underdeveloped" cultures.

III. Reversal: Tendency to see another culture as superior while maligning one's own.

IV. Minimization of Difference**:** Recognition and acceptance of superficial cultural difference such as eating customs, etc., while holding that all human beings are essentially the same. Emphasis on the similarity of people and commonality of basic values. Tendency to define the basis of commonality in ethnocentric terms (i.e. everyone is essentially like us).

V. Physical Universalism: Emphasis on commonality of human beings in terms of physiological similarity.

VI. Transcendent Universalism: Emphasis of commonality of human beings as subordinate to a particular supernatural being, religion, or social philosophy.

He then notes the following **ethnorelative** states:
I. Acceptance of Difference: Recognition and appreciation of cultural difference in behavior and values. Acceptance of cultural differences as viable alternative solutions to the organization of human existence. Cultural relativity.

II. Adaptation of Difference: The development of communication skills that enable intercultural communication. Effective use of empathy, or frame of reference shifting, to understand and be understood across cultural boundaries.

III. Integration of Difference: The internalization of bi-cultural or multicultural frames of reference. Maintaining a definition of identity that is "marginal" to any particular culture.

References:
Bennett, Milton J. "A Developmental Approach to Training Intercultural Sensitivity." International Journal of Intercultural Relations. Vol. 10 (2). Summer 1986.
_____. "Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity." in Paige, Michael (Ed.). Cross-Cultural Orientation: New Conceptualizations and Applications. University Press. Lanham, MD. 1986.

Using What You Learned, in Your Campus Studies

Your time abroad will probably have been a wonderful way of enriching and diversifying your Amherst College education. You will have learned a tremendous amount simply from living and learning in a new social and cultural environment, from the people you meet, and from life as it vicariously unfolds. Many past Amherst students report that the study abroad experience stimulated not just a new ways of looking at themselves and the world, but new ideas about what comes after they graduate, which is to say: jobs and a career. Your remaining time on campus may perhaps, all of a sudden, seem very fleeting and precious. You may have returned with a renewed sense of purpose and direction and a clearer sense of your skills, interests, and needs, or more con-fused than ever about the future!

The names of students returning from study abroad are routinely sent to all faculty, who are encouraged to assist them to incorporate what they have learned overseas into their on-going studies. Faculty know that many returned students see the world somewhat differently than they did beforehand. They understand that living and learning on the terms of a foreign culture may have been a transformative experience for you. They also know that while most returning students come back with a new appreciation of the educational resources and values of Amherst College, there is also with an awareness that there are other styles and systems of learning. Faculty are aware that you are likely to be

proud of what you have learned about yourself and the world, and are, as a consequence, seeking ways to build on this experience, so as to keep it alive.

You should thus do what you can to incorporate what you learned while away into your courses. This is the remaining challenge of the study abroad experience. You should, when appropriate, discuss your study abroad learning with your teachers, to see if there is any way you can use what you now know in your current course work. You should also try to share your experience/gained perspective/knowledge with classmates, in class or outside it Did you learn anything about yourself as a learner? Did you miss the pressure of Amherst's 'carrot-and-stick approach to academic learning, or did you relish the freedom to learn in new and more independent ways? Did you have any teachers who were especially exciting and engaging. Did you take any courses which simply could not have been offered at Amherst? Did you find your out-of-class learning at least as valuable as what you learned in the classroom? Did you have an internship or independent study project? Share it by giving a short presentation to your classmates.

Amherst records show that, especially in Senior thesis work, students who have studied abroad do exceptionally well, often using ideas and resources they acquired during their overseas experience. A preponderance of Senior Prizes and Honors are awarded each year to students who have studied abroad.

Building Upon Your Study Abroad Experience

Here are some suggestions of campus activities that will help you keep your overseas experience alive, rather than seeing it as something apart from your domestic education:

- Stay in contact with your overseas pals, host family, program director, other Americans you met. Write letters or at least keep in regular e-mail correspondence.
- Keep in touch with news and events in the country where you spent time via newspapers, journals, and the internet. Become an expert on this country or region.
- Keep your language learning going by taking more language courses, or start a new language. Participate in a language table, visit the language houses, and maintain your proficiency by seeking out native speakers
- Submit original writing you did while abroad or reflections on what you learned or on being back to the Amherst Student, your home paper, to Transitions Abroad (www.transitionsabroad.com), a great publication on alternative work, study and travel overseas (copies in Career Center library), or to Abroad View (www.abroadviewmagazine.com).
- Get involved with clubs on campus that center around international issues and cultural heritage identity, such as AIKYA, Asian Culture House, Asian Students Association. Black Students Union, Chicano Caucus, French Club, International Students Association, Korean American Students Association, La Causa (Latino/a Organization), Russian House, Students of Mixed Heritage at Amherst College, the Diversity Coalition, or the Foreign Policy Forum

- Take courses with a strong international focus. Don't limit yourself to Amherst College courses or programs only. Mount Holyoke, Hampshire, Smith, and the University of Massachusetts offer courses in many international areas not available at Amherst
- Volunteer to help local, national, or international agencies involved in environmental concerns, human rights, relief work
- Teach English as a Second Language to members of the new immigrant community of Amherst or surrounding regions.
- Discuss your experiences with prospective participants. Your comments and advice are invaluable to interested students, and your help is very much appreciated.
- Be ready and willing to tell others about your program and overseas living experiences. Volunteer to assist with pre-departure orientation for future study away participants

Marketing Your Study Abroad Experience to Employers, Graduate Schools, and Others

You might be regretting that you didn't do more to prepare for the working world before and during you time away--something echoed by campus career advisers. Whatever your situation, mood, and plans, it is wise to begin to talk about this not only with your campus advisor, but also to make an early appointment with the staff of the Career Center. Employers generally look favorably at applicants who, in addition to having a strong academic record, also have had an "internationalizing" experience. In the increasingly globalized economy and job-market, they look even more favorably if this experience has brought a potential employee into meaningful contact with the overseas workplace.

Many study abroad programs have internship components, sometimes for credit, often not. If yours did, and you are concerned about your career development, consider taking advantage of this opening. If you participated in some sort of work project, volunteer service, etc. in the community surrounding your program, this is also something you can build upon. While Amherst does not grant credit for such workplace experiences, employers, graduate schools, and others like very favorably upon it. You are urged to visit the Amherst Career Center early after you return, and often, to learn about its services for job-hunting seniors; attend all relevant job-seekers workshops.

Make an appointment with a Peer Career Advisor to write a Resume that incorporates your overseas learning. Note the skills you learned abroad, such as: language proficiency and critical thinking, multicultural/cross-cultural experiences; adaptability and flexibility

Tips and Questions:

- Learn which firms with offices abroad recruit on the Amherst campus.

- Don't be distressed to learn that you might have to work in the U.S. first. Ascertain whether you will need a higher degree to obtain the job you want.
- What graduate entrance exams are required? Where in the U.S. or abroad can that degree be earned?
- Make time to gather and pursue short-term and more permanent work-abroad resources.
- Working with the Amherst Career Center, prepare a resume which stresses your international sojourn and what you gained from it. Make sure it adequately describes your experience abroad and all skills you acquired, including language competency.
- Keep in touch with all the contacts you gathered abroad. Write to them, stating your serious interest in returning to work in that country after graduation (if your ARE serious).
- Investigate short-session programs that teach the Teaching of English as a Second Language. Do they help with job placement?

Planning An International Career

Working for an international organization or working overseas can be an exciting way to begin or further your career. The global job market is real, as is economic interdependence. Strictly speaking, almost all work is 'global.' Goods and services these days more often than not either draw upon the resources from other countries or are sold to other countries, or both. Work forces are increasingly made up of people from many different cultural backgrounds. In almost any job, you will be supervised by people with a different background than your own; will have as colleagues people from different cultural backgrounds than your own; or you will supervise people from different cultural backgrounds than your own. In this sense, all work and all careers possess some degree of 'internationalization.'

You might first need to define what you mean by an 'international career.' Do you wish to work outside the U.S., or with an organization in the U.S. that conducts business across borders or between cultures? Lots of things follow from this distinction. Individuals who are successful in an international career tend to have studied abroad, be adventuresome, have knowledge of one or more foreign languages and be very independent.

There are a number of potential areas that recent graduates can enter into but bear in mind positions are very competitive and for the larger organizations such as the United Nations and World Bank, require a graduate degree and international experience. The U.S. Government is the largest employer of Americans overseas, with opportunities in the Peace Corps, Department of State, and Department of Commerce among the largest. Other opportunities exist with nonprofit international organizations (often referred to as NGOs), teaching, and seasonal or temporary jobs. To work with a U.S. company overseas usually you have to work in the U.S. for 2-3 years before having the opportunity to transfer abroad.

Going Back: Pursuing Other International Opportunities

Of course, having returned, you may have a yearning to go back, soon. There is no way that the many richnesses of the study abroad experience, done as part of your degree studies and with financial aid if you qualified for it, can be replicated. But, yes, there are many ways of 'returning'—and if not to the same city and country, then to another. Perhaps you now want an overseas internship, or are seeking a paid job. Perhaps, you are seeking volunteer work, or teaching. Maybe, you are qualified for a graduate fellowship, such as a Fulbright, Marshall, or Watson. Or maybe you would like to do graduate or professional school work, earning a degree from an university in another country. For any of this international opportunities, we recommend that you come in to the Career Center to explore our library of resource materials. Before you visit, you might want to begin by looking at International Opportunities on the Career Center web-page.

Applying for Post Graduate Fellowships and Scholarships

Many national fellowships and scholarships have deadlines in September and October, with even earlier internal deadlines at Amherst College. These awards include, but are not limited to: Churchill, Fulbright, Luce, Marshall, Rhodes, and Watson Fellowships. If you are interested in applying for a fellowship, you should contact the Fellowships Office during the spring semester preceding the academic year in which you plan to apply. Denise Gagnon can give you specific details about the preliminary and final application process. The Amherst College Committee on Fellowships interviews and makes nominations based on preliminary applications. You will begin the official application process after being nominated by the Committee.