Shock Talk: Re-entry Resources for Study Abroad

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

By

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Abstract

Shock Talk is a digital publication targeting Ball State University students who have recently returned from studying abroad. The purpose of the publication is to provide guidance, resources, and advice to study abroad returnees. The articles were written based on research done about the needs of returned study abroad students. The specific topics covered in the publication include: reverse culture shock, different ways to cope with re-entry, how to find resources to help with readjustment, the academic and emotional effects of studying abroad, and other ways for ongoing processing of the study abroad experience. A large portion of the publication is dedicated to connecting the study abroad experience, including coursework, internships, and work experience, to a future professional career. The published document, in PDF form, includes a cover, contents page, a note from the editor, articles, photographs, advertisements, and advice pages.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor Kelly Kirkwood for advising me through this project. Her ability to nudge, point, or (when I really needed it) shove me in the right direction - in the absolute kindest and gentlest way possible - will forever astound me. Her patience, experience, and guidance have been an immense help in the creation of a meaningful end product.

I also want to thank all of the study abroad returnees, including Gabrielle Byers, Nathan Stewart, Kyle Hayes, Jared Shrack, Bobby Holliman, Amanda Warhurst, Courtney Gutierrez, Andrew Erlandson, Breona Barth, Katie Reed, Kelly Kirkwood, and two others who wished to remain anonymous, for taking the time to write out their experiences and their advice for others. Their contributions have helped pull the entire project together, and I truly believe that their words of wisdom will speak to the intended audience better than any chart, list, or article.
Author’s Statement

The idea for this project stemmed from my desire to combine my Spanish major, my minor in Digital Publishing, and my photography hobby. The format, a digital publication, allowed me to use the skills I had previously learned in my minor classes, as well as presenting me with new design and layout challenges to solve along the way. A significant part of completing my major in Spanish was the semester I spent studying abroad. The idea for the topic of the project was born out of my own experiences re-entering the United States after studying abroad. Personally, my transition was quite difficult. I was not aware that there were so many resources available to me. It was difficult at first for me to connect with anyone who had been through a similar experience, until I began classes again and started meeting and working with international students, who understood many of my experiences very well.

Target Audience

The target audience for this publication is students who have returned to the United States very recently after studying abroad. Although the publication is intended mostly for Ball State students, U.S. students at other universities would be able to benefit from it as well, since the information is applicable across almost any school or program.

Rationale

Post-processing the experience is a phase in the study abroad process that is often overlooked. It is easy to assume that once a student has returned to his or her home country, the difficult part of studying abroad is over. However, a large portion of students experience culture shock all over again when they return home. This makes it even more important that students reflect on and grow from studying abroad. Currently at Ball State, it is mostly up to the individual student how or if they choose to process their experience. There are opportunities to
connect with international students and to talk to others about their study abroad experiences, but they are not always readily available. Some universities have focus groups or formal coursework that is required after studying abroad, which have the potential to help students immensely with their transition back to the United States. This project has been part of my own processing method, even now that it has been almost a year since I returned to the United States. Doing the research, writing the articles, finding the resources, and creating this product have allowed me to further my own reflection and processing of the semester I spent in Spain.

Description of the Product

Based on my research, the specific topics I chose to cover in the publication included the definition of reverse culture shock, ways to cope with reverse culture shock during re-entry, and how to find resources to help with readjustment. The academic and emotional effects of studying abroad were also covered, as were ways to continue to process study abroad experiences. A large portion of the publication was dedicated to relating study abroad experience, including coursework, internships, and work experience, to a future professional career.

I wrote all of the articles myself, based on the literature I had reviewed and on personal experience. I was the photographer for the images on the cover, back cover, one within the content. The other photographs were taken by fellow returnees and used with their permission. I designed the layout using Adobe InDesign and developed the final product as an interactive PDF file. This allows the reader to have access additional resources via hyperlinks.

Review of Related Literature

The specific topics covered in the publication were based on the research I did about the needs of study abroad returnees. Hadis (2005) found that 62.8% of returned study abroad students agreed with the statement “When returning from studying abroad, I experienced
REVERSE culture shock in the United States” (p. 62). The issue of reverse culture shock was one that appeared across multiple sources. Wielkiewicz (2010) found that students reported “significantly more skepticism regarding their home culture” along with their re-entry adjustments (p. 660). Although this could be perceived as a negative result of studying abroad, it could also be interpreted as allowing students to gain a “realistic appraisal of American culture after seeing it through the eyes of another culture.” Because reverse culture shock was a typical and very real part of re-entering the United States after studying abroad, my digital publication included a section on reverse culture shock and suggestions on how to handle it. This issue was also the inspiration for the title of the publication, Shock Talk.

Study abroad as it relates to future employment was another topic explored in my project. According to Armstrong (1984) forty percent of students surveyed who studied abroad in high school chose Spanish as major, with many of these students earning double majors in Spanish and another area (p. 3). A wide variety of careers were chosen based on these majors, including jobs in international business, Spanish education, medicine, translation, and law. This showed that returnees often wanted to incorporate their study abroad experience into their career choice, so career resources, tips, and links became a large part of my project. Hadis (2005) also reported that about one-third of the students surveyed returned to their host country (63). Although not all of these students returned to live there for an extended period of time, I decided that this information meant it would be useful to include links to information about working abroad in the career section as well.

Hadis (2005) also discussed the typical changes seen in study abroad returnees, stating that “one of the most noticeable changes in these students is a higher than average curiosity and interest in academic matters”, and that over half of the respondents agreed that after their return
they studied “more for the ‘pleasure of learning’ than to get a good grade” (p. 57, 63). This, combined with the maturation and independence acquired by students while abroad, was the reason the sections on academic and emotional effects were included in the publication (Hadis, 2005, p. 57).

One of the key features of the publication is that there are three sections dedicated to showcasing advice. Students who had previously studied abroad and gone through the re-entry process were quoted in these pages, which also include some photos that they provided. The quotes were taken from a survey I conducted of 16 returnees, who had studied in various parts of the world through several different schools and programs. The surveyed students were a mix of Ball State students and American students from other universities in the United States. These sections will appeal to the reader because the advice is from a peer who has actually been in a similar situation. They add a sense of reality to the idea of reverse culture shock and readjustment to one’s native country, and offer solutions that have been proven to work in the past.

**Distribution**

Possible means of distribution include email, a link in a study abroad office or other relevant newsletter, and social media such as Facebook. The advertised Ball State clubs’ Facebook pages, groups, or websites would be a particularly relevant place to post the final product so that it can reach its intended audience. The final product could be distributed electronically to returnees as they come back home, or among international clubs and groups at a university. It would be possible to develop this idea and this product into a series that is published periodically, perhaps going into more detail on one or more of the topics covered, or on other relevant subjects.
Conclusion

It is my hope that this publication will be able to help recent returnees ease the transition back into American life. I believe that the resources that are included and linked to in the product can be greatly beneficial. The tips and advice make the publication quite unique, in that it is partially by returnees, written and compiled for new returnees. The articles based in fact and the quotes based on experience pull the project together so that students re-entering the United States after studying abroad can be informed and helped through the transition.
References


SHOCK TALK
Re-entry Resources for Study Abroad

FEATURING REAL ADVICE FROM STUDENTS WHO HAVE STUDIED ABROAD

10 TIPS TO HELP COPE WITH REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK
Page 6

WHAT'S INSIDE:

• Helpful ways to relate studying abroad to your career
• Reverse culture shock: what it is and how to deal with it
• Continuing your international experience after your return

Spring 2013 issue, Vol. 1
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EDITOR’S NOTE

The creation of Shock Talk stemmed from my hope that I could give someone else - or hopefully many others - the opportunity to process their study abroad experience in a way I was not able to when I first returned. I realized when I came back from my semester in Spain that I was unprepared to deal with things like reverse culture shock and the effect my experience had on both my personal and my academic life.

For my Honors thesis, I wanted to combine my skill sets in a creative way in order to bring resources and helpful information to students going through the re-entry process. I decided to come up with a way to help study abroad returnees who were likely feeling the same way that I did when I came back to the United States. As a Spanish major, Digital Publishing minor, and photography enthusiast, I felt that a digital publication geared towards study abroad returnees would be a great way to help my peers while processing my own experience.

I hope that the information, resources, advice and information are helpful to you, the reader, and that you can find a way to relate your study abroad experience to your life in the way that works best for you.
**Reverse Culture Shock**

**Reverse Culture Shock - (n.)** “... just as adapting to a new environment away from home causes emotional stress and anxiety, so can re-adapting to one’s own home culture after an extended period in another country. This is referred to as reentry shock, reverse culture shock, reentry adjustment, or readjustment.”

(Weikleweicz, 2010, 650)

Many students who return home, especially after participation in a study abroad program that lasted for a semester or longer, find themselves experiencing difficulty readjusting to their home culture. This reverse culture shock can be presented in any number of ways. Sometimes it can cause feelings of isolation or of being misunderstood by friends and family. Sometimes it is difficult to get used to speaking a native language again, to eating local food, or to other lifestyle differences that once seemed normal. Students often report feeling skeptical about their own culture after their return, now that they have been immersed in another country’s way of life. Feeling this way is normal, and it often takes time and patience to readjust. Everyone’s experience with reverse culture shock is different, and everyone overcomes it differently.

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*The Stages of Culture Shock*

1. Everything is new, interesting, and exciting.
2. Differences become apparent and irritating. Problems occur and frustration sets in.
3. You may feel homesick, depressed and helpless.
4. You develop strategies to cope with difficulties and feelings, make new friends, and learn to adapt to the host culture.
5. You see the host as your new home and don't wish to depart or leave new friends.
6. You are excited about returning home.
7. You may feel frustrated, angry, or lonely because friends and family don't understand what you experienced and how you changed. You miss the host culture and friends, and may look for ways to return.
8. You incorporate what you learned and experienced abroad into your new life and career.
9. You gradually adjust to life at home. Things start to seem more normal and routine again, although not exactly the same.

(Schneider, Bancel, 2003, p. 188)
"... Adjusting to the faster-paced, "always working" mentality of the U.S. In Spain, everyone was more relaxed and people took their time with everything, but when I returned, I felt constantly rushed. To overcome this, I scheduled down time into my day and made sure to relax so that I could ease back into the always-on-the-go lifestyle."

-Gabrielle Byers, ISA Barcelona, Spring 2012

"Funny enough, I could put my toilet paper into the toilet was a big difference when I came home. You have to throw it in a trash can in Costa Rica."

-Nathan Stewart, KIIS Costa Rica, Summer 2012

"I had a hard time with the fact that I saw my own culture through a new lens. It was a bit disorienting to sometimes have a critical view of my own country."

-Kelly Kirkwood, Ball State London Centre, Spring 2001

"The most difficult part of returning to the United States after studying abroad was adjusting to my "comfortable" life in the United States where everything was familiar. I enjoyed the challenge of adapting to new ways of life overseas, and wished I could have that challenge as a part of my everyday life. To overcome this, I reflected on my journal that I kept while abroad and figured out ways to find new challenges for myself in the United States."

-Kyle Hayes, ISEP Edinburgh Napier University, Spring 2010

"Coming back and having people only wanting to hear a minute paraphrasing of how my trip went. I shared more with a few close friends."

-Anonymous, KIIS Argentina, Summer 2012
### REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

#### Tips for Coping

1. Stay in touch with host families & international friends
2. Use your language classes to continue practicing language skills
3. Attend a study abroad returnee workshop or conference
4. Join (or start!) a club or an organization for returnees
5. Volunteer in your school’s study abroad office
6. Help with pre-departure orientation sessions
7. Connect with international students on your home campus
8. Explore graduate programs or careers abroad
9. Share your experience by giving a formal presentation
10. Continue to keep up with current events in your host country

#### RE-ENTRY RESOURCES AROUND THE WEB

- **What’s Up with Culture?** is an online cultural training resource for study abroad. It offers materials for students preparing to go abroad, preparing for the transition back home, and those who have already returned.
- Consider attending a returnee conference, such as the [Minnesota Study Abroad Returnee Conference](#)
- Helpful materials are often available from your study abroad program or your university’s study abroad office, such as [this handout](#) (adapted from Kappler and Nokken), which lists common challenges and strategies to help process them.
THE STUDY ABROAD EFFECT

THE ACADEMIC EFFECT

Studying abroad can impact your studies, and not just by showing up on your transcript. It can lead to new academic goals, such as continuing to practice a foreign language through coursework. Taking the opportunity to learn by doing coursework in an entirely different education system may have broadened your study skills. Above all, your experience abroad has most likely impacted your desire to learn, not just so that you can pass classes or complete assignments, but for the sake of truly acquiring new knowledge and skills.

What We Bring Home

1. Improved foreign language and communication skills
2. Greater awareness of international current events and politics
3. Heightened self-awareness and independence
4. Ability to evaluate and view our own culture more objectively
5. Adaptation and coping skills, applicable to a variety of situations

Adapted from What's Up With Culture? 2.4/Seven-five Long Term Outcomes

STAYING INTERNATIONAL

One way to continue build on your study abroad experience can be to try to stay international once you've returned home. Consider engaging with the international student population on your campus at home. Chances are they are experiencing challenges similar to what you faced while you were abroad, and would appreciate your help and support. Other ways to keep your experience going include volunteering or working in the study abroad office, or helping with study abroad orientation sessions. There are plenty of opportunities to stay international, even after your return.

THE RELATIONSHIP EFFECT

Once you return home, you will find that your relationships have most likely been affected by the time you spent abroad. Just as your perceptions and attitudes have probably changed, you family and friends may have undergone changes during the time you were away. The best way to handle this is to give yourself and your relationships time to readjust. stay flexible and open, but optimistic.

Did You Know?

Approximately ⅓ of students who study abroad go abroad again
"I go to Asian markets pretty often to get the food that I like to eat. I try to keep in touch with Korean friends through social media, international texting, etc."

-Jared Shrack, Chungnam National University, Daejeon, South Korea, Spring/Fall 2011

"I have engaged quite heavily with the international student body at Ball State. I also do quite a bit of reading in international issues, keep in touch with the friends I made overseas, and enjoy foreign films."

-Kyle Hayes, ISEP-Direct Edinburgh Napier University, Spring 2010

"Shortly after my return I left for another country. I am teaching in Korea, so I guess the international bug infected me."

-Anonymous

"I've continued to stay in touch with friends . . . I also continue to listen to Spanish music and try to keep up with current events in Spain through following Spanish news organizations like El País on Twitter."

-Bobby Holliman, ISEP Almeria, Spain, Spring 2012

"I've made it an obligation to befriend at least one international student in each of my classes. After experiencing first hand how hard it is to be a foreigner, I offer any help I can provide, may it be studying for a test or a ride to Walmart. In return, I'm constantly being invited for dinner where I get to try new food and learn about their culture."

-Amanda Warhurst, ISEP Spain, Spring 2001

"I changed my entire trajectory. My study abroad experience is what led me into my current career in international education."

-Kelly Kirkwood, London Centre, Spring 2001
INTERNATIONAL CAREERS

Interested in staying international as you begin your professional career? There are a wide variety of options, both in the U.S. as well as overseas. Language Education is one option, whether it is teaching a foreign language or teaching English to non-native speakers. Careers in International Business present several options as well. Other fields, such as Medicine, Law, and Media present opportunities to use language skill or to focus on helping international populations. Jobs and internships available to U.S. citizens exist all over the world.

RESOURCES FOR THE INTERNATIONAL JOB SEARCH

• Thinking about teaching abroad? Check out these great links!

• Wanting to look for another type of employment overseas? Take a look at these links!

• Consider continuing your education abroad with graduate school in another country. You can also look into funding a project or graduate semester abroad by applying for a grant, such as the ones offered by the Fulbright Program.

MARKETING YOUR STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE

During the hiring process, an employer will often find that a majority of the resumes they receive list similar academic experiences. Study abroad experience gives you a unique skill set, which can set you apart from other job candidates. Living and studying in another country improves your adaptability and flexibility, due to the rapidly changing situations at hand. This is a highly desirable quality in an employee, especially in today's constantly-changing job market. Communication skills in a foreign language can be helpful when seeking employment. However, your experience can be advantageous even if you studied in an English-speaking country. Knowledge of international English or another country's version of English can also prove to be very useful. These skills are often sought after by employers who do business internationally. Diversity awareness is also becoming increasingly important in many workplaces, which can allow you to use your international experience professionally.
STUDY ABROAD AND YOUR CAREER

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE: … ON YOUR RESUME

Make sure that your study abroad experience is organized in the appropriate section.

- Put academic programs under the education section:
  
  Bachelor of Arts, Ball State University, Muncie, IN - Telecommunications, 2013
  Universidad Pública de Navarra, Pamplona, Spain, 09/2011-01/2012

- List internships done abroad as professional experience:
  
  Information Technology Assistant, Channel 12 News
  Dublin, Ireland, 01/2011-05/2011

- Work programs can be listed as professional experience as well. If the job was unrelated to your field, focus what you learned.
  
  Colegio Jesus Maria, Sevilla, Spain
  Helped students of various grade levels practice their English conversation and grammar skills, aided teachers in lesson planning for English courses

- Include specific skills you gained or improved upon while abroad under a section for skills or proficiencies.

... IN JOB INTERVIEWS

When your interviewer mentions your study abroad experience, take it as your opportunity to go beyond a simple, few word response. Develop your answers ahead of time so that you are prepared to share a learning experience or a relevant amusing anecdote. Talk about what the experience provided for you, or how you interacted with the host population. It can be a good idea to identify skills in the job description and create examples from your experience that incorporate them. Balance out your study abroad experience by also using domestic experience. Focus on how what you learned abroad will be valuable and applicable to the position you have applied for here in the United States.

... IN YOUR COVER LETTER

Each cover letter you write should address the specific position for which you’re applying. Consider connecting your study abroad experience by talking about how it relates to your field. For example, if the position you are applying for works directly with a population whose language you studied while abroad, you can address this in your cover letter.

If your international experience is not directly or obviously related to the job you are applying for, you can use the cover letter as an opportunity to expand upon the transferrable skills you gained while abroad, such as independence, confidence, and problem-solving.

Adapted from “Re-entry and Marketing Your Experience”, Iowa State University
"... Keep in contact with the people you know, and try to make what you learn abroad a part of your life. You won't regret it."

-Andrew Erlandson, Arcadia University, Perugia, Italy, Spring 2012

"Be patient with yourself. It takes time to assimilate back into your new normal. You will forever be changed. But that is a good thing!"

-Kelly Kirkwood, London Centre, Spring 2001

"... Write up a condensed and brief script of what your experience was like in that country. What I did was, I got sick of people asking me how it was that I just picked a couple activities that I did in Costa Rica and that was what I shared with other people. Most of the time, the person asking really didn't want to know anything more than a quick story anyway, so that is what I gave them. I usually mentioned that I went zip lining through the Costa Rican rainforest and taught local children English."

-Nathan Stewart, KIS Costa Rica, Summer 2012
"Keep in touch with friends that [you] have made abroad to make the transition easier, as they are going through this transition also."

-Katie Reed, ISEP Spain, Spring 2012

"Be prepared to have reverse culture shock. For some, it's nothing more than getting used to having wi-fi internet again. For others, it's readjusting to driving a car. I would make sure that students make themselves aware of some of the things they will have to get used to beforehand, that way when they get back, they're not shocked and unprepared."

-Kyle Hayes, ISEP-Direct Edinburgh Napier University, Spring 2010

"Make a scrap book or something of your memories so that you can always go back to them when you are feeling far from the place that has become so close to your heart."

-Breona Barth, AHA Vienna, Spring 2011
Interested in engaging in diverse clubs and meeting students from all over campus, or even the world?

Get involved with Ball State's Multicultural Organizations:
- Black Student Association
- Asian American Student Association
- Latino Student Union
- Spectrum
- Student Association of Bangladesh
- Voice of Triumph Choir
- Afghan Student Union
- African Student Association
- Caribbean Students Association
- Chinese Students and Scholars Association
- Indian Students Association
- Saudi Students Club
- Tajik Student Association

INTERNATIONAL CONVERSATION HOUR
- A place to get together and discuss various topics such as academic success, friendship, dating, and recreation.
- An opportunity for international students and domestic students to meet and learn from one another.
- A great way for international students to improve English conversation skills and adjust to life at BSU.

Meetings are every Tuesday from 6-7:30pm in the Student Center, room 310.

Sponsored by the Ball State Counseling Center