Study Abroad Re-Entry Handbook

Returning home after a study abroad experience
Contents:

Welcome Home
What is Re-entry?
Are You Experiencing Reverse Culture Shock?
Quick Tips for Returning Home
Reflect & Process Your Time Abroad
Packaging Your Study Abroad Experience – Your Career Search
Additional Resources
Dear Vanderbilt Students,

Welcome home! We’ve missed you while you’ve been away! We hope that you have returned from one of the most challenging and enriching experiences of your lifetime, both academically and culturally. Now that you’ve returned back to the US we hope your journey of learning and growth will continue, as you approach your remaining time at Vanderbilt with a fresh perspective and life experience under your belt!

We recognize that returning to the US is often just as challenging, if not more so, than going abroad in the first place. In order to assist in your return we have prepared this handbook. This guide contains information on “reverse culture shock” as well as various tools to help ease your way back into life at home.

Again, welcome back to the US and welcome back to Vanderbilt. The Global Education Office is committed to assisting with your international issues and interests. Please come visit us!

Sincerely,
Thomas Bogenschild

Director – Vanderbilt Global Education Office
Vanderbilt University Student Life Center
Suite 115, 310 25th Ave South Nashville, TN 37240-1573
Phone: 615-343-3139
Re-entry

“Re-entry is the process of returning home after spending time abroad”

Upon returning home from a study abroad experience, students often expect a seamless transition – to pick up exactly where they left off. Often, you have an idealized view of home, and expect complete familiarity once you return. Frustration and disappointment may occur if these initial expectations do not meet the reality, and you may find yourself feeling antsy, depressed or just a bit “off” once the excitement of seeing your family and friends has worn off.

Home may fall short of what you’ve expected. Things have changed, and what was once so comfortable might now feel a bit foreign. Like many other students returning home from abroad, you will experience a range of different emotions that are the result of seeing your home community, university or country again after your abroad experience.

You find yourself dreaming about your host country, missing the new friends you’ve made, or even craving some delicious local fare from the country of which you’ve just returned. Also, you are upset because nobody seems interested in the experience that you’ve just had, and your family and friends can’t understand what your time abroad was like.

It is important to familiarize yourself with the re-entry process, recognize signs of reverse culture shock, and equip yourself with the tools necessary to help ease this process.
Are You Experiencing Reverse Culture Shock?

Homesick Blues. When you were abroad you missed the comfort and familiarity of home. Now, once your back, you find you miss the people, places and lifestyle of your abroad experience. Manage this “reverse-homesickness” by keeping in touch with the people you met while abroad, and feed your international spirit through many opportunities here at Vanderbilt!

Nobody Will Listen. Not everyone may want to hear about all of your adventures and observations from abroad. Understand that it may be hard for others to relate to your experience, and they may not be able to share your same enthusiasm. Be realistic in your expectations of family and friends – have a good read on the situation and share your stories when appropriate and effective! Be engaging.

Balancing Act. Upon returning home students often struggle with balancing their “old” habits and traits with new skills and attitudes they acquired while abroad. Be patient and seek opportunities that let you exercise you new language skills and share your worldly ideals. Embrace your “new self” and seek opportunities that allow you to exercise the changes in perspective or outlook that you picked up while abroad. Join language clubs, visit ethnic restaurants, and maybe even present a piece of research you accomplished from abroad!

You Can’t Explain. Often times when you do find that wonderful person who wants to hear every detail about your time abroad, you find that all of a sudden you are at a loss for words! Naturally, it is difficult to explain how your time abroad has really impacted your life, especially if speaking to an individual who doesn’t have a travel background and no frame of reference. Be comfortable with the fact that you might only be able to convey a “surface level” view of your experience. Try writing down your observations and perspectives in a journal or blog so that you do have record of those “deeper impact” explanations of your experience.

Slow & Steady Wins the Race. Understand that the reintegration process takes time. Remain patient and allow yourself to become adjusted to life back in the States at a pace that is comfortable for you. Take time to process your experience; relax and embraces the changes that might have occurred while you were away. Journal or scrapbook so that you can visit the memories from abroad, while slowly beginning to adjust comfortably back to life at home.

Adopted from “The Top Ten Immediate Re-entry Challenges,” By Dr. Bruce LaBrack Aspire Newsletter, p.6. Spring 1994

Vanderbilt Global Education Office
Re-entry Advice
from the GEO Peer Advisors

Rachel Witt

- Keep in touch with friends you made while abroad
- Make yourself available as a contact for future study abroad students
- Keep a personal journal with your reflections and thoughts about abroad
- Continue to explore interests you developed while studying abroad

Oliver Han

- Go to Walgreens and get 50 to 1,127 of your most memorable pictures from abroad printed out!
- Make a nice photo album or a wall collage in to help you remember and relive the glory days and give your friends visuals to accompany your stories from abroad.

Juhi Mirchandani

- Put up photos and think about your time abroad in a fond way
- Make concrete plans to go back in the future so you don't feel as sad about leaving
- Focus on re-connecting with friends & share your experiences – it’s therapeutic!

Quincy Ross

- Seek opportunities that allow you to remain connected with your abroad experience, such as eating with friends at ethnic restaurants, or join international clubs.
- Look for internships abroad so that you can have another opportunity to live and learn in a foreign country.

Brian Alosco

- Don't underestimate your Vandy classes. You may have forgotten how to be a real student. It may take a few weeks to adjust, but stay on top of your school work.
- Get involved. Or re-involved. The organizations that you left behind when you went abroad should still be here. This will help you ease back into Vandy life.

Catherine Cocke

- Don't let the travel bug die. Take that passion that you fostered abroad and apply it to traveling here in the U.S. and explore Nashville as well
- Seek opportunities to join an international research project. It’s a great way to make an impact, as well as travel abroad on someone else’s dime!
Take Time to Reflect

Relax & Reflect: In order to ultimately get the most out of your experience abroad it is necessary to set aside some time to process your experience, understand the impact it has made on your life and how it will influence your future. Reflection will allow you to recognize the impact of this experience on your skill set, perspective and ideals. Through evaluating your experience you might also discover that your personal, academic and career goals have changed. The process of reflection will also assist you understand and overcome the discomfort and confusion of reverse culture shock.

Reflection is a time consuming process that will continue beyond your initial return home. It is one way that you can carry the impact of your abroad experience with you long after you’ve returned.

Below we’ve listed some questions to help you begin the process of evaluating your time abroad and reflecting on its impact.

Think & Enjoy:

- What did you love most about abroad? Why?
- What did you learn about yourself while abroad?
- What challenges did you overcome while abroad?
- What surprised you?
- How was your life different while abroad?
- How did your outlook on the world change while you were abroad?
- How did this experience change your values, perspectives and goals?
- Did your abroad experience fall short of, meet or exceed your expectations? Explain.
- Did your time abroad change your view of your major/academic course here at Vanderbilt?
- What skills, knowledge, and attitudes did you gain while abroad? How will you make use of these new changes now that you are back home?
- What can you get involved in while back on campus so as to satisfy your new goals.

Vanderbilt Global Education Office
Now that you’ve returned from a wonderful semester overseas, it is important to understand how best to leverage your time abroad. Below are some ways to help package your experience and utilize your time abroad as an effective professional tool.

Begin by selecting 5 – 7 items from the list below that you feel will be useful to an employer in the field you wish to work. Recall and discuss a specific situation from your time abroad that demonstrates the skill or quality, and frame it.

**SKILL**
- Time management skills
- Communication skills/Communication despite barriers
- Creative problem-solving
- Achieve goals despite obstacles
- Accept responsibility
- Learn quickly
- Take initiative and risks
- Function with a high level of ambiguity
- Handle difficult situations
- Handle stress
- Manage/Organize
- Lead others in informal or formal groups
- Conduct research despite language and cultural differences
- Adapt to new environments
- Understand an organization's culture
- Learn through observing
- Active listening
- Perform in an environment with adverse conditions

**QUALITIES**
- Self-reliant
- Driven/persistent
- Appreciation of diversity
- Flexibility & Adaptability
- Tolerance/open-mindedness
- Assertiveness
- Inquisitiveness
- Self-confidence
- Open to relocation
- Diplomatic
Additional Resources

Check out the additional resources below for more information on reverse culture shock and what you can expect when you return home from abroad – Dig in!

- **CEA Global Education – Re-entry Shock**
  - [http://www.gowithcea.com/alumni/reentry.html](http://www.gowithcea.com/alumni/reentry.html)

- **CIEE Center for International Education – The Knowledge Series**
  - [http://www.ciee.org/study-abroad/advisors/return.aspx](http://www.ciee.org/study-abroad/advisors/return.aspx)

- **CET Academic Program – Re-entry Materials**

- **International Studies Abroad (ISA) – Now That You’re Back**
  - [http://www.studiesabroad.com/alumni/reentry](http://www.studiesabroad.com/alumni/reentry)

- **World Learning – Online ‘Returned from Abroad’ Tool-Kit**
  - [http://www.worldlearning.org/5367.htm](http://www.worldlearning.org/5367.htm)