

## The Importance of Reflection

Setting aside the time to think in-depth about study abroad sets the stage for better understanding of the impact it has made and how it might influence you in the future. Reflection can often facilitate clearer ideas of the qualities and skills you have developed, more precise views about what is important to you, your communication, and leadership styles. You can usually begin to see yourself and your home culture in a wider global context and operate with more relevant standards for your personal, educational and career goals.

In other words, participating in study abroad is just one component of the experience. Evaluating your experience and determining its contribution to your development is another and this component is just as important as living the experience. Interestingly enough, reflection may continue long after you return to campus, and even after graduation. In this way, study abroad may be with you for years to come.



Journaling is a great way to explore reactions, thoughts and insights that revolve around your experiences abroad. The questions below may help you begin to examine your time away from the College.

We hope you find these helpful!

- What did you like most about your host country? Why?
- What did you like least? Why?
- What do you think is the most important thing you learned about other cultures and societies?
- What were some of the challenges you faced? What surprised you?
- What did you expect to get out of this experience?
- In what ways did your program meet your expectations?
- In what ways did it fall short?
- What was the most difficult thing to adjust to? Why?
- What personal values, opinions, or decisions changed during this experience?
- How have the friends, instructors, or contacts from study abroad influenced you?
- How were you different/similar than others at your site?
- In what ways did being different help/hinder the group?
- Did this experience impact your thoughts about your major, minor, or honors research topic? Why or why not?
- What skills, knowledge, and attitudes did you gain?
- How can you take what you have learned and use it in the future (in courses, in “real life,” in relationships, etc.)?



***Travel and change of place impart new vigor to the mind.***

***-- Seneca***

***“The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land; it is at last to set foot on one’s own country as a foreign land.”***

***– G. K. Chesterton***

## *Some Advice:*

- ✓ Accept that you have changed and that things are not going to be the same as when you left (and that's okay!)
- ✓ Don't isolate yourself.
- ✓ Take care of yourself physically as well as mentally: Maintain a healthy diet, including exercise. This keeps your stress levels low.
- ✓ Don't brood.
- ✓ Focus on how you are now better off from the experiences you had and what you have learned.
- ✓ Try new things. If you return to the same place a different person, redefine the place. Take up a new hobby, residence, sport, mode of transport.
- ✓ You may need to "rebuild" relationships, not merely "resume" them.
- ✓ Don't dwell on the past.
- ✓ Keep your memories alive – don't store them away in a shoe box. It wasn't a dream and it was important.
- ✓ Write down what you thought was great about the US while you were abroad.
- ✓ Use your cross-cultural skills to observe your own culture.
- ✓ Keep in touch with people you met abroad.
- ✓ Stay spontaneous. Be flexible and expect the unexpected. Remember that this helped you get through the difficult times abroad.
- ✓ Don't let failures in your home culture be any less a learning experience than they would have been while you were abroad.
- ✓ Continue to reflect on what you learned abroad.
- ✓ Look for the good in the present situation.
- ✓ Don't be upset if people seem indifferent to your experience abroad.
- ✓ Don't talk about what happened abroad unless your listener wants to hear it.
- ✓ Recognize that things at home have changed while you were away and respect those changes.
- ✓ Find people who want to hear about your experiences abroad.
- ✓ Rekindle the spirit of adventure you had abroad. Explore home.
- ✓ Meet up with people who have had similar experiences, such as other returnees or international students.
- ✓ Go out of your way to make new friends, just as you did abroad.
- ✓ Let yourself be sad and miss the people and places that you left.
- ✓ Give yourself TIME!

***To quote Benjamin Button about coming home: "It's a funny thing about comin' home. Looks the same, smells the same, feels the same. You'll realize what's changed is you."***

*\*Many thanks to the Clark University, Tufts University, Middlebury College, Kalamazoo College, and Wheaton College study abroad offices for providing the inspiration and some of the content for this booklet.*