

WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

Re-Entry Programming

Purpose, practices and recommendations for supporting WPI
students following travel abroad

A Major Qualifying Project Report

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By

Emilee Kaufman

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Approved:

Professor Scott Jiusto, Project Advisor

Mrs. Leanne Johnson, Project Advisor

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Worcester Polytechnic Institute and the Global Perspective Program

Introduction

Worcester Polytechnic Institute's innovative project-based curriculum provides students the opportunity to solve a multitude of problems using their knowledge, talent and critical thinking. Emphasizing the importance of exploring and understanding social dynamics and different cultures, WPI provides students with opportunities to do this firsthand through the first-year Great Problems Seminar, Humanities and Arts Exchange Programs, the Interactive Qualifying Project and the final Major Qualifying Project. These opportunities provide students a chance to address real world problems on and off campus. Specifically, the off-campus Global Perspective Program allows students to, "experience the reality of living and working in another country with an intimacy and understanding that no course or textbook could provide" (Worcester Polytechnic Institute, 1995-2013).

WPI's Interactive Qualifying Projects (IQPs) encourage students to work together to solve real world problems on-campus, within the United States as well as overseas. This experience provides students with the opportunity to enrich their academic career by stimulating critical thinking, group cooperation and promoting cross cultural awareness.

Through the Global Perspective Program, there are opportunities for student travel in over thirty project centers spanning across the United States, Africa, Central America, Asia, Europe and Australia. In 2013, WPI revealed that new project centers would be opening for the upcoming year in Maine, Russia, India, Albania, Switzerland and France (Worcester Polytechnic Institute, 1995-2013). By creating more opportunities for students to study abroad, WPI is also exposing more students to the re-entry process.

Re-entry, the process by which people re-assimilate to their home environment after being abroad for a period of time, has been studied extensively (World Learning, 2012). Past research has focused on the stages of re-entry, the process of re-entry and the effects re-entry has on an individual. My research focuses primarily on the re-entry effects on students who have returned from study abroad or similar experiences. Research shows that students who have traveled overseas often benefit in the areas of professional development, academic enhancement, cross-cultural competence, communicative competence, personal reflection and social enrichment (World Learning, 2012).

My research found that WPI offers many re-entry programs and resources for returning students. However, students are not adequately utilizing the available resources to aid them during the re-entry process. By interpreting the information gained by conducting literature reviews, informal interviews with key faculty members and students who have participated in an abroad experience at WPI and reading past research, this project identified past and current re-entry programming at WPI and evaluated WPI's re-entry programming. This project, by using

the information gathered, proposed recommendations for WPI to strengthen and optimize the university’s re-entry programming.

This report is organized so readers will first understand student needs and opportunities during the re-entry process. Then, I evaluate WPI’s current re-entry practices followed by a chart detailing the findings and recommendations based on my research and evaluations. An analysis and discussion of the findings and recommendations explain which recommendation would benefit WPI and the students the most. Lastly, I provide appendices detailing WPI’s current re-entry practices and the proposed recommendations, re-entry tools and resources to assist WPI or any interested party in re-entry program planning and other valuable information regarding re-entry.

Student Needs after an Abroad Experience

This project focused on how WPI’s re-entry programming addresses student needs and provides opportunities for student enrichment. This section will discuss the importance of the six previously identified areas for returned student growth (Table 1: Definition of Student Needs during Re-Entry). For more information on student needs during the re-entry experience, Dr. Bruce La Back, who has extensively studied student re-entry needs, provides a listing of the top “Ten Immediate Re-Entry Challenges” (La Brack, 2006). This list can be found in Appendix E: Resources for Re-entry Programming. Effectively incorporating the following aspects into re-entry programming offers many benefits for the returned individual, enabling them to utilize their experience to its fullest potential. Later in the project there is a series of tables discussing Student Needs after an Abroad Experience. These tables summarize for WPI and other interested parties my evaluation, interpretation and analysis of current re-entry programming at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. The Interdisciplinary and Global Studies Division, as the administrative home for the Global Perspectives Program, has expressed interest in using the findings from this report to strengthen re-entry efforts on campus.

Definition of Student Needs during Re-Entry

Professional Development	Academic Enhancement	Cross Cultural Competence	Communicative Competence	Personal Reflection	Social Enrichment
Skills and knowledge that enhances or improves personal development and career advancement	Enrichment and furthering of knowledge in academic and intellectual areas	Ability to understand and appreciate different cultures and differences between cultures	The ability to effectively relay, obtain and understand information presented orally, physically or in writing	The examination and evaluation of feelings, behaviors, changes in oneself	The sharing of information, experiences, stories and the formation of relationships with people

Table 1: Definition of Student Needs during Re-Entry

Professional Development

Studying abroad provides a unique experience that can increase personal and professional skills of students who are involved. Professional development refers to the cultivation of a variety of skills, academic and personal strengths, areas of expertise and the like that harbor potential to benefit the individual in a professional capacity (Education Week, 2004). These newly acquired skills and experiences are left underutilized if proper re-entry programming is not implemented. Providing students with opportunities to harness their skill-sets and utilize their abroad experience to the fullest potential is important for the student to continue growing and learning as an individual and a student (Tillman, 2011).

Academic Enhancement

Improving students academically and intellectually is often the goal of study abroad opportunities. However opportunities to expand and develop these improvements are sometimes overlooked during the re-entry process. Having experienced new cultures, people, academic areas and more, students often return home with heightened curiosity. In order to optimize the learning and academic experience of the returned individual it is important for the university or third party to provide continued learning opportunities.

Cross-Cultural Competence

Cross-cultural competence is “the ability of individuals and systems to work or respond effectively across cultures in a way that acknowledges and respects the culture of the person or organization being served” (Williams, 2001). Being immersed in a different culture for any extended period of time provides new learning and personal growth experiences for the individual(s) participating. Once returned from an abroad experience and returning to less diverse daily routines and experiences it is common for students to dismiss the importance of culture abroad and at home. Providing students with more opportunities to experience different aspects of various cultures is beneficial for the student personally, socially and professionally too. Cross-cultural competence is especially important for individuals who work with or otherwise interact with people different from themselves racially, ethnically, culturally and the like.

Communicative Competence

Effective communication is a vital skill to have. Communicative competence benefits the sojourner while abroad and once returned (Byram, 1997). Communicative competence encompasses “...a speaker’s internalized knowledge both of the grammatical rules of a language and of the rules for appropriate use in a social context” and surpasses the knowledge of common conversation (Random House). Instead, communicative competence encompasses both verbal and non-verbal communication. While abroad, strong communicative competence allows the traveler to effectively communicate with their project group, advisors, sponsors and locals. Once returned, re-entry programming that further strengthens communicative competence is crucial for the continued success of the individual and a smooth re-entry process enabling the individual to communicate with others about his/her abroad experience.

Personal Reflection

Any individual participating in an abroad experience is subject to experience a wide variety of emotional, physical, social and cultural obstacles while abroad and once returned. The bewilderment and distress they can experience when being exposed to these obstacles is referred to as culture shock (Furnham, 1986). Adversely, reverse culture shock is this same bewilderment and distress experienced by an individual after they have returned from a foreign environment to a once familiar environment. To provide an outlet for personal reflection about the experience or the lasting feelings of reverse/culture shock is important to maintain the well-being of the individual. Personal reflection re-entry programming is available in many different forms. Personal reflection during the individual's re-entry process is crucial regardless of whether the experience was positive or negative.

Social Enrichment

A staple of study abroad programs is the social context of the experience. Students are being challenged to work outside their normal setting, more often than not in a new and unfamiliar environment. These experiences greatly affect a person's social skills while abroad and once returned. Socially, these experiences can be quite challenging and often enhance the student's social competence. Social competence is defined as "the condition of possessing the social, emotional, and intellectual skills and behaviors needed to succeed as a member of society" (Tish Davidson, Welsh & Bierman, 2011). Providing further social outlets such as campus events, programs, and guest speakers to encourage the continuation and strengthening of such skills is important to the success of a student's re-entry and their ability to thrive in other on and off campus social settings.

Evaluation of Current WPI Re-Entry Practices

As shown in the tables below (Table 2 through Table 10), Worcester Polytechnic Institute offers a wide variety of re-entry programming and opportunities for students. Each table provides details of the re-entry opportunities offered by each of the six departments I identified as offering re-entry programming: the Career Development Center, the Humanities and Arts Department, the Interdisciplinary and Global Studies Division, the International House, the Student Activities Office and specific IQP sites. The tables show the type of program offered and explain how the program provides student opportunities or addresses student needs. These Tables serve as visual representations of the adequacy of WPI re-entry programming; it shows the extent to which student opportunities are being provided by re-entry programming. Following each table, if needed, there is a recommendations section that will suggest improvements or additions for the department based on the analysis conducted on current programming at WPI, programming at other universities and based off discussions with key faculty at WPI.

Re-Entry Programming Through the Career Development Center

Re-Entry Practice	Professional Development	Academic Enhancement	Cross Cultural Competence	Communicative Competence	Personal Reflection	Social Platforms
Marketing the Abroad Experience - Campus programming to help students who have returned home market their abroad experience.	Tools such as resume critiques and job searches for future learning and work.			Help students communicate effectively on paper and in person about their abroad experience.		
International Career Fair - A resource providing different international job opportunities and company listings for students interested in global job opportunities.	Job and internships overseas, job opportunities offering travel, opportunities of international related issues					

Table 2: Re-Entry Programming Through the Career Development Center

Recommendations for Career Development Center Programming

- A series of panels, informational resources, and resume critiques would benefit students who have returned from an abroad experience in marketing the importance and significance of their project work and experience.
- Showcasing companies and organizations overseas looking for employees is important for students interested in traveling and other cultural experiences as well as general student body with a willingness to travel for work

Re-entry Programming through the Humanities and Arts Department

Re-Entry Practice	Professional Development	Academic Enhancement	Cross Cultural Competence	Communicative Competence	Personal Reflection	Social Enrichment
International Studies Senior Seminar (HU4411) - An academic class designed to help students better understand their abroad experience in a well-rounded cultural context.	As a senior seminar, one of the focuses of this class is how to utilize the abroad experience post-graduation.	Encourages student learning in global current and past events, requires written student assignments and discussions of experience.	Assigns readings from different countries and cultures, provokes discussions of cultural differences and encourages understanding and appreciation of differences	Students are required to communicate orally and through writing assignments about their experience, themselves and their opinions and understandings.	Students are required and furthermore encouraged to share their experiences with the class, write about their experience and themselves.	Class provides an opportunity for students with similar interests to work together towards achieving a common goal.

Table 3: Re-Entry Programming through the Humanities and Arts Department

Recommendations for the Humanities and Arts Department

- WPI’s returned/international students would benefit from having the opportunity to participate in classes similar to this one, perhaps offered for juniors/underclassmen

Re-entry Programming through the Interdisciplinary and Global Studies Division

Re-Entry Practice	Professional Development	Academic Enhancement	Cross Cultural Competence	Communicative Competence	Personal Reflection	Social Enrichment
Global Opportunities Fair- An organized showcasing of all potential abroad sites for students to visit during either their Humanities and Arts exchange, Interactive Qualifying Project or Major Qualifying Project.	Provides students with options of continued travel for work, educational or volunteer experience	Showcases academic possibilities to utilize future or past abroad experiences (e.g. Minors in language)				
Pre-departure Orientation - A mandatory program that educated students who will be traveling abroad about culture shock, safety and health precautions and general knowledge.			Students discuss differences in culture, geography and social life specific to their host country with WPI faculty.	Students are asked to discuss opinions, suggestions, ideas, commentary on a variety of questions/prompts provided by faculty.		Students traveling together are asked to work together to educate the rest of the student group on different topics assigned by faculty.
Global Ambassadors Task Force - Student organization developed to better the programming of the Interdisciplinary and Global Studies Division.			Discussion of other student's abroad experiences and how to improve that experience in future years.	Students who are members of the GATF are asked to share their experience, opinions and suggestions with each other and WPI faculty.	Students are asked questions about the successes/failures of their project and experience.	Provides students who all traveled off-campus for their IQP with a platform to share their stories and opinions.
Alumni Database - A comprehensive list of students and alumni who previously traveled abroad with information about where they traveled, the purpose of their travel and ways to communicate with them.				Returned students are asked to communicate with perspective students to answer questions about their abroad/international experience.		
Study Abroad	Opportunity for					Uniting students who

Re-Entry Practice	Professional Development	Academic Enhancement	Cross Cultural Competence	Communicative Competence	Personal Reflection	Social Enrichment
Returnee Reception - A culminating reception for students, faculty and staff welcoming their return.	students and faculty to network and share experiences.					have all had an abroad or international experience.
Alumni to Parent Resources - Multiple tools that returned students can provide to help inform and educate parents of students that want to or will be traveling abroad.				Returned students are asked to communicate with the parents of perspective students about their abroad or international experiences.		Provides returned students with the opportunity to share their experience with other people.
Pre-departure Preparation Class (ID2050) - A class designed to help students explore their future host country, the assignment they will be participating in and an overarching cultural education		Academic class that educated students about the country of their travel and the cultural, social, and daily differences globally.	Purpose of this class is to prepare students for their immersion in a different culture.	Students are required to communicate orally and through writing assignments about their project proposal and the host country in general.		Students who will be traveling together participate in the same class, encouraging the building or strengthening of relationships.
President's IQP Award - A yearly award reception honoring and selecting the previous year's most successful and sustainable IQP projects.	Returned students are asked to submit an executive summary about their IQP work and if selected present in front of judges who will then choose one winner.	Continued work on their project and presentation.				

Table 4: Re-Entry Programming through the Interdisciplinary and Global Studies Division

Recommendations for the Interdisciplinary and Global Studies Division:

- It would be beneficial to past and present and prospective students for there to be more emphasis on how studying abroad can affect the student after their return. Showcasing minor/double major opportunities, future traveling opportunities and campus organizations.
- Enhancements include more site specific and relevant information. Tailoring the presentations to the project site would better benefit the students. Continuing to have returned students present during IQP site sessions to answer questions would be helpful.
- More frequently gauging student's opinions and ideas both pre-departure, while abroad and once returned can provide the Global Ambassador Task Force with helpful information on the IGSD's current programming.
- The creation of an Alumni Database is a fairly simple and very beneficial resource WPI could offer to current and prospective students and parents.
- Organizing a semiannual reception for returned students to discuss with advisors and returned travelers from different project sites is a great opportunity to showcase WPI re-entry programming and get alumni interest in programs offered.
- In the seven week preparation course for traveling abroad, curriculum should cover reverse culture shock and re-entry in order to help students begin preparing.

Re-entry Programming through the International House

Re-entry Practice	Professional Development	Academic Enhancement	Cross Cultural Competence	Communicative Competence	Personal Reflection	Social Enrichment
<p>Global Book Club - A campus promoted program that showcases a certain book(s) during the year and the country it was written about, providing students and faculty alike an opportunity to discuss their reading and own experience and opinion.</p>		<p>Reading and understanding different books on various international and culture related topics.</p>		<p>Readers are encouraged to share their opinions and thoughts about the featured book.</p>	<p>Reading about different cultures and other people's experiences encourages the reader to reflect on their own experience and culture.</p>	<p>People with similar interests attend meetings and sessions to review the book and share their opinions.</p>
<p>UNPACKED International Magazine -Campus published magazine showcasing staff, faculty and student's international and abroad experiences.</p>			<p>Provides students with information of culturally different areas and student's experience there.</p>	<p>Submissions can be in many forms but they must communicate the experience to the reader.</p>	<p>Artistic submissions are encouraged to help students reflect on their experience</p>	

Table 5: Re-Entry Programming through the International House

Re-entry Programming through the Student Activities Office

Re-entry Practice	Professional Development	Academic Enhancement	Cross Cultural Competence	Communicative Competence	Personal Reflection	Social Enrichment
International Student Council - A student organization that promotes cultural acceptance and understanding welcoming both students of that culture and students interested in different cultures.		Programming includes educating other people about international related topics through events like International Education Month, International Trivia Night etc.	Programming is to promote understanding and acceptance of different cultures and people from around the world. Programming examples include the International Food Festival, Global Book Club etc.	Provides students with opportunities to enrich their communicative skills through programs/opportunities such as Global Book Club discussions, UNPACKED, etc.		Annual international dinner inviting students from around the world and students with international interests to share experiences and build relationships with people who have common interests.
Global Humanitarian Alliance- Student organization created to address global issues			Student goals are to help people from around the world regardless of their culture.		Enabling students to help other people or try to solve a global problem provides a rewarding experience.	Students with a common interest in helping people and global issues are encouraged to do so by working together on the problem.
Study Abroad Mentor Program - A group of students who have returned from an abroad experience that volunteer to mentor students who will be traveling and address any needs or questions they may have.				Student mentors are asked to answer questions and share their experience with students accepted into the abroad programs offered by WPI	Sharing personal stories and recalling their own experience, mentoring other students provides a reflective experience.	Purpose of the program is to unite students who have returned from their travels with students who want to travel.

Table 6: Re-Entry Programming through the Student Activities Office

Recommendations for the Student Activities Office:

- Study Abroad Mentor program should be implemented and offered to students traveling abroad within one semester prior to departure. This program will provide useful project experience information and an invaluable perspective on the program.

Re-entry Programming through specific IQP Sites

Re-entry Practice	Professional Development	Academic Enhancement	Cross Cultural Competence	Communicative Competence	Personal Reflection	Social Enrichment
Blogging/Journaling - While abroad and once returned for the travelers to keep track of day to day activities, reflective writing and overall experience.		Writing about their own multi-cultural experience and sharing their thoughts and experiences about different cultures with other people.	Purpose of blogging and journaling is to communicate with yourself or other people your experiences, feelings, activities etc.	Recalling and recording personal experiences, feelings and activities.		
Current Events - A useful tool for students to utilize pre-departure, while abroad and once returned to keep them informed about the host or home country they are traveling to.	Enriching student's knowledge about world events.	Understanding global events in their historical, social and cultural context.	Understanding and synthesizing information in a global context.	While abroad, reading and understanding current events from the students home country serves as a useful re-entry tool.		
Project Center Reunions - An event organized by project center to provide the opportunity for past years Alumni to reunite possibly with future project center travelers.						Returned students are invited to attend reunions specific to the country they traveled to and discuss each other and their shared experience.

Table 7: Re-Entry Programming through Specific IQP Sites

Recommendations for specific IQP sites:

- Faculty advisors should continuously encourage and stress the importance of blogging/journaling while abroad. Potential for online blogs to be used for WPI website. Other campus departments, such as the Career Development Center have utilized student blogging to spread information about different campus topics and events. For an example, visit <http://wp.wpi.edu/cdc/>

- Advisors should require the reading and discussion/opinion of current events prior to departure and while abroad to maintain a sense of normalcy and interaction with host/home country.

Collaborative Re-entry Programming Offered by the IGSD and CDC

Re-entry Practice	Professional Development	Academic Enhancement	Cross Cultural Competence	Communicative Competence	Personal Reflection	Social Enrichment
Continuing Abroad Workshop - This workshop showcases different opportunities for students to continue traveling through volunteering, graduate school, continued WPI programs etc.	Marketing abroad experience on resume, potential future employees, networking opportunities			Networking and interviewing with potential employers provides practice for students to communicate about themselves and their abroad experience		Networking

Table 8: Collaborative Re-Entry Programming Offered by the IGSD and CDC

Collaborative Re-entry Programming Offered by the IGSD and George C. Gordon Library

Re-entry Practice	Professional Development	Academic Enhancement	Cross Cultural Competence	Communicative Competence	Personal Reflection	Social Enrichment
Suggested Reading List - A list organized collaboratively with the IGSD, project center advisors and library to provide traveling/returned students with a list of suggested reading about the host country, returning home or other culturally related topics.		Reading and understanding different books on various international and culture related topics.			Reading about different cultures and other people's experiences encourages the reader to reflect on their own experience and culture.	

Table 9: Collaborative Re-entry Programming Offered by the IGSD and the George C. Gordon Library

Collaborative Re-entry Programming Offered by the IGSD and International House

Re-entry Practice	Professional Development	Academic Enhancement	Cross Cultural Competence	Communicative Competence	Personal Reflection	Social Enrichment
Photo/Video Contest - Encouraging students to submit photos/videos about one or more aspects of their abroad experiences				Expressive communication through pictures and videos	Students have the opportunity to share something personal/important about their experience with other people	

Table 10: Collaborative Re-entry Programming Offered by the IGSD and the International House

The figure below, Figure 1: Frequency of Student Opportunities Provided by Re-entry Programming shows the frequency of opportunities offered through the different existing and proposed re-entry programming. However, Figure 2: Number of Re-entry Programs Offered within different Campus Departments/Offices below shows that the majority of re-entry programming on campus is organized and implemented through WPI's Interdisciplinary and Global Studies Division. By increasing participation or the utilization of other campus departments WPI can increase student participation in re-entry programs and stimulate idea for new programs. From this table and my past research, I have developed a complementary table that explains my major findings, recommendations and rationale behind the recommendations for WPI.

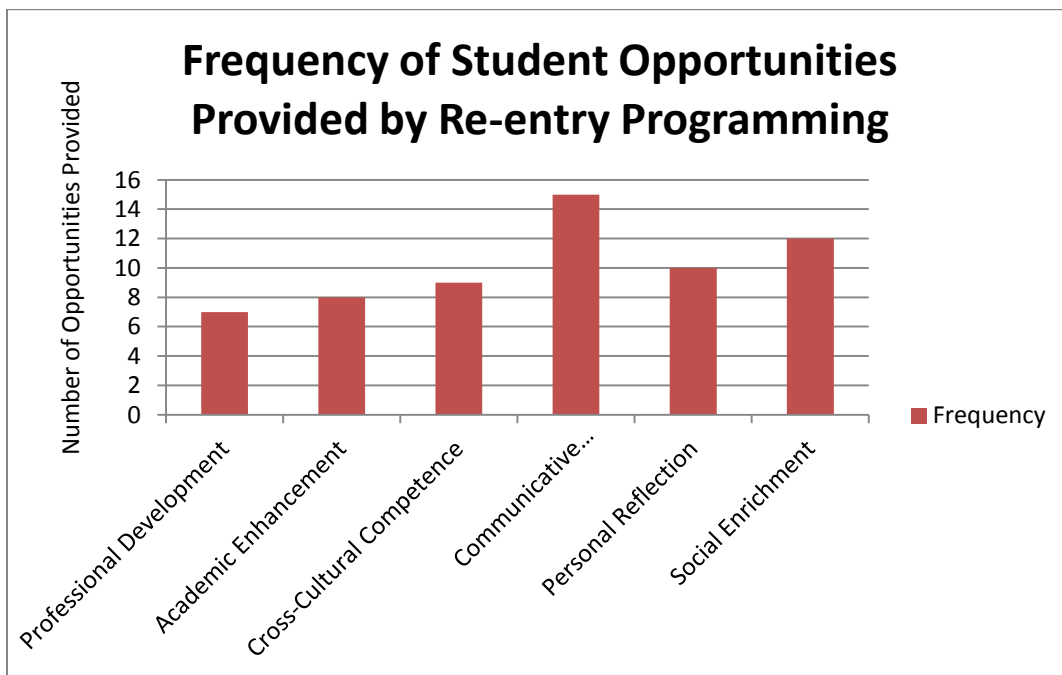


Figure 1: Frequency of Student Opportunities Provided by Re-entry Programming

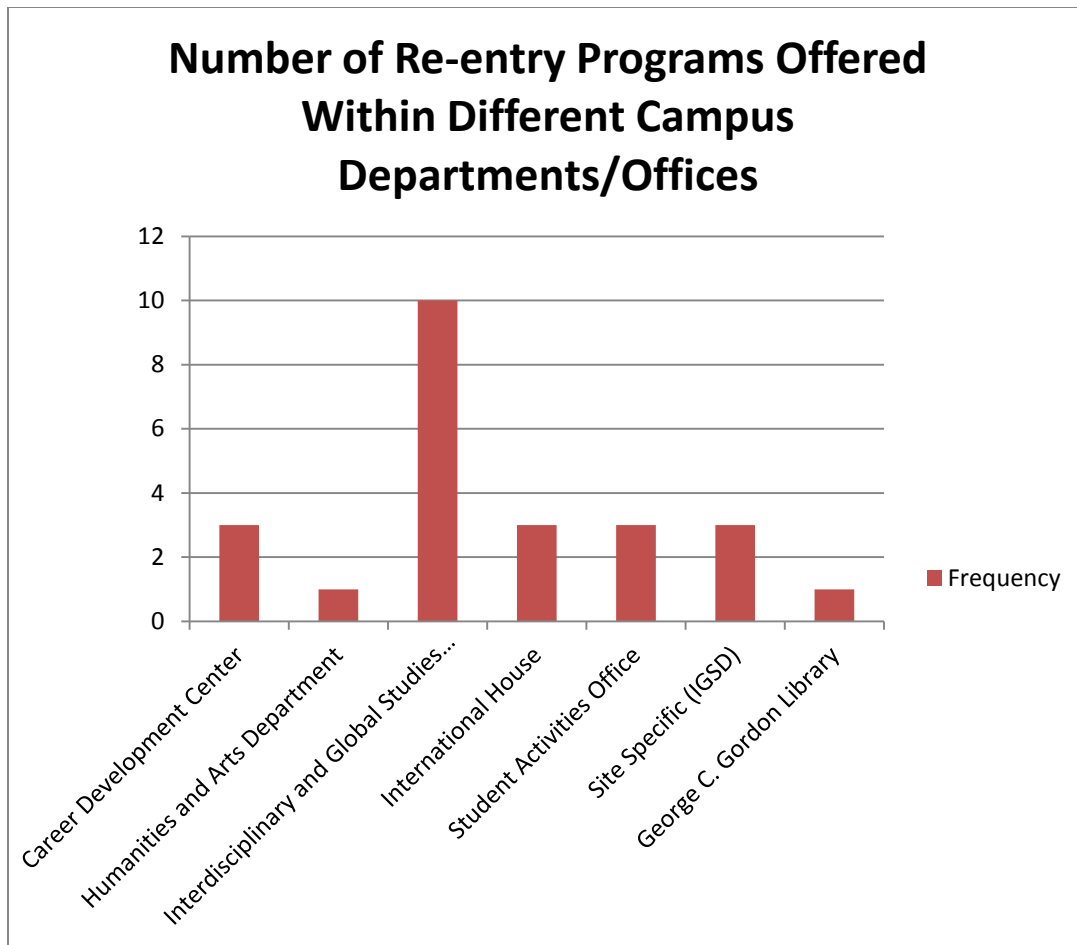


Figure 2: Number of Re-entry Programs Offered within different Campus Departments/Offices

Descriptions of current re-entry practices at Worcester Polytechnic Institute can be found in Appendix A.

Findings, Recommendations and Rationale

Analysis of Findings and Recommendations

Worcester Polytechnic Institute offers its students unique opportunities to go overseas and be immersed in new and exciting cultures. Similarly, the university provides the students with the necessary information to succeed in these overseas projects. However, through my research I have concluded that WPI's re-entry resources are not utilized as much as they could be by the student population traveling overseas. Highlighting the different student needs and opportunities during re-entry, WPI faculty and departments can implement new re-entry programs and enhance pre-existing programs and resources to more adequately address the needs of the students.

Table 11 displays each of the nine major results of the analysis conducted on WPI re-entry programming. Further, the table explains the rationale behind the findings and recommendations for WPI to improve upon their re-entry programming.

Below I will discuss each of my findings, the rationale behind them and any recommendations I have for WPI to improve the on campus opportunities for student re-entry.

Reference Number	Findings	Recommendations Existing/ <i>New</i>	Rationale
1	WPI offers many re-entry programs, tools and resources		
2	WPI's reentry programming is not utilized by the majority of returned students	Existing: Informational Meetings Proposed: A guide book for returned students WPI Re-entry Website	Providing more knowledge about re-entry and the effects of the re-entry process, students will be able to recognize the opportunities provided by re-entry programming on campus.
3	There is no centralized location for students to find re-entry resources	Proposed: WPI re-entry website	Creating a website or online resource to make information about re-entry and re-entry programming more easily accessible will increase likelihood of participation.
4	Students lack sufficient knowledge about re-entry experience	Existing: Include re-entry into PQP/ID2050 curriculum Proposed: WPI Re-entry website	Providing students with accurate and useful information about re-entry and reverse culture shock pre-departure, while abroad and once returned will ease the re-entry process and address questions students may be having.
5	WPI re-entry programs are poorly advertised	Existing: Informational meetings Proposed: Tables at Global Opportunities fair Undergraduate Emails WPI re-entry website Student feedback through focus groups	With better marketing and PR by the departments involved, students will be more likely to participate in the pre-existing programming and future programs as well. Focus groups help the university to understand students' knowledge/awareness/evaluation of re-entry programming

Reference Number	Findings	Recommendations Existing/ <i>New</i>	Rationale
6	Current programming doesn't adequately address student needs of professional development and academic enhancement	Proposed: Conducting student/faculty focus groups	Focus groups and evaluations can serve as informational resources for re-entry planning but also as an educational and stimulus tool to increase awareness of students
7	Finding 7: Departments/offices are unaware that the services they offer can be utilized as re-entry tools	Proposed: Incorporating and showcasing re-entry materials, resources and tools within student services such as Academic Advising, SDCC, CDC and library	As showcased in the Re-entry Programming and Student Needs chart, many departments and offices offer re-entry tools and/or programming but they aren't advertised as such. Also, broadening the range of faculty and departments involved will enable more students to benefit from WPI's re-entry programming.
8	There are misconceptions associated with cultural campus organizations	Proposed: Student testimonials about personal involvement and experience in these organizations. Participating/advertising at global opportunities fair.	PR and marketing these organizations to the student body will rectify the misconception that admission/participation in these organizations is pre-determined by social, ethnic, religious, cultural affiliations
9	Alumni students intend/want to stay involved with project center	Proposed: Study Abroad Mentor Groups Alumni Panels at global opportunities fair and project site sessions Returned student database	Harnessing students' willingness and desire to stay involved with the IQPs provides the alumni students with re-entry programming while simultaneously offering prospective/future WPI IQP travelers invaluable information about past experiences and personal opinions.

Table 11: Findings, Recommendations and Rationale

Finding 1: WPI offers many re-entry programs, tools and resources:

WPI has the resources, opportunity and student interest to have successful re-entry programming on campus. Currently, WPI does offer re-entry programming to assist student through this process.

Finding 2: WPI's reentry programming is not utilized by the majority of returned students

Through interviews and discussions with both WPI students who have returned from overseas projects and various WPI project advisors it is clear that the programming offered at WPI is not utilized to its fullest potential. Because of this, I recommend that WPI develops a re-entry website to make the available resources and useful information more readily available.

Finding 3: There is no centralized location for students to find re-entry resources

By evaluating WPI's current re-entry tools, resources and programs, I found that there was no centralized location for students to access these materials. Developing and implementing an online resource (website) will provide the opportunity for students to access any and all re-entry related resources.

Finding 4: Students lack sufficient knowledge about re-entry experience

While analyzing re-entry programming on campus, I found that there was emphasis and attention put on the topic of culture shock and what to expect when arriving somewhere new. However, there was very little information provided about re-entry and reverse culture shock. Incorporating these topics into the pre-traveling curriculum will better prepare students for their eventual re-entry.

Finding 5: WPI re-entry programs are poorly advertised

One of the main purposes of this project is to analyze the re-entry programming offered by WPI. This was very difficult to do at first because the re-entry programs and opportunities are poorly advertised to students who are looking for them. Making students aware of these opportunities through utilizing better marketing strategies and PR would increase student participation.

Finding 6: Current programming doesn't adequately address student needs of professional development and academic enhancement

The analysis and programming break down show that the re-entry programming offered by WPI does not adequately address professional development and academic enhancement. There are currently limited re-entry opportunities at WPI focusing on these two student needs. To improve matters, I recommend conducting student and faculty focus groups to gain information regarding the type of programming students would like to see. These focus groups would provide valuable information for developing re-entry programming as well as spark interest in these programs by the involved parties.

Finding 7: Departments/offices are unaware that the services they offer can be utilized as re-entry tools

The campus offers tools and resources for students who have returned from an abroad experience. However, these opportunities for students are not showcased in a way that students struggling during re-entry would be likely to participate in or be aware of. Also, most of the re-entry programming offered by WPI is through the IGSD as shown by Figure 2: Number of Re-entry Programs Offered within different Campus Departments/Offices. Expanding the number of departments and offices offering re-entry programming students will have more opportunities to get involved and become informed of such programs. Further, the incorporation of more departments and offices will help develop WPI's re-entry programming become more holistic.

Finding 8: There are misconceptions associated with cultural campus organizations

When discussing the participation of students in cultural organizations with WPI faculty, such as the Japanese Culture Club, the International Student Council and others, it became apparent that there are misconceptions regarding the admission and participation of students in organizations similar to the previously mentioned. Providing campus with student testimonials about student experiences in these organizations can rectify misconceptions and provoke participation. Removing these invisible boundaries that inhibit participation would enable students who have a heightened interest in international affairs or other cultures or countries an outlet for their interest.

Finding 9: Alumni students intend/want to stay involved with project center

Through various conversations with IQP alumni and faculty advisors, it is evident that students want to stay involved with their respective project center and the IQP process. Allowing students to participate and give informational sessions benefits both the returned students and prospective students. Other ways to harness and retain student alumni involvement include Study Abroad Mentor programs, alumni panels and discussions as well as an Alumni Database.

My findings have concluded that the problem is not that WPI does not offer adequate re-entry programming, but rather, WPI does not make its resources known to students who have returned from overseas. I believe a revamped, more direct marketing strategy for WPI, especially the Interdisciplinary and Global Studies Division, would increase the participation of returned students in re-entry programming on campus.

The recommendation most frequently mentioned is the WPI Re-Entry Website (or webpage). A centralized resource for students, parents and faculty would be an effective resource for people to access useful information regarding re-entry as an experience, programming on campus, and opportunities for alumni, and resources and tools for returned individuals. Logistically, the re-entry website would be the most immediate resource for students to use as a tool or to find information on other re-entry opportunities at WPI. The website can include basic information

about re-entry and reverse culture shock, upcoming re-entry events being held on and off campus, a calendar of these events, an organized list of re-entry programming on campus, resources for students who are struggling during their re-entry and a guidebook on how to deal with the symptoms and effects of re-entry. This website is the most important recommendation for WPI because it will be the most holistic re-entry tool.

An analysis of the above table, Table 11: Findings, Recommendations and Rationale shows that by addressing one of the recommendations, other findings and recommendations could also be addressed. For example, by developing a student survey to gain information about students' perceptions of re-entry, students would be exposed to different WPI programming and the re-entry process as a whole. The student survey would be an educational tool for WPI as well as a stimulus for students to raise awareness of re-entry programming and resources. To benefit the students even more, an automated survey could provide individualized recommendations generated from student responses. For example, if a student identified that he/she was interested in artistic expression, the survey could provide a link to WPI's UNPACKED webpage offering student submissions for art, poetry, stories and various types of expression. (Unpacked).

Another recommendation that would greatly benefit WPI and the students involved is conducting focus groups for returned students. A current re-entry program, WPI's Global Ambassador's Task Force (Appendix A: Current Re-entry Practices) provides students the opportunity to discuss with other returned students different aspects of WPI's off-campus IQP experience. By prompting discussions about re-entry as an experience and the programs on campus, students will be able to help tailor WPI re-entry programming.

For a complete list and description of re-entry programming recommendations and proposals, see Appendix B: Proposals and Recommendations.

Final Thoughts

Worcester Polytechnic Institute's unique overseas project opportunities provide students with exciting and challenging opportunities. When participating in these overseas projects, students are challenged personally, socially and of course, academically. One challenge that is often faced after the abroad experience is the challenge of the re-entry experience. After an in-depth analysis of WPI's past and current re-entry programming, informal interviews with faculty and students, and research regarding this topic I have concluded that WPI has the adequate resources for returning students. However with the implementation of some key re-entry resources, such as a re-entry website, and with a better marketing plan for the departments and offices involved, WPI re-entry programming will be better utilized by returned students.

Appendices

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- Brief descriptions of the current re-entry practices available on WPI's campus

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- A list of possible opportunities for re-entry programming at WPI

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- A sample schedule of events and opportunities offered at a re-entry conference that would be used as a yearly reception for students who have returned from an overseas project

Appendix D: Background on Culture Shock and Reverse Culture Shock

- Brief descriptions regarding culture shock, the stages of culture shock and causes of culture shock.

Appendix E: Resources for Re-entry Programming

- Provides materials useful for students traveling overseas or who have traveled overseas. Also, a useful resource for study abroad advisors and faculty.

Appendix A: Current Re-entry Practices

Below are brief descriptions of the current re-entry practices available on WPI's campus. From collecting all the information regarding programming offered, I can conclude that WPI has many, valuable resources for returned students. The programs offered span a wide range of types of programming such as academic classes, receptions, organizations, individual opportunities and re-entry tools. These opportunities for returned students to utilize are important for a successful re-entry process. If WPI can gauge student interest more effectively and market these opportunities, students will benefit academically, socially, professionally and personally.

Unpacked

Worcester Polytechnic Institute's International House created an international and intercultural themed magazine, "UNPACKED". Using the metaphor to assist students to unpack emotionally, the magazine accepts written, photographic and artistic submissions by students. UNPACKED, "...aspires to promote global awareness, cross-cultural understanding and dialogue on campus with the aim of informing, challenging, and expanding the university's views on culture and the global community."

UNPACKED provides students with an expressive outlet to share important aspects or stories from their international experience. Due to the creative nature of the submission categories and purpose of the magazine, UNPACKED addresses student re-entry needs by providing a platform to enhance cross-cultural competence, communicative competence, and person reflection.

PQP/ID2050

When traveling abroad for any range of projects at WPI, students must enroll in a seven week preparation course, ID2050 and participate in the Pre-Qualifying Project (PQP). The PQP and ID2050 serve many functions for both students and advisors traveling off-campus. Focusing on project proposals, team dynamics and cross-cultural awareness, PQP and ID2050 are crucial to the development of any project and to the student's experience off-campus. Although students participate in these courses prior to departure, they contribute significantly to re-entry programming because it gives students the opportunity to learn about re-entry prior to departure and potential culture shock and other distractions. Participation in PQP and ID2050 address student re-entry needs by facilitating professional development, academic enhancement, cross-cultural competence, communicative competence and providing a social outlet.

Global Opportunities Fair

Each year WPI's Interdisciplinary and Global Studies Division (IGSD) hosts a fair to promote the university's off-campus IQP, MQP and humanities and arts opportunities. During the fair prospective students are encouraged to visit the different project center tables to learn about that particular project site and projects offered. In addition, student who have participated at various project centers are invited to join the advisors and speak about their abroad experience. This fair provides the Humanities and Arts (HU&A) department at WPI an opportunity to educate students about the HU&A program and the different minor and major concentrations offered.

Hu4411-Senior Seminar in International Studies

This course serves as a mandatory requirement for students minoring in international studies and as a mandatory senior seminar for students majoring in this field. Students who are interested in taking this course are recommended to have taken other international studies courses and have completed or participated in an international project or exchange. This course encourages students to reflect on their past experiences, evaluate different lessons learned while abroad and embrace becoming a global citizen by learning and discussing current and past global events. Another goal of this course is to assist students in using their abroad experience and acquired skills to enrich their future personally and professionally. The well-roundedness of this course curriculum is a great resource for students who wish to grow professionally, academically, personally and as citizens of the world. (Robertson, 2013)

President's IQP Award

The President's IQP Award is an award given annually to an IQP team whose project best represents the relationships between science, technology and the needs of society. Every year, students are encouraged to submit their project's executive summary for entry to be considered for the IQP award. The President's IQP Award provides students with an opportunity to continue their project work reflect on their past experiences and develop academically and professionally.

Global Ambassadors Task Force

WPI's IGSD student group called the Global Ambassadors Taskforce was created to brainstorm and discuss ways that the IGSD and WPI could help students who are completing a project off-campus, "... explore, understand and build on their off-campus experiences" (Jeyaraj, 2012). This organization not only explored whether or not students would be interested in re-entry programming but it too functions as a re-entry program by encouraging students to explain and discuss their off-campus experiences, challenges faced, and ideas to better the program.

Global Humanitarian Alliance

This student organization focuses on helping people in need. Specifically, students use their technology and problem solving background to address sanitation, water and hygiene issues in third world countries. This organization serves as a great opportunity for students to participate in a project based organization that focuses on solving real world problems similar to many IQPs. From a re-entry perspective, this organization: enables students to further enrich their cross-cultural competence, provides a social environment for students with similar interests, encourages students to reflect on past project experiences as well as future project opportunities.

WPI Global Book Club

This campus program hosted by the International House improves cross-cultural competence and academic enhancement by encouraging students/faculty to read different books all relating to the same country and encouraging discussion about the topics presented. Every 7 weeks, a new country is chosen to focus on and thus new books are recommended to read.

Project Center Reunions

Project center reunions offer students an opportunity for the establishment of new relationships as well as strengthening preexisting ones. Reunions can be organized in ways that engage the students; ice-breaker activities, reflection discussions, and other programming can be used to assist in student re-entry needs.

International Student Council

This student organization's purpose is to promote understanding and acceptance of different cultures through different on campus programming. The student council engages students of different cultures by celebrating cultural differences through international food festivals, trivia nights, campus speakers etc.

Photo/Video Contest

WPI is in the beginning stages of planning the first annual Film Festival which invites students who have returned from overseas to submit video documentaries, photos, or photo collages to be showcased to the campus wide community.

Appendix B: Proposals and Recommendations

The following is a list of possible opportunities for re-entry programming at WPI. These opportunities do not complete the entirety of my recommendations because I do encourage the development of different resources at WPI such as a re-entry website as well as a strengthened marketing plan. This list, coupled with WPI's current programming, if implemented would enable WPI to provide more opportunities for students to utilize during their re-entry process.

Re-entry Surveys and Focus Groups

Conducting focus groups and student surveys would benefit WPI as well as the students involved. The purpose of the surveys and focus groups would be to both gain information about student perceptions of re-entry programming at WPI and stimulate students to utilize these resources. Surveys would ask a series of questions regarding what information/resources students think they have access to, what information/resources/programming students would like to be available and further interest in re-entry programming. Logistically, the IGSD could hold focus groups in the conference room and provide an open area for students to discuss a trajectory of different topics surrounding re-entry.

Alumni Database

The Alumni Database would serve as a resource for prospective students considering applying for WPI or any of WPI's abroad opportunities. The alumni database would consist of personal profiles and contact information for WPI students who have experienced any range of abroad experience. Not only would this be useful and helpful for prospective students and parents but by encouraging students to share their experiences, stories and opinions of their travels the alumni database would also serve as a re-entry tool for returned students.

Study Abroad Mentor

A mentoring program for students who will be traveling abroad will benefit not only the prospective student but the study abroad alumni as well. Peer mentors can provide a different perspective on studying abroad, their particular project experience and the IQP in the general.

Alumni to Parent Resources

Alumni to parent resources can span a variety of different re-entry tools. In particular, WPI would benefit from utilizing returned students' testimonials for parents of prospective students interested in WPI as a university or in the global opportunities offered.

Returning Reception

An annual returnee reception inviting all the students that participated in an overseas IQP or humanities project would be a beneficial re-entry program for students and faculty at WPI. This reception would promote stimulating conversation on international topics and interests as well

as provide opportunities for students and faculty alike to share about their personal experiences overseas.

Abroad Blogging/Journaling

Blogging and/or journaling while abroad provide students a resource to utilize after their return to the home country. Having recorded entries of day to day activities, feelings and important happenings can ease the re-entry process. Blogging and journaling can potentially benefit future students traveling to similar IQP sites as well as students interested in global opportunities offered at WPI.

Current Events

Having students reading and discuss current events of the host country pre-departure and of the home country while abroad enhances the students' knowledge of culture, increase cross-cultural competence, and overall can ease re-entry stress by staying up to date with the home country and national happenings before the students return.

Pre-Departure Orientation (enhancements)

In order to more directly address student needs, during the mandatory pre-departure orientation WPI faculty can prepare students for re-entry by discussions on re-entry, reverse culture shock, the phases of re-entry, and of course, WPI re-entry programming opportunities.

Career Development Center (enhancements)

The Career Development Center currently provides many resources and organizes campus programs that aid students in applying for and obtaining positions and making career choices. Students who have returned from an abroad experience have gained invaluable personal and professional experience through their IQP. The CDC can help students market their abroad experience in ways that show employers the importance of their experience. Providing a resource which compiles overseas internship/job opportunities for students interested in working and living abroad would address student professional development needs. Similarly, the Career Development Center, in collaboration with the IGSD could organize an international career fair where international employers or representatives come to discuss job opportunities overseas. Further, the CDC could plan workshops for returned students to attend that would discuss potential future opportunities for traveling abroad offered through WPI and alternative options.

Appendix C. Sample Re-entry Conference Schedule

Adapted from the Annual New England Study Abroad Re-Entry Conference

The purpose of a conference such as the Annual New England Study Abroad Re-entry Conference is to provide students who have recently returned from a study abroad experience an array of opportunities and information. Conferences such as this focus on offering sessions on re-entry, adjusting during re-entry, future study abroad opportunities, student advocacy for study abroad opportunities, exploring careers/internships in international fields and networking opportunities.

Schedule of Events

09:45AM-10:00AM	Registration and Complimentary Breakfast
10:00AM-11:00AM	Welcome and Guest Speaker
11:15AM-12:00PM	Break-Out Group Exercises
12:15PM-01:15PM	Lunch <i>International Opportunity Fair Open</i>
01:15PM-01:45PM	Photo Finalists Display/Presentation and Voting
02:00PM-02:45PM	Break-Out Panels I
02:45PM-03:30PM	Break-Out Panels II
03:30PM-04:00PM	Farewell and Thank You <i>International Opportunities Fair Closed</i>

Break-Out Group exercises

Providing the opportunity for break-out group sessions is a great way to encourage individual participation as well as a reflection of the experience. Typically groups would be formed based on the location of their abroad experience –this is because the participants can then more easily develop connections with the other participant’s based on similar travels, experiences, feelings, projects, etc. The main purpose of the break-out session would be to ‘unpack’ the participants’ abroad travels and experiences by asking a series of open response questions and then providing time for each participant to share.

Examples of ‘unpacking’ questions include:

1. How were your interactions with friends and family upon coming home? Do you feel like you have undergone a change? Do they recognize these changes in you?
2. Do you feel you see the U.S. differently? Is there anything that bothers you about your country now that you are home?
3. What do you enjoy most about being home?
4. What did you not like initially about your host country? Did your views change over your sojourn there? Why?

5. The five things (people, places, activities, etc.) I miss most from being abroad since I have returned home are:
6. Were the academics different in your program abroad? How? Did you develop different study or reading skills to deal with these differences?
7. Describe a funny or uncomfortable cultural or language misstep and what did you learn from this experience?
8. What was the most challenging experience you had while you were abroad and how did you overcome it?
9. What are some of the stereotypes about your host country that Americans have? What stereotypes did people of the host country have toward Americans? Did you find any of them to be true? How so?
10. Were issues of difference (gender, race, disability, sexual orientation) conceptualized in unlike ways? How so? (LaPlatney, 2012)

Photo Display/Presentation and Voting

During the registration period for the conference, participants would be encouraged to submit a photograph that they had taken during their abroad experience that was meaningful to them. Including but not limited to capturing unique scenery, cultural depictions, social, adventure etc. Along with the photo there would have to be a title and a short description of the picture. This provides participants with the option to tell a story about their experience, reflect on a certain experience/moment and also a chance to highlight their talents! During the allotted time for this photo display and voting, the photographs would be projected in front of the conference attendees with the short description read aloud. After viewing all photo submissions, voting could be done and a small prize could be awarded to the winner; perhaps the printing, framing and displaying of the winning picture at the participant's campus.

International Opportunities Fair

The international opportunities fair would be very similar to a career fair. Different organizations that offer abroad opportunities would have a designated area to present their organization's materials and relevant information. Organizations can include universities with graduate programs, third party study abroad providers, volunteering organizations etc. Throughout the conference participants would be encouraged to introduce themselves and interact with the representative from the organizations, sign-up for mailing lists and take informational pamphlets.

Break-Out Panels I & II

The purpose of having break-out panels is to address specific re-entry and participant needs. The format of the panelist discussions can be different for each topic. It can be lecture style, interactive, group based etc. Some topics to consider including;

1. Resume critiques
2. Marketing your abroad experience

3. The field of international education
4. Graduate school options
5. Going abroad again (work, volunteer, intern, teaching)
6. Dealing with reverse culture shock
7. 'Unpacking'
8. Top 10 re-entry challenges discussion

Appendix D. Background on Culture Shock and Reverse Culture Shock

When traveling abroad, most sojourners are informed of the potential bewilderment and distress they can experience when being exposed to a new, foreign social and cultural environment. This experience is commonly referred to as culture shock. For the purpose of this literature review it is important to discuss the stages of culture shock in order to later discuss the stages of reverse culture shock, an important component of the reentry experience.

Culture Shock and the U-Curve Model

Experiencing culture shock is defined by having experienced any one or combination of the stages of the U-curve model that explains the emotional and behavioral effects had by the traveler once immersed in a foreign culture and environment. The first stage in the U-curve is the honeymoon phase. This phase describes the initial enchantment and fascination with the many new aspects of the host country. Typically the honeymoon stage can last from a couple days to a few weeks however; telling of its name, the honeymoon phase is relatively short lived. The next phase that describes the steady decline in the traveler's positive attitude is the disintegration stage. This stage is characterized by more hostile and negative feelings toward the host country, its cultural, environment, and its people. Commonly during this stage, the recognition that the traveler won't leave in any short time period settles in and resonates with oneself causing frustration and causing the traveler to put blame on the host country, culture, people for the shortcomings of the traveler and their perceived inability to 'fit in'. The next and final stage in the U-curve model is the adjustment stage. This stage is characterized by the traveler's acceptance of the host country and gradual appreciation of the once foreign cultural and social environment (Oberg). An important aspect of the adjustment stage is that the traveler at this point has fond memories and recollections of experiences had within the host country.

Reverse Culture Shock and the W-Curve Model

The W-Curve, adapted by Gullahorn and Gullahorn is a staple of reentry research. An adaptation and extension of the U-curve model used to describe culture shock, the W-curve explains the behavioral and emotional effects that the traveler experiences after returning home and also includes the addition of the feelings commonly held by people anticipating an abroad experience.

As depicted below through the dark green fragments, Gullahorn and Gullahorn added to the U-curve by analyzing typical feelings and behaviors had while the travelers either begun or returned to their home. During the period of time represented by the dark green fragment, the soon-to-be traveler is expected to have feelings of excitement and anxiety anticipating their future travels. Next, picking up where the U-curve model ends at a high point with the traveler feeling positive about his or her feelings toward the host country, these positive feelings continue and excitement builds in anticipation of returning to home, friends and family. Similar to the initial honeymoon phase, the sojourner returns home and is re-immersed back into their home culture and environment furthering the positive feelings. The next phase, following the

patterns of the U-curve is a decrease in positive feelings by the traveler and results in a steady increase in negative feelings and resentment towards the home country. At this time it is common for the sojourner to experience 'reverse homesickness' or 'reverse culture shock'. Reverse culture shock, is the feeling of estrangement and bewilderment when returning to one's home country from a foreign host country. Going into survival mode, the returning traveler will begin to adapt and integrate the skills and changes made overseas, thus beginning an upward positive movement along the W-curve. Wielkiwicz and Turkowski characterize this upward movement as the gradual accepting and understanding about the experience had with the present and future. This stage ultimately culminates in the student being able to use the skills gained abroad in their everyday personal, social, academic and professional life. (Wielkiwicz & Turkowski, 2010, p.650)

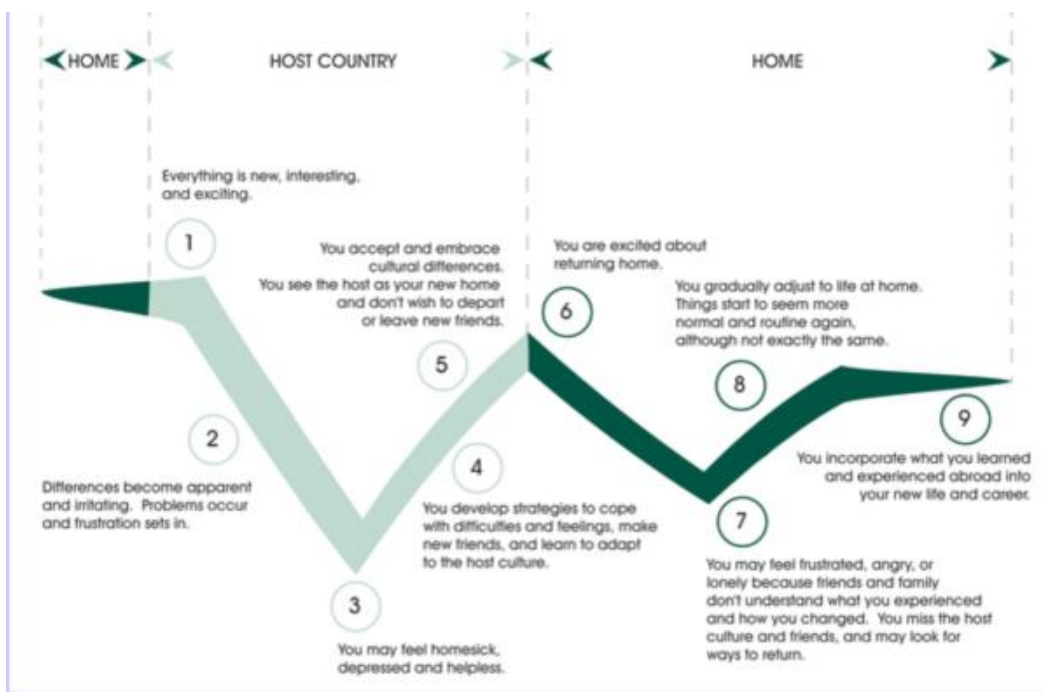


Figure 3

Criticisms of U-curve and W-curve

Seeing as the 'U' and 'W' curve emerged fairly closely to the concept of culture shock, they are both very well represented theories throughout reentry and study abroad research. However as research is continuing and more and more people are traveling and thus returning from abroad experiences, many people are beginning to question the validity of both the U and W curve models.

Two critics in particular offer a concrete case as to why they believe the usage of the U and W curves as reentry models should cease to be used. In a presentation named, "Caution: 'U' and 'W' Curves Ahead" Kate Berardo and Bruce LaBrack offer their criticisms and analysis. Within

the presentation they make very valid arguments but some specific points to highlight are as follows: (Berardo et al., 2007)

There are certain assumptions that are made about the two preceding models. Firstly, there is the common misconception that there is one main pattern of adjustment that most people returning from travels experience. Second, it is assumed that the U and W curves can be applied to various 'types' of sojourners. Next, it is inferred through the physical appearance of the curves that there are fixed times when the stages occur and for a generalized length of time. Lastly and most importantly, it is a common misconception that there is empirical evidence that supports the U and W curve models.

Berardo and LaBrack also address that if there is no empirical evidence proving the validity of the U and W curve that is has come to be accepted for many reasons. The curves are 'intuitively appealing'. Basically, people see the logic behind having these different feelings in waves when traveling and returning. With that said, there is evidence supporting initial euphoric feelings, - homesickness and reverse homesickness experienced. Another reason many reentry studies use the curves to describe culture shock and reverse culture shock is because in a field that is relatively new, there are few alternatives to the models and theories proposed.

Having discredited the usage of the U and W curve, one might question what should be proposed to use instead. LaBrack explains that although he is not sure what should be used to discuss and explain the phases and styles of culture shock and reverse culture shock, whatever it is must address the following criteria; (La Brack, 2010)

1. the obvious diversity of students who go abroad (and come here) to study,
2. in cultures profoundly different than their own,
3. who will encounter an amazing range of circumstances and situations,
4. to which they will have an equally diverse set of reactions, and
5. we, as educators, will have to help them make some sense and meaning out of all this—for their sakes and ours.

Other obvious criticisms regarding culture shock and reverse culture shock is that a lot of this research and studies were done a long time ago. Like previously mentioned, technology has changed many aspects of everyday life and many aspects of travelling abroad. Now, there is technology in place that makes connecting and staying connected with home, family and friends faster cheaper and exponentially easier. Similarly, because of the rapid spread of technology and the shrinking globe phenomenon, many other countries are becoming more westernized. This is important because as other countries adopt westernized brands, stores, restaurants etcetera the familiarity of those things might put the sojourner at ease and lessen the amount of culture shock experienced.

Appendix E: Resources for Re-entry Programming

This section provides further resources for any person interested in re-entry or experiencing re-entry.

TEN TOP IMMEDIATE RE-ENTRY CHALLENGES

As Rated by University Students

Dr. Bruce LaBrack

There are lots of reasons to look forward to going home, but there are also a number of psychological, social, and cultural aspects which can prove difficult - often because they are unanticipated. The following list was generated by interviewing students like you who have been through the experience and survived nicely. However, they say you should take the process seriously by being realistic and thinking about it and your possible reactions. They offer the following thoughts on reentry for your consideration in the hope they will make your return both more enjoyable and productive.

1. Boredom

After all the newness and stimulation of your time abroad, a return to family, friends, and old routines (however nice and comforting) can seem very dull. It is natural to miss the excitement and challenges which characterize study in a foreign country, but it is up to you to find ways to overcome such negative reactions – remember, a bored person is also boring.

2. “No One Wants to Hear”

One thing you can count on upon your return: no one will be as interested in hearing about your adventures and triumphs as you will be in sharing those experiences. This is not a rejection of you or your achievements, but simply the fact that once they have heard the highlights, any further interest on your audiences’ part is probably unlikely. Be realistic in your expectations of how fascinating your journey is going to be for everyone else. Be brief.

3. You Can’t Explain

Even when given a chance to explain all the sights you saw and feelings you had while studying abroad, it is likely to be at least a bit frustrating to relay them coherently. It is very difficult to convey this kind of experience to people who do not have similar frames of reference or travel backgrounds, no matter how sympathetic they are as listeners. You can tell people about your trip, but you may fail to make them understand exactly how or why you felt a particular way. It’s okay.

4. Reverse “Homesickness”

Just as you probably missed home for a time after leaving the United States, it is just as natural to experience some “reverse” homesickness for the people, places, and things that you grew accustomed to as a student abroad. To an extent it can be reduced by writing letters, telephoning, and generally keeping in contact (Facebook!), but feelings of loss are an integral

part of international sojourn and must be anticipated and accepted as a natural result of study abroad.

5. Relationships Have Changed

It is inevitable that when you return you will notice that some relationships with friends and family will have changed. Just as you have altered some of your ideas and attitudes while aboard, the people at home are likely to have experienced some changes. These changes may be positive or negative, but expecting that no change will have occurred is unrealistic. The best preparation is flexibility, openness, minimal preconceptions, and tempered optimism.

6. People See “Wrong” Changes

Sometimes people may concentrate on small alterations in your behavior or ideas and seem threatened or upset by them. Others may ascribe any “bad traits” to the influence of your time abroad. These incidents may be motivated by jealousy, fear, or feelings of superiority or inferiority. To avoid or minimize them it is necessary to monitor yourself and be aware of the reactions of those around you, especially in the first few weeks following your return. This phase normally passes quickly if you do nothing to confirm their stereotypes.

7. People Misunderstand

A few people will misinterpret your words or actions in such a way that communication is difficult. For example, what you may have come to think of as humor (particularly sarcasm, banter, etc.) and ways to show affection or establish conversation may not be seen as wit, but aggression or “showing off.” Offers to help in the kitchen can be seen as criticism of food preparation, new clothing styles as provocative or inappropriate, references to your host country or use of a new language as boasting. Be aware of how you may look to others and how your behavior is likely to be interpreted.

8. Feelings of Alienation

Sometimes the reality of being back “home” is not as natural or enjoyable as the place you had constructed as your mental image. When real daily life is less enjoyable or more demanding than you remembered, it is natural to feel some alienation, see faults in the society you never noticed before, or even become quite critical of everyone and everything for a time. This is no different than when you first left home. Mental comparisons are fine, but keep them to yourself until you regain both your cultural balance and a balanced perspective.

9. Inability to Apply New Knowledge and Skills

Many returnees are frustrated by the lack of opportunity to apply newly gained social, technical, linguistic, and practical coping skills that appear to be unnecessary or irrelevant at home. To avoid ongoing annoyance: adjust to reality as necessary, change what is possible, be creative, be patient, and above all use all the cross-cultural adjustments skills you acquired abroad to assist your own reentry.

10. Loss/Compartmentalization of Experience

Being home, coupled with the pressures of school, family, and friends, often combines to make returnees worried that somehow they will “lose” the experience and somehow become compartmentalized like souvenirs or photo albums kept in a box and only occasionally taken out and looked at. You do not have to let that happen. Maintain your contacts. Talk to people who have experiences similar to yours. Practice your skills. Remember and honor both your hard work and the fun you had while abroad.

U.S. and other Country’s Values

The graphic below comes from NAFSA’s “Reflecting on Your Study Abroad Experience and Putting It to Work” workbook. The unnamed graphic explains the differences between American values and the values of people from other countries. I think this graphic is important because it is useful for students to see the differences in how people of different backgrounds think, act, and what they value, emphasize and believe is important.

U.S. VALUES	SOME OTHER COUNTRY'S VALUES
Personal control over the environment/ Responsibility: Each person should control whatever might affect him/her	Fate/Destiny: Events beyond one's power or control
Change seen as natural and positive: Means improvement/ development/growth/progress	Stability/Tradition/Continuity: Honors rich and ancient culture
Time and its control: Punctuality, keeping schedules most important	Human interaction: Relations between people most important
Equality/Fairness: Of opportunity as an ideal	Hierarchy/Rank/Status: Position in society clearly defined
Individualism/Independence: The "self" as the center of the world/ need time to be alone	Group's welfare/Dependence: One cannot exist outside one's group
Self-help initiative: A person's achievement on his/her own	Birthright inheritance: Privilege of birth; inherited wealth or social position
Competition: Brings out the best	Cooperation: Working together for common good
Future orientation: Looking toward the future as better; planning and goal setting	Past orientation: Serves as model; past kept alive; today's world seen as continuity of past
Action/Work orientation: Action is superior; inaction unacceptable	"Being" orientation: State of inaction is acceptable; concern with the nature of existence and inner self
Informality: Free from all pretense	Formality: Gives dignity and importance to situation
Directness/Openness/Bluntness: Better to be "up front" about everything	Indirectness/Ritual/"Face": Must be preserved at all costs even if one has to lie a little to do so
Practicality/Efficiency: Useful purpose for everything is only validity	Idealism/Theory: Philosophical; knowledge for knowledge's sake; art for art's sake
Materialism/Acquisitiveness: Seen as the legitimate reward for hard work	Spiritualism/Detachment: Other worldliness

Figure 4

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