

Connecting International Experience to Campus, Community, and Career

Re-entry Resources



*A Reference Guide Prepared by
The McCulloch Center for Global Initiatives
For Students Returning from Study, Internships, and Research Abroad
January 2022*

Foreword

Welcome back! After returning from your learning abroad experience, not everything may be back to “normal.” And that is precisely how it should be. Whether you studied, interned, or researched abroad, your understanding of the world has grown richer, perhaps more complicated. You have developed new knowledge, and possibly new professional or research skill sets. Upon your return to Mount Holyoke (and family and friends) it may be difficult to know exactly how you will integrate your transformed self. The many expectations you are confronting, around academic deadlines or your professional future, may make it seem easier to leave your international experience behind.

This resource guide is written in the hopes you will not do that. The present moment is rife with possibility. This guide will give suggestions about how to navigate your current pressures so you can capitalize on your international experience. It will help you integrate your new knowledge into courses or theses, cement your recent gains in language proficiency, frame your new knowledge and skill sets for resumes and job interviews, see global-local connections, and carry forward community engagement or research questions sparked abroad into partnerships with your local community and collaborations with students and faculty at Mount Holyoke.

We hope this guide proves to be a useful resource as you make your transition back. If you have ideas for adding to the guide or are seeking additional resources, please do not hesitate to email global@mtholyoke.edu.

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Re-entry Adjustment¹

What could be easier than going home? After all, you grew up in that culture, speak the language(s), understand how the system works, are familiar with how to cope with daily living, and have a ready-made support group. When you were homesick you dreamed how great it would be to be back in a comfortable and familiar place surrounded by family and friends. However, the reality is that returning home after a significant overseas experience is not without its stresses. There are many reasons why this is so, but the following factors can contribute.

It Is Largely Unexpected

Few people prepare for the return because they expect it to be easy and are surprised when it is not.

The Reality of Home Differs from Reality

When you are abroad, images of home life can become idealized or romanticized. It is easy to forget or minimize the problems or issues that once were sources of stress in your everyday life. Re-encountering them can be disconcerting.

Change Has Occurred to Everyone

However major or subtle, things are different. You, the people around you, and your culture have changed. Sometimes this is obvious and immediately observable; sometimes it is "hidden" and only comes out under certain circumstances, which are usually unpredictable and therefore unsettling.

People May React to Returnees in Ways Returnees Consider Inappropriate

People generally expect you to be the same person you were when you left and usually attempt to treat you that way. They often have little patience for a returnee who seems to be significantly "different" or who exhibits behaviors or attitudes that, to them, seem odd or uncharacteristic of that person.

What is Re-entry Adjustment?

Re-entry adjustment refers to the difficulties you may face upon re-entering your own culture. Typically the more successful you were in immersing yourself in the country and culture where you have just been, the more difficult a time you will have re-adjusting to your own culture and getting back into the routine of your old life. You will most likely go through an adjustment process, similar to what you might have experienced overseas. Imagine it being shaped like a U. Initially, you will probably be a little excited to be back in your own country, seeing friends and family once again. But you may quickly move out of this stage, as you realize that your friends and family seem only mildly interested in hearing about your experience overseas. Things have changed while you were gone, and you might feel a little bit out of place in your own culture. At this point you may slide down into the bottom part of the U. You might find yourself getting irritated and impatient. Others may expect you to act the same as you always did, but you have changed, and find it difficult to do so. You may wish to just leave the country again as soon as possible! It will take time and patience on your part to facilitate your gradual re-adjustment to your culture. There are also several coping mechanisms you can utilize to help you move from the low part of the U curve, back up again.

What makes re-entry adjustment more difficult than cultural adjustment?

There are several reasons why re-entry adjustment can sometimes be so much more intense than culture adjustment. The main reason is probably because it's not expected. Students typically do a lot of planning and preparation to go abroad and are usually prepared for some of the difficulties they will initially face in a new culture. However, students tend to do a lot less preparation for returning home. They may not even think about it

until they are on the plane heading home. Re-entry adjustment is difficult, because it creeps up on you unexpectedly. Another factor that can make it difficult is the lack of understanding and support on the part of those around you. When you go overseas, people comprehend that you are different, and they expect you to make mistakes and have some misunderstandings. However, that same understanding and support is probably not present back in your own country. It's difficult for others to understand the intensity of what you have experienced abroad, and how difficult it is for you to adjust back to your own culture. It's something that seems like it should be easy, but in fact is really very difficult.

Symptoms of Re-Entry Adjustment

- Vague disoriented or frustrated feeling
- Boredom and insecurity
- Disdain for things American
- Feelings of alienation and withdrawal
- Need for excessive sleep
- Communication seems difficult
- You find it difficult to explain things coherently
- Others don't seem to understand you
- You feel resistant to family and friends
- It's hard to relate to others, or find common ground with them
- All you can think about is going back

Environmental Changes that Affect Re-adjustment

- Noise level is different (you now hear all of the background noise that you might have tuned out if you were learning the language in your host country. Suddenly you hear everything and it feels like sensory bombardment)
- Weather (humidity and temperature)
- Hours of sunlight
- Urban / rural settings
- Racial makeup of population
- Smells and sounds
- Pace of life and activity around you

Coping Strategies

- Get together with others who have been to the same area as you
- Maintain a sense of patience and humor, similar to when you initially went overseas
- Keep in touch with the friends and contacts you met while you were away
- Seek out international news so you don't feel so abruptly cut off from your experience
- Look for ways to use the new skills and knowledge you gained while abroad, i.e. giving a slide show or talk at your local library, Rotary club, etc.
- Write about your experience, and share it with others, or submit it for publication
- Maintain a healthy diet, and exercise
- Visit elementary/middle/high schools to speak about your experience
- Get involved with international students on campus

¹Borrowed and adapted from from "Online Cultural Training Resource for Study Abroad" (www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/) and "Re-entry Shock" (<https://www.evergreen.edu/sites/default/files/studyabroad/docs/reentryshock.pdf>).

Top Ten Tips for Re-entry²

1. Recognize the adjustment process

Returning home represents a transition. The more you know about why returning home is both similar to and different from going abroad, the easier the transition will be.

2. Allow yourself time

Re-entry is a process that will take time, just as adjusting to a new foreign culture required a period of acculturation. Give yourself time to relax and reflect upon what is going on around you, how you are reacting to it, and what you might like to change. Give yourself permission to ease into the transition.

3. Understand that the familiar will seem different

You will have changed, home has likely changed, and you will be seeing familiar people, places, and behaviors from new perspectives. Some things may seem strange, perhaps even unsettling. Expect to have some new emotional and psychological responses to being home. Everyone does.

4. There will be some "cultural catching up" to do

Some linguistic, social, political, economic, entertainment, and current event topics may be unfamiliar to you. New academic programs or regulations, slang expressions, popular culture references, recent events, and even major social changes may have emerged since you left. You may have some learning to do about your own culture. The longer you have been gone, the more you may have to discover, and the more noticeable it will be to others that you are not culturally fully up-to-speed. Approach this challenge in the same way you approached culture learning overseas, with a sense of humor and an open mind.

5. Reserve judgments

Just as you had to keep an open mind when first encountering the culture of a new foreign country, try to resist the natural impulse to make snap decisions and judgments about people and behaviors once back home. Variation in your perception (and mood) are common at first, and your most valuable and valid analysis of events is likely to take place *after* allowing some time for thorough reflection. Most returnees report gaining major insights into themselves and their home countries during re-entry, but only after allowing a sufficient period of time for reflection and self-analysis.

6. Respond thoughtfully and slowly

Take some time to rehearse what you want to say and how you will respond to predictable questions and situations; prepare to greet those that are less predictable with a calm, thoughtful approach. If you find yourself being defensive or aggressive in responding to those around you, take a moment to relax and reset your perspective. It is tempting when asked for the twentieth time, "How was London?" to sarcastically reply, "Very British!" but the momentary satisfaction will do little to open a real communication channel. As always, thinking before answering is a good strategy.

7. Cultivate sensitivity

Showing an interest in what others have been doing while you have been on your adventure overseas is a sure way to re-establish rapport. Any opportunity to get beyond the superficial questions (e.g., So how was it?) can

² Adapted from materials developed by Dr. Bruce La Brack, School of International Studies, University of the Pacific for the Institute of International Education, San Francisco. (<http://www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/>)

feel like a welcome opportunity to express yourself more fully. Still, you also want to avoid the perception that returnees are so anxious to tell their stories and share their experiences that they are not interested in what happened to those who stayed at home. Attention to two-way communication can create the rapport that opens space for more meaningful exchange.

8. Beware of facile comparisons

Learning abroad often leads to stretched perspectives, some perhaps quite different than those you left with. Making comparisons between cultures and nations may come naturally, particularly after residence abroad. However, the openness to cultural difference that served your adjustment abroad can be helpful now too. You've learned to see nuance in new ways. People tend to appreciate reflexive returnees more than "instant experts" who pronounce on every topic with judgmental comparisons.

9. Remain flexible

Keeping as many options open as possible is an essential aspect of a successful return home. Attempting to re-socialize totally into old patterns and networks can be difficult, but remaining aloof can be isolating and counterproductive. What you want to achieve is a balance between resuming and maintaining earlier patterns and enhancing your social and intellectual life with new friends and interests.

10. Seek support networks

There are lots of people back home who have gone through their own re-entry process and both understand and empathize with a returnee's concerns. Returnees may find it useful to seek out people with international living experience such as academic faculty, exchange students, Peace Corps volunteers, international development staff, diplomatic or military personnel, church mission officials, and those doing business internationally. University study abroad and international student offices may also be places where returnees can find support and empathy as they go through the re-entry process.

Remaining Time in School

From What's Up with Culture? On-Line Cultural Training Resource for Study Abroad - Module 2.5.23

Making the most of your remaining time in school is important. It is also important to find ways to use the knowledge you have brought back and the new perspectives you have acquired. The following checklists should give you a start on how to accomplish this crucial step.

Academic courses

Courses, of course! To the extent possible, select remaining courses that will build upon the overseas experience and both deepen and broaden your knowledge. Doing so can provide you the opportunity to apply your newly gained understanding and skills in relevant areas in such diverse disciplines as history, political science, sociology, anthropology, international development, art, area studies, economics, etc.,

If involved in English or Journalism courses, write an account of some important aspect of your study abroad as part of a class assignment. If you like the effort, offer the article to the school newspaper or submit it to a local newspaper because they are often looking for local human-interest stories. Even if you are not currently required to write about your experience you can try your hand at being a free-lance author. Guest editorials, Personal Opinion sections, Travel sections, and First-Hand Experience types of newspaper formats are potential places to begin.

Your school may have a Speakers Bureau where you can register what topics and areas you have an interest in and about which you would be willing to make public presentations. Such audiences are always appreciative of opportunities to hear about new places and people.

Study abroad offices on campus may sponsor an occasional forum where a group of students can discuss their time overseas and answer audience questions. If your school has orientation or cross-cultural training courses for students before they go overseas, you could volunteer to give a short talk to them about things you think they should know before they go abroad or even act as a student teaching assistant. International offices are always looking for volunteer help and most would welcome such offers. It is an excellent way to apply your new skills and knowledge and a benefit to outbound students.

Many schools have experiential learning components in their curriculum or offices that will arrange internships for academic credit. Since many communities have both businesses and non-profit organizations that could use such experienced student assistance, this is a natural avenue to explore as part of your post-return adaptation. Businesses that deal in or with international marketing, import-export, commodity exchanges, cargo carriers and shippers, etc., are possible candidates, especially those in joint-ventures or who are part of multi-national corporations. Non-profits include refugee and resettlement agencies, cross-cultural health care agencies, local charity or immigrant centers, micro-banking and development organizations, legal aid, literacy and work-preparation programs, and much more. All of these can be good additions to a resume as well providing personal satisfaction. Such experience is also attractive to future employers.

Language

Obviously, consider continuing language learning begun abroad or begin a new language.

Find opportunities for using language skills such as tutoring children or adults in the language, translating simple documents, volunteering as a teaching assistant or language lab assistant.

Continue to correspond with your homestay family, host culture nationals, and foreign friends in the language.

Subscribe to foreign language media (newspapers, magazines, newsletters). Some embassies provide resources and newsletters.

Maintain contact with networks of friends overseas through email and social media.

Seek out foreign language broadcasts available on cable channels or through streaming services such as SCOLA. Watch 30 minutes to an hour a day in the language to maintain aural competency.

Explore what extracurricular language opportunities there are available on campus. These may include language clubs, language tables in dining rooms, partnering with an international student who speaks your target language, living in an international dorm with international students, seeking an international student as a roommate, acting as a participant (or judge) in a foreign language speech contest, etc.

On-campus Opportunities

Offer to organize a film series of modern classics in foreign languages you are familiar with for the student union or a modern language department.

Consider becoming an academic "Mentor" or student advisor for an international student if your institution has such programs. If your campus has an International Students Association attend a meeting and meet some members. You may find that you will have much more in common with them as a result of your own study abroad experience than you might suppose.

Community organizations

Volunteer at local secondary education institutions to talk to history, international studies, and government classes about your overseas experience. Schools are always looking for interesting outside speakers for the classroom and assemblies.

A good outlet for your pictures, videos, and other media could be a local organization that is interested in "Traveler's Tales" where you could combine your pictures with a narrative of your experiences. Sometimes these are associated with photography or travel book stores, but they are also found at local library branches, senior citizen organizations, adventure sports stores, etc.

Join a local chapter of a national language organization such as Alliance Francais, Goethe Society, Japan Society, etc.

Seek opportunities to act as a cultural bridge for community-based organizations involved in international exchange such as Sister Cities Associations, Kiwanis, and Rotary Club. You might volunteer to translate for, or host, short-term international visitors.

Organizations such as Youth for Understanding and AFS Intercultural Programs are devoted to international and intercultural exchanges for high school students and are constantly looking for local trainers, mentors, and resource persons. They provide an excellent opportunity for you to play a very direct role in helping young people make the most of their overseas sojourns and the return home.

A wide range of local non-profit organizations from women's centers to migrant or immigrant assistance programs are always looking for individuals with intercultural skills and experience, especially if they have some capacity in the language(s) of their clients. Internships, paid and unpaid, can often be arranged.

Daily life practices

Become aware of and seek to apply cross-cultural skills in your everyday interactions.

Cultivate intercultural sensitivity, especially across racial, religious, and socio-economic lines. Be aware of difference and how you evaluate and react to it.

Try new experiences at home in the same spirit you once did abroad. You could try new ethnic restaurants or cuisines you are not familiar with (and, of course, if possible, find a good restaurant which serves food you came to appreciate overseas). Or you might attend a holiday celebration or public event of a group you know little about (e.g., Hmong New Year, Vietnamese Tet, Sikh Baisaki, Hindu Holi). Respectful and curious visitors are always welcome.

Push your comfort zone. Keep trying to find new ways to view the world, new ways to experience human culture, and new ways to interact with those who are culturally different from you. If you look for it there is often as much cultural diversity in domestic contexts as there was abroad, but it may be a bit harder to see at home because most people once home operate within a relatively restricted and narrow set of social situations compared to their adventures overseas.

Consider seeing more of the United States. US-American students returning from overseas often realize how little familiarity they have of the tremendous geographic and cultural diversity within their own country. Now would be a good time to start to explore and experience that regional richness.

This list is only a small sample of the many ways in which you can apply your overseas knowledge and experiences as you approach graduation. Of course, some students decide that overseas travel, work, and study is not only fun but something they want to do much more of, perhaps even considering a career abroad. A few students even go abroad a second time on study abroad. Whatever the result of your study abroad experience, we hope the information provided here helps you prepare for the readjustment of coming home.

Possible Outcomes of an International Experience

From Maximizing Study Abroad: A Students' Guide To Strategies For Language And Culture Learning and Use

This sheet provides a handy reference of skills students may develop as a direct result of their experiences abroad. Use this to spark ideas for creating a résumé, preparing for an interview, and reflecting upon your experiences.

Skills

- Understand cultural differences and similarities
- Adapt to new environments
- Learn through listening and observing
- Establish rapport quickly
- Function with a high level of ambiguity
- Take initiative and risks
- Utilize time management skills
- Identify problems and utilize available resources to solve the problems
- Accept responsibility
- Communicate despite barriers
- Learn quickly
- Handle difficult situations
- Handle stress
- Manage/organize
- Lead others in formal/informal groups
- Conduct research despite language and cultural differences
- Cope with rejection

Qualities

- Self-reliance
- High energy level/enthusiasm
- Appreciation of diversity
- Perseverance
- Flexibility
- Open-mindedness
- Assertiveness
- Inquisitiveness
- Self-confidence
- Self-knowledge
- Independence

Professional Experience

What are some terms specific to the student's career field? Brainstorm some here:

Language Resources

Did language immersion abroad deepen your interest and facility in a language? Introduce you to a new language that you want to pursue further? Connecting to language resources upon return can solidify your language skills while they are still sharp.

You may refer to the following as a starting point for language resources. But ***please*** refer to the language departments or MHC Bulletin as your guide to fulfilling College language requirements.

MHC Language Tables and Language Communities/Language Floors

Language tables are very informal weekly meetings, usually over lunch or dinner, where students can practice speaking in the target language in a casual context with language assistant(s) and faculty members. Check the MHC events calendar and with the language departments for language tables for Arabic, Chinese, Italian, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Russian, and Spanish.

Language Living-Learning Communities (LLCs) are communities of students that promote a supportive and congenial environment of language immersion for their residents by providing access to language assistants, faculty and staff who facilitate programs, and activities that enhance students' linguistic and cultural competence in the target language. For the 2021-2022 academic year, LLCs are offered for Chinese (Mandarin), Italian, German and French, and the language floors are located in Creighton Hall. Students of any ability level, who are currently or will be enrolled in a language course taught in the language of the community for which they are applying, will be eligible for the community.

Language & Culture Commons

The [Language & Culture Commons](#) is a facility designed to promote language learning, both inside and outside the classroom. The LCC offers a variety of media and computer equipment, software, books, films, magazines, mentors, cultural events and other resources to support the process of language acquisition. The LCC is located in Room 6 on the lower level of the Ciruti Center for Foreign Languages.

Other Language Learning Opportunities

For information on language courses, contact the relevant MHC language department or – for less commonly taught languages – the [Five College Center for World Languages](#). This UMass based center offers both ***Mentored Language Courses*** and the ***Five College Supervised Independent Language Program*** (SILP).

*Your undergraduate years represent one of your best opportunities to
build new language skills. Seize the opportunity!*

Student Organizations

For students returning from international study, internships, or research, MHC Student Organizations can provide an opportunity to maintain engagements begun abroad – whether connecting with communities from the region where they lived, or building on academic or professional interests. (Organizations are grouped in two categories below for ease of discovery, though their purposes may cross these categories.)

Please contact Student Involvement (x2478), to learn more about involvement in these organizations.

Cultural Organizations:

- Arab Association, MHC
- Asian Students Association (ASA)
- Association of Pan-African Unity (APAU)
- AWAZ
- Bangla Club
- Bulgarian Club
- Chinese Cultural Association (CCA)
- KASA (Korean-American Sisters Association)
- Kuch Karo: Pakistani Students for Change (PSC)
- Liga Filipina
- MHACASA - Mount Holyoke African and Caribbean Student Association
- Nepali Student Organization
- Russian Club
- Vietnamese Student Association

Academic and Special Interest Organizations:

- Anthropology Club
- Biology Club
- Chemistry and Biochemistry Club
- Computer Science Society
- Economics Society
- Entrepreneurship Club, MHC
- Espanol Sin Limites
- German Club
- Investment Club
- Italian Club (Il Gruppo Italiano), MHC
- Neuroscience Student Forum
- Philosophy Society, MHC
- Pre-Law Association
- Pre-Medical Association, MHC
- Sisters in Science (SIS)
- Society of Physics Students
- Women in Business

The Global Competence Award

Global competence is crucial for successful careers and citizenship in today's global world. Mount Holyoke offers many amazing opportunities, in and outside the classroom, on and off campus, to advance your global competence. To receive a Global Competence Award, you must satisfy the following requirements:

1. Language Requirement

Complete at least three courses, in the same language, beyond the language requirement, while enrolled at Mount Holyoke. One course taken pass/fail can be accepted.

2. Cultural Immersion

Complete at least one of the following:

- An [internationally-focused internship](#)
- An internationally-focused community-based learning project
- [Study Abroad](#)

3. Global Perspectives

Complete at least two courses that explore a global issue from different perspectives.

4. Cross-Cultural Learning on Campus

Participate in at least one of the following:

- Live on a language floor
- Participate in the [Global Partners' Program](#)
- Be active in a student organization with an international focus (you will need to supply a description of your participation of 300 words or less when you submit your application).

5. Reflective Essay (no more than 750 words)

Logistics:

1. [Track your progress towards meeting the requirements for the Global Competence Award.](#)
2. The McCulloch Center certifies that a student has met the criteria for the award. Students need to apply in MyMtHolyoke by March 1st of their Senior year.
3. Seniors will receive the award at a special ceremony during Commencement Week.
4. The award will be listed in the Commencement program and noted on the transcript.
5. If you have questions about whether certain courses or activities will meet the criteria for the award, please contact Jenny Medina (jmedina@mtholyoke.edu) in the McCulloch Center.

Select Re-entry Support & Informational Resources

MHC RE-ENTRY RESOURCES (KEY OFFICES AND CONTACTS):

MCCULLOCH CENTER FOR GLOBAL INITIATIVES

https://www.mtholyoke.edu/global/study_abroad/returning_stu

Phone 413-538-2072

Contact:

April Stroud, Director of Study Abroad

Adelia Pope, Study Abroad Coordinator

Student Peer Advisors and Program Assistants: Sammi Craig, Yixuan He

CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/cdc/>

Phone 413-538-2080

Contact: Kelly Woods, Associate Director

COUNSELING SERVICE

<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/counseling>

Phone 413-538-2037

COMMUNITY BASED LEARNING (CBL)

<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/cbl>

Phone 413-538-3072

Contact: Alan Bloomgarden, Director of Community Engagement

DEAN OF STUDENTS

<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/deanofstudents>

Phone 413-538-2550

Contact:

Marcella Runnell Hall, Dean of Students and Vice President for Student Life

Latrina Denson, Associate Dean of Students for Community and Inclusion

FELLOWSHIPS OFFICE

<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/fellowships>

Phone 413-538-3344

Contact: Ryan Lewis, National Fellowships Advisor

PRE-HEALTH PROGRAMS

<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/prehealth>

Phone 413-538-3389

Contact: Katie Lipp, Director

NEXUS: CURRICULUM TO CAREER PROGRAM

<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/nexus>

Phone 413-538-3010

Contact: Kate Walker, Coordinator

ONLINE RESOURCES:

MHC Study Abroad Moodle - "[Welcome Back! Returning Home](#)" section. If not already enrolled, search Study Abroad in Moodle and self-enroll. It includes a list of returned study abroad students on campus, resources for marketing your experience, and other returnee resources such [What's Up with Culture](#) to help you process your cross-cultural experience.

CAMPUS EVENTS:

Going Global: Connecting and Exploring Languages & Culture for Study, Internships, Work, and Beyond... An Alum Panel and Resource Workshop, March 3, 2022, 5:00-7:00 pm in Shattuck Hall-Cassani Room (102).