Transformation

A resource for study abroad
Australian Learning & Teaching Council

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2012 Resources
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Support for the production of this publication has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

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2012
ISBN [Office of Learning and Teaching WILL ADD]
Instructions
The resources in this document are intended to accompany the Instructor’s Guide provided for the module, Stereotypes. These materials should be easier to photocopy for students to support the re-entry workshop outlined in that guide.

The documents should be distributed prior to the meeting for the workshop.
The following post was written by a student during his exchange experience in Sweden. The post might serve as a spark to hold on online discussion, in-country, with students who are themselves adapting to their host countries, thinking about how the experience has changed them. The questions at the end should help to spark some discussion. Use similar questions if you wish to conduct an in-country discussion with students about their own transformations, using a different post or piece of reflective writing that touches on themes of personal change and growth.

It’s been four months now.

I’ve seen so much of this place. Made a lot of friends, a lot of memories, seen and done things I would never ever have imagined.

This is much like the story of every exchange student, I would imagine, but to me, it feels special.

As I find myself nearing the end of my stay here in Umeå, Sweden, I feel like a little reflection is in order:

Actually, I’ve spent more time on my various trips around Europe than here in Umeå. Just got back from a trip further north at 1am today. I’m writing this blog now rather than later since I’m leaving again for another trip around Europe in a couple of days. Tiredness is no longer a problem, just a fact of life.

So far I have visited a whole lot of Sweden, plus bits of other countries like Poland, Finland (twice), Norway (thrice), Russia, Italy, Switzerland, France and Monaco, with plans to see Spain and Germany as well as Italy and France.
again before I leave – in a month.

I’ve been roaming around with friends I made here, friends from just about every country in the world (in fact I’m convinced Sweden has more Germans than Swedes). I have a bunch of Swedish friends as well, of course, but they are not so interested in such touristy activities…

One thing that you notice when travelling with non-native English speakers is that many will call just about anywhere “home”. Instead of “let’s go back to the hotel where we are staying for one night”, it’s “let’s go home”. Of course I don’t feel at home in that hotel, it’s just the place we sleep. In this case I usually try to correct people (which some really appreciate, more than others).

There is one case, though, when I don’t feel that this is a mistake; When people say we are going “home” as we return to Umeå, then I am inclined to agree with them. I do feel like I’m coming home. This feels like home.

The snow; the cold; the sun that we never see, and the beautiful skies by which we know it is still there; this tiny little room; my curtains that I found in a dumpster – held open by a coathanger; riding my bike across the frozen lake; cooking my own food in my own shared kitchen; my housemates, about whom I know nothing, not even their names (as is the Swedish way); the times when I find myself thinking “$5 Australian, what’s that in crowns?”; the big dirty factory next door, whose smoky beacon guides me safely home from any place in town at any hour of night…

All of it. It’s home.

Original post and photos at: http://tiny.cc/zlvzew
Hey all,

It’s been my first week back at UOW this week and I found myself a little scared to be back! So much had changed and was different and yet so much was still the same! Every now and again I find myself thinking “I’m homesick.” I had this really weird moment the other day, where I was sorting through my UK photos for printing and I thought “I miss being home.” Huh? Was? Ich wohne nicht in London/Scotland/Wales. But it doesn’t matter, I’m still homesick.

I was thinking about what was discussed at the ‘welcome back’ session with Tonia, and I can definitely say that I feel like a bit of a hybrid of an Australian and a British girl now. As I posted on my personal blog, “I love Australia. I love the bush. I love the sun. I love my friends. I love to write Australian bushland poetry and I love going to The National Park for swims and picnics. I even love the song ‘I am Australian’, in particular these stanza’s:

I’m the teller of stories
I’m the singer of songs
I’m Albert Namajira
And I paint the ghostly gums
I’m Clancy on his horse
I’m Ned Kelly on the run
I’m the one who waltzed Matilda
I am Australian.

I’m the hot winds of the desert
I’m the black soils of the plain
I’m the mountains and the valleys
I’m the droughts and flooding rains
I am the rock, I am the sky,
The rivers when they run
The spirit of this great land
I am Australian.

But see the UK and Ireland have my family and they have the culture we don’t have.”

I decided in light of how I’m feeling at the moment I’ll sum up the things I liked best about the UK using pictures.

1. Seeing real snow for the first time and understanding the meaning of ‘proper cold.’

A day trip to Loch Ness
Stuck in a snow storm without an umbrella in London.

2. Meeting my relatives overseas in both Ireland and England for the first time!

3. My flatmates and our weird and wonderful adventures.

Halloween at Flat 12!

4. The history and culture in the UK

All those old buildings and churches were so awesome. One fond memory is of my American flat mate and I doing a guided tour of Lancaster castle with a truly creepy guide who seemed ghoulishly obsessed with death. On the entertainment front, I went to the theatre four times when I was in the UK itself! That’s a play a month! I couldn’t help it. The tickets were so much more affordable than back home and I loved the atmosphere. And after all, who wouldn’t have fun trying to explain the three hour plot of Les Miserables in London’s West End to their Chinese flat mate throughout the entire performance without annoying everyone around us?

My two play Guides. One for Hamlet and one for Season’s Greetings with some of the cast’s autographs.

5. Real Christmas Markets.

Market and fair in Edinburgh, Scotland. I took this on the actual ferris wheel.

It’s funny. When I got towards the end of my trip in the UK, I was so homesick and just wanted to come home to Australia. After a week or two, I instantly wanted my travelling life back! Anyone else going through this?
36 hours to pack, 15 hour flight home and 19 hours later sitting back in a lecture theatre; not the way I had planned my return home to Australia but that was the reality I faced.

As the plane started its descent into Sydney my heart was racing. I was more nervous coming ‘home’ than I was starting this whole adventure. What was I coming back to? Before I left I had run away from a few things using the excuse that I would be abroad for the next year so I could not commit to anything. In the last week before my departure, I had three final exams, a farewell dinner and the enormous task of packing my bag (which I finalised the night before!). Things were a blur before I jumped into the unknown, but looking back that was so much easier than coming back.

While overseas I logically knew that time continued second by second, at the same rate for my friends and family back home and for me in Japan. But while I was living my life over there, it didn’t seem as though things in Australia were progressing at all because I wasn’t there. I had sat through the workshop on culture shock at the pre-departure meeting and studied the theories in commerce, but I didn’t real feel as though I experienced the trough in the experience curve…until I encountered reverse culture shock.

Coming back to what I thought I knew, but knowing it would be different, was a daunting and overwhelming thought. For a while after I was home, it felt like I was playing a life-size ‘spot the difference’. And every difference I saw reminded me not only of
what I had missed in Australia while I was away, but how much I was missing my life in Japan. Using Facebook as a window looking at all the things that I should have and could have been doing; it was hard, and there were many moments where I found myself wishing that I was not back. The day before I returned, while I was packing the life I had created for myself back into my bag (which seemed to have become a lot smaller since my arrival), I was sitting, surrounded by the clothes I had taken out of my draws, with nothing in my suitcase, overwhelmed by what I had to do. It was such an emotional experience and battle of will to finally empty my room and zip up my bag for the final time, knowing that this was the end.

Coming back to Australia did make me reflect upon what I had missed while I was away: fish and chips at the beach, walking along the sand, rolling down a grassy hill, looking out onto the horizon. The things that remind you of the Aussie lifestyle. Before I had even reached my house, I made my parents drive the coastal road around North Beach. We sat and had fish and chips, taking in the moment. Even embracing the flies and the seagulls. To be honest, though, it felt like I had come back for a holiday. I had to keep reminding myself that I didn’t need to try the food or drink right then and there because I would be able to come back in a day, a week, a month, a year and the same thing would still be there.

The permanence; the indefinite of the monotony that I had wanted to get away from was there once again. My days consisted of going to Uni, coming home, doing homework and then doing it all again the following day. A few times I caught myself looking around campus.

Some students may relate to Sarah’s story of coming home from Japan. Sarah talks about her anxiety, her sense that she had to face things she had left behind in Australia, and her initial sense of being out of place (that she was only holidaying in Australia) are a powerful example of reverse culture shock.

A videotape of a portion of Sarah’s interview can be found at: Re-entry (2:06) http://youtu.be/6MsgEl_GKfw
for the friends who I had studied with in Japan only to find myself being disappointed. Campus was so lonely without my Australian friends who had graduated the year before, without my Japanese swim team and without a communal lunch hour in which we used to sit and make friends with other students.

Living at home again I have also noticed how much chicken my family consumes! It seems as though I’m eating it at least once a day. In Japan frequently meal time would turn into Master Chef; my friends and I would bring the contents of our fridge to the communal cooking area and be faced with the challenge of creating something for dinner. Some of the dishes were rather inventive, but nothing inedible was made and every day was a surprise. I now crave rice, particularly onigiri (which was only ¥100) – so cheap yet so satisfying – and am still adjusting to the Australian diet which is the only thing I’d ever known before going away. It seems so strange that nine months can change a lifetime. I’m still waiting for Dad to set up the BBQ so that I can be a true Aussie and “throw a few shrimps on the barbie” as my American friends often told me.

Before going on exchange, going on exchange was my goal. I was working four part-time jobs in order to self-finance my trip and was so committed to my Uni work for fear of failing and being ineligible to actually participate on the study abroad. Coming home I didn’t have that driving goal, and I felt lost. It has taken me three months to build and work towards my next challenge, but I am confident that I will get there. I am slowly beginning to settle back into ‘Aussie life’ but don’t think I’ll be back for very long before my next sojourn overseas, whether it be as a holiday or for work. After having this experience I will not be content until I can see and do all that is out there waiting to be discovered.

Sarah’s account of reverse culture shock is particularly eloquent and dramatic, her time in Japan clearly quite powerful, even though cut short. Elsewhere, Sarah wrote about this disorientation in a post on our team weblog, Oz Students Abroad, and another student responded, sharing her own experiences with reverse culture shock and the sense of incomplete transformation.
I realised today, home is no longer home. Yes, I still live in the same house and the same room that I left a year ago and my family are what, but I am living in a world of memories and virtual contact. I have no friends that still live in the area; I can’t simply call by and have a chat or a cry, watch a movie or bake cookies. I truly miss the friends I made in Japan during my exchange. I keep in contact via Skype and Facebook but I see photos of events that I know I would have attended if I were still there. Seeing the laughter and the frivolity all while I have been in my room studying for final exams made it even harder. It is all through virtual contact. I am grateful for these technologies as I know that if we had to write letters and send them through the post I would have lost contact with so many more people, but it is still difficult.

I so desperately want to start the next chapter of my life; to begin the next challenge, as my exchange was a year ago. I don’t know why I cannot be the confident, proactive person I was in Japan while I’m here. I feel like I want to run away (particularly back to Japan) but I know that is not the answer. I don’t want to face the reality that was and is my life in Australia. Reverse culture shock is worse than what I experienced going abroad. At the beginning of an adventure there is excitement, anticipation and an unknowing. Back home, back at Uni, back to routine I feel like I am losing touch with all the experiences I had and returning to the person I was before I left rather than the being person I became.

I know that every person’s experience is different so I would really like to know how other people are dealing with being ‘home’.

A videotape of a portion of Sarah’s interview in which she discusses her changed views on Australian culture, especially diet, eating, socialising, dress, and student life, and how she’s integrated Japanese popular culture into her daily life.

Australia through a New Lens (4:07) http://youtu.be/BKuoIYQ-ug4
Hi,

I completely understand and relate to everything you have posted here! I too have found it really hard to re enter, and its not the first time.

I found the way that I have been able to move forward easier is to do what you do when you are travelling or to get the feeling back that you had when you first moved overseas. Get out of your comfort zone. I signed up with the local volunteer bush fire brigade. Completely out of my comfort zone, completely out of character, BUT its something that I would do when I was travelling and has given me that thrill again and made me much more confident.

I am also meeting new people. I am also trying (‘trying’ being the operative word) to learn a language, to keep a connection with Europe and my friends who also speak this language and to also keep busy and etc.

I hope things get better for you! Also another thing that I find easier on re entry is to plan a new trip (even small) which gives you something new to look forward to.

Goodluck!
Morgan x

Original post and response available at:
http://tiny.cc/no2zew.

On a note related to the communication dimensions of this exchange, readers should also note that the two students were at different university campuses, on opposite coasts of Australia.
I recently returned from three months living and studying abroad in the current economic shambles that is the country of Greece.

Having travelled extensively and lived abroad before, I presumed this return would be like the others. Sure I would be sad for a day or two, but would get back into the flow of things quickly like an professional traveller.

WRONG.

For some reason this return has been the hardest, and I was not sure why.

This was only three months away, last time I was abroad living in Ireland for seven. I knew I had limited time in Greece due to visa restrictions, so it wasn't a surprise I was asked nicely to leave once those three months were up.

I was looking forward to seeing my family and friends and the beautiful country which I realised I loved more than I let on.

Yet something had gone wrong this time and I fell into a pit of sadness and had a mini depressive episode the first few weeks back.

I realised that whilst my family were pleased to see me, many friends had moved on or were busy or lived in differing corners of the globe now.

Being the constant traveller makes you extremely popular on social networking sites such as Facebook where everyone claims to live vicariously through your travels. But it makes for a pretty lousy physical relationship, with many wary of putting in a lot of effort when I’m potentially going to run away again to some other distant land anytime soon.

Those that I have seen have helped make the transition smoother, especially my best friend. It doesn’t matter how long we go without seeing each other, nothing changes and we still have the best time.

I had applied to two internships before I came home so that the re entering of Perth would be easier, both of which I found out I did not succeed in getting. I finally found a part time job
which is lovely and has definitely helped in regards to finances, but something is missing still.

Two of my best friends currently still live in Greece, and it is often with a pang of jealousy that I Skype with them with their tanned skin, sunny weather and hilarious stories of the daily trials of Greek life. Whilst in the current situation I don’t have a pressing desire to be living in Greece again, I have come to the conclusion that right now Australia does not hold the answer. And that I need to continue my searches for jobs and experiences elsewhere.

I also had a terrible headache for the first week and a half which I realised was my body going through caffeine withdrawals from the amount of coffee and frappes I was consuming daily in Greece. It was also hard to get up before 12pm in the day, and eating dinner at 6pm was also eerily strange, as that was normally coffee time not dinner time!

In saying all of this things are better now, I have been home a month and have really enjoyed spending quality time with my family and catching up with friends. I am still struggling to find any work or work experience or internships in journalism or public relations but am becoming more upbeat and positive again.

I think the change of weather (well in three months when spring arrives and winter ends) shall be good, and I’m starting new activities and volunteering in an effort to re inspire myself and feel as though I have a purpose being back here in Perth (study doesn’t count, it’s like having a job you don’t get paid for).

To all of the other returning study abroaders: I hope your transition home is much much smoother than mine was this time and that the reverse culture shock of returning home does not last too long. Even with re entering culture shock as bad as it has been this time around, I certainly would not change the experiences and friendships that I made in Greece and would readily go through it again in a heartbeat.

Morgan x

Morgan’s original post is available at: http://tiny.cc/t52zew.
‘Student Today, Husky Forever’ by Kelly

Even though I have only been home for a month, it seems like a lifetime since I left the University of Connecticut on a very, very cold day. Summing up a week is hard enough, so 5 months is all but impossible! Instead, I will write about some of the things that I learnt that stuck with me.

Firstly, there were the little things that were different to Australia that I simply did not think of, but made a lot of difference. Driving on the opposite side, not a problem, but crossing roads defiantly did! The first night my 2 friends and I arrived in LA, we decided to walk down to Denny's (best restaurant ever). After standing at the traffic lights, having a chat, for AGES, we were soon embarrassed to discover that in LA the ‘walk’ signal doesn’t make a noise, so we had missed about 3 goes, because we weren’t paying attention! It may seem insignificant, but I can still clearly remember it, 6 months on! Being a western country, I had naively assumed that everything would be the same as in Australia. Boy, was I wrong. And don’t even get me started on tipping! 5 months later, and I’m still not 100% sure of the proper way to do it.

Next up, adapting. While for the first couple of days I felt like a fish out of water, by the end of my stay, I was an unofficial American. I adapted really quickly to all the little things that would make my life easier. With limited funds and no one but yourself looking out for you, you have to! I also started saying ‘bunch’ instead of ‘heaps’ and ‘chug’ instead of ‘skull’, just to make my life easier when the Americans had no idea what I was saying.

I cannot write about my stay in America without mentioning School Spirit. At UConn, there is a slogan written all over the place ‘Student today, Husky forever’, and that is how I feel. Long after leaving there, I will still be a Husky, and I have all the merchandise to go with it! On any given day, half the students would be wearing UConn clothing, on game day, this would go up to 99%. The basketballers were famous around College, people would literally go up to them and ask for photos. The Co-Op sold UConn branded EVERYTHING, from Christmas decorations to dog collars to baby clothes. UConn wasn’t just our school, it was our life.

By the end of my trip, I was feeling homesick, and I was ready to go home. After 1 week back in Australia but, I was already missing everything about the place that had been my home for the last 5 months, and the best 5 months of my life. Exchange was the best thing I have ever done, and the experience will stay with me for life.

Kelly’s original post is available at: http://tiny.cc/0h4zew.
'Being home’, by Emily

I have been home for almost two months, and I wouldn’t say I am struggling to cope with the change, but it’s certainly a lot different to what I expected. I thought the experience of returning to Australia would leave me in despair, because of the final few incredibly intense days I spent in Los Angeles. The fourth of July was my last night in the city and rather than heading out, drinking and partying, I spent it watching fireworks outside my window with my best friend. It was the most magical moment of my life, it could have come straight from a scene in a Hollywood movie, but it happened to me and I am very grateful. While watching the fireworks show, I thought about home and how nothing could ever be this good again.

In reality, and in the present day I am very happy. I don’t think there was anything anti-climactic about going home at all. In fact, I knew that coming home was a huge part of exchange. It wasn’t a negative experience, as I thought it would be. I really wanted to see my family, I missed them a lot. There are only so many places in the world you can visit, without feeling the hollowness that comes with not having your family beside you.

I haven’t seen all my friends from home yet, but I regularly meet up with a few of my closest friends. I feel like I need that interaction, otherwise I will probably go crazy. It is difficult to stay motivated for uni, and since I am only there once a week, I’ve been looking for a job. I’m in the transition stage between university and the real world. I feel like this is one of those things that’s not as bad as it seems to be.

Anyway, I hope everyone who has recently come back from overseas is settling in and sorting out their new lives.

Good luck!

Emily's original post is available at: http://tiny.cc/gx4zew.
My semester abroad is now coming to end, with exactly 14 days left until I have to get on that long haul flight back to OZ.

It’s exam time here in Bath, which I am finding quite odd. Classes finished about 5 days before Christmas, students are given 3 weeks off and then into exams. If I was to be continuing on for another semester, I would only have a one week break before starting the next semester. I much prefer our university system, it just seems to make more sense! (Although the 3 week break over Christmas did allow for ample travel time. Spain was gorgeous!)

I spent the Christmas town hopping, 3 or so days in different towns around the UK with friends from uni and also friends who were on exchange in Australia last year. A cold Christmas felt a tad odd, although it did feel more ‘traditionally Christmas’ or what Christmas seems like in all the films anyway! But it felt pretty weird without my family and friends and the beach, although we did manage to get in some snow cricket on Christmas day just for my benefit.

Having exams right before I finish my semester abroad has made it incredibly hard to see everyone before I fly out. But making sure I see everyone has made me realise just how many amazing people I’ve met over here. From England, Europe, and even some new Aussie mates. My English friends have taken me under their wing completely, and where at the beginning of the
semester I was introduced as “the token Aussie,” I’ve now received “Oz” instead of ‘Erin’ as a nickname. My sports team were even going to see if they could get uni funding for me to come back to Italy in April for their beach tour! (Unfortunately it’s not going to happen...) I’ve managed to convince some friends from some of my classes to do placement in the southern hemisphere, with some scattered over Aus and a few in NZ. Just gives me an excuse to go and see more of the world closer to home (I have most definitely got the travel bug!).

This 6 months has gone so fast, and yet at the same time it feels like so long ago that I was in Wollongong. Leaving Bath is going to be bittersweet as I’m excited to go home, but also sad to leave. But yesterday when I packed up a box to send home (mainly consisting of a winter wardrobe), I thought about just how amazing this experience has been.

Not only have I made friends from around the world and seen 16 countries, but I’ve seen snow for the first time, had a cold Christmas, learnt how to cook, tried new sports, survived a long distance relationship and minus temperatures. I’ve even been able to recommend places and travel spots to other people. I’ve had a snow day, town hopped the UK, met relatives on the other side of the world, experienced homesickness, stood on a frozen lake and represented my country as we lost the rugby and the Ashes, and loved every minute of it all! I’ve even started hearing English accents as normal and Australian accents as incredibly odd (when they pop up on TV or on the street).

When I was organising my exchange trip, I met another girl from Wollongong who was also coming to Bath; we even discovered we have a lot of close friends back home. Having her here with me in Bath has been so wonderful. Not only did it give me a travel buddy, but also a cooking partner and someone to talk with about home. She was there when I had some family troubles, and also when we both had boy troubles back home – it was great to have someone to talk to.

Obviously procrastination has kicked in at its best with this long post.. But a few photos from awesome times here.

Erin’s original post is available at: http://tiny.cc/m57zew.
Re-entry discussion

Passage 1: from Lean (2012: 274):
When I returned from two months in West Africa, I was haunted by memories of the experience. It had reshaped my perspective upon my life in Australia, altered the way I looked at my personal and professional relationships and left me longing for the freedom, excitement and adventure that I had found while travelling. After a few months, however, this thinking had begun to subside as I settled into ‘home’ roles, routines and performances. Yet, despite this, even in the familiarity of home, the experiences and moments of Africa never completely disappeared. The cultural moments, which had altered my thinking and behaviour in the performance of physical travel, had lingered in social interactions, altered routines, photographs, objects and through continuing to travel and reside in mobile spaces, places and landscapes.

Passage 2: A Student's Story (US student visiting Australia)
Ernest Hemingway once said “you can't escape yourself simply by moving from one place to the next,” and that’s true... but you can certainly find yourself. I know, because I did… Since I have arrived in Australia I have tested and broken my limits over and over again. If someone had asked me a year ago if I thought I could bungee jump 150 feet above a rainforest in Cairns, climb a mountain by moonlight, or dive into the ocean near the Great Barrier Reef in a country known for its sharks, I would have laughed in their face, but I did all that here, and more.

Australia offers experiences that you simply cannot find anywhere else in the world, from climbing the Sydney Harbour Bridge, to watching dolphins while lying on the whitest sands in the southern hemisphere, to staring in absolute awe at Ayers Rock. This country gives you every opportunity to challenge yourself.

I feel stronger and more confident now, which is a sensation that will stay with me for the rest of my life. All of a sudden calculus doesn’t seem quite so daunting ... if I can swim with sharks, I can do anything.

— Sarah Lyons, University of Arizona
Cover photos by distorted faces photos by Joan Teresa; original available at http://tiny.cc/louyew.

Photo by lake side in Sweden and of cyclist on snow provided by Steven; originals available at: http://tiny.cc/zlvzew

Photos of memories from the UK (snow scenes, roommates in fancy dress for Halloween, playbill & Christmas markets) by Maureen; available at: http://tiny.cc/s1wzew

Photos from her sojourn in Japan (aquarium, group in traditional Japanese dress, eating, crossing rope bridge, and girls in pink costumes) by Sarah.

Photos from Mykonos in Greece by Morgan; available at: http://tiny.cc/md3zew.


Photos from winter in the UK (standing on a frozen lake, squirrel in a tree, and snowball) by Erin; available at http://tiny.cc/m57zew.

Photos from the Austrian Alps by Betty; available at http://tiny.cc/60j0ew.
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