

# LaBrack: Post Study Abroad Reflection Exercise

The following exercise is designed to help you think carefully about how living in another country (or several) may have changed you in significant ways, including preparing you for post-graduation employment. Moreover, it may provide you with ideas as to how you can summarize and characterize those positive changes and integrate that information into a resume. Study abroad is almost always a "value added" experience in a job search.

As you read the following statements, check each change that you believe has occurred in you. Be honest! There are no right or wrong answers, only statements that you agree do, or do not, apply to you.

## Intercultural/communication skills

- I have a greater capacity to accept differences in others and to tolerate other people's actions and ideas that may be vastly different from my own.
- I am more knowledgeable about another culture and lifestyle.
- I have improved my ability to communicate with people in a second language (or understand better the variety and peculiarities of a version of "World English").
- I have a greater ability to empathize (i.e., to sense how an event appears and feels to someone else).
- I understand that there are many ways to accomplish the same task and that those approaches are only "different," not necessarily better or worse.
- I have learned to improve interpersonal communication through increased abilities in listening well, speaking clearly, and paying attention to nonverbal cues.
- I have more curiosity about, and respect for, new ideas.
- I am more flexible and able to adjust to changes in others.
- I am more tolerant of ambiguous situations, that is, of situations that are confusing and open to differing interpretations.
- I realize why stereotypes can be so harmful and hurtful, both to others and myself.
- I have learned how to recognize when I have made a cross-cultural mistake and can use culturally appropriate language and measures to repair any damage.
- I understand and appreciate how much educational systems can differ across cultures.
- I have a greater willingness to take on roles and tasks to which I am unaccustomed.
- I can adapt and cope in vastly different settings.
- I am more able to accept as valid others values and lifestyles.
- I am more balanced in my judgments (i.e., less likely to judge things as "good" or "bad," "right" or "wrong").
- I think more critically: I am more discriminating and skeptical, particularly of stereotypes.
- I have generally improved my observation skills.
- I realize the importance of time to be alone to think.
- I find myself regularly reflecting about the overseas experience and its meaning for me.
- I am confident that I can meet and make friends abroad.
- I have an increased motivation to go abroad again.

## World view

- I understand better another country's role in world affairs.
- I have a better understanding of how and why political policy differs abroad.
- I have the ability to see situations and issues from more than one perspective.
- I understand more clearly how US-Americans and the United States are viewed overseas.
- I see the world as more interconnected than ever before.
- I value human diversity and respect others from a variety of backgrounds different from my own.
- I have greater sympathy for the struggles of international students and immigrants as a result of my experience.
- I have a deeper understanding of the common problems and issues that confront all human beings on this planet.
- I have greater awareness of political, economic, and social events occurring around the world.
- I seek out international news and want to know what is going on in the world more than ever before.
- I am aware that cultural changes can have unexpected consequences.

## Personal capabilities

- I understand more fully my own strengths and weaknesses.
- I feel more confident in undertaking new travels or projects.
- I can accept failures and shortcomings in myself more easily.
- I am more confident and assertive when facing new situations.
- I have become a more patient person.
- I am more willing to share my thoughts and feelings with others, and to be open when others wish to share theirs with me.
- I am less afraid of making mistakes or being laughed at than I used to be.

- I can see myself more objectively (i.e., I see my own day-to-day problems in a broader, more realistic context).
- I have increased my perseverance and self-discipline.
- I can "analyze" a social situation more quickly than before (i.e., figure out what is going on and react appropriately).
- I am more deeply committed to an idea, cause, or goal.
- I have the ability to create personal peace and satisfaction in my life.
- I have a greater sense of responsibility for other people.
- I am more able to express deep emotions freely.
- I am more able to ask for and receive help from others.
- I have increased my capacity to experiment and take risks.
- I have a clearer notion of what I wish to do with my life.

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- I am more aware of opportunities in life that are open to me.
- I feel greater respect and appreciation for my natural family.
- I am more independent in my relations with family and friends.
- I can accept the shortcomings of my family members in an understanding way.
- I think that I need fewer friends but deeper (more intimate and more trusting) friendships.
- I am more aware of the way I use and structure time.
- I am interested in, and capable of, making long-range plans.
- I am more determined to develop fully my skills and talents, especially those recently gained through overseas living.
- I feel a greater need to have diverse experiences and friends.
- I feel that being abroad helped clarify my goals and values.
- I am more likely to do things spontaneously (i.e., to do things without undue concern about possible consequences or any advanced planning).
- I am more capable of solving life's day-to-day problems and accomplishing necessary tasks.
- I can set more realistic priorities, both short-term and long-term, for myself.
- I am more confident about the decisions I make.
- I have a greater appreciation for what I have.
- I have the ability to make clear personal choices and goals for my life rather than complying with what others expect and want from me.
- I have learned to place a lower value on material things.
- I want to be able to use my skills in future work and can articulate what those are to a prospective employer.

#### Own culture

- I see my own cultural values more clearly and understand how and why they differ from others.
- I can evaluate advantages and disadvantages of my own culture and society more objectively (i.e., from the perspective of an outsider).
- I am sensitive to subtle features of my own culture that I had never seen before.
- I have both a greater appreciation for US-American culture and a clearer critical sense of its limitations and problems.
- I have a deeper understanding of (if not necessarily commitment to) the values and lifestyle of my native community.
- I appreciate US-American efficiency, but miss the different pace of life abroad.

Go back and select the two or three that seem to you the strongest or most significant. Reflect on what effects you think these two or three biggest changes will have on you and your relations with others in the next several years.

As you look over the seventy-five items above, try and think about how you could translate those skills and attitudes into language that would appeal to the kind of employer you want to work for. As a result of your overseas experience, you likely gained insights and skills which you need to make any prospective employer aware of, whether during an interview or when constructing a resume. You have a lot to offer an employer. Figure out how to tell them what and why this is so!

La Brack, Bruce. "2.4.1- Seventy-Five Long-Term Outcomes." *What's Up With Culture ?* 2000. University of the Pacific. 10 October 2006 <http://www.pacific.edu/sis/culture/> Adapted and expanded from: The AFS Student Study Guide published by the AFS International/Intercultural Programs (Washington, D. D., 1979), reprinted in: Clyde N. Austin, ed., *Cross-Cultural Reentry: A Book of Readings* (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 1986), pgs. 273-27.