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Returning From Abroad: A Comparative Review

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RETURNING FROM ABROAD:
A COMPARATIVE REVIEW

Denver W. Miller

SIT Graduate Institute PIM 74

A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of International Education at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

May 15, 2016

Advisor: Carrie Wojenski, Ed.D.

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Student Name: Denver W. Miller

Date 15 April, 2016

Dedication

I dedicate this capstone to my loving and supportive wife, Brooke. Thank you for being my greatest advocate, sounding board, and well of encouragement. I would not be the person I am were it not for you. Together, through this journey, we brought our first daughter into the world and I cannot imagine balancing everything without you. My thanks also go out to my parents, sister, and parents-in-law for all of their support.

Deep thanks go to out to my grad cohort. Our shared experience has been a rewarding academic journey for me and I am humbled by your professionalism, humanity, and your potential. I look forward to all of our future achievements.

I would also like to thank the scholars referenced in this capstone. Their thoughts pioneered this segment of the field and I humbly acknowledge standing on their shoulders in the hope of making a contribution to the field.

Finally, continued gratitude to the professionals in the field who inspire me to become a better educator. Katie, Jim, Kerry, David, SherriLynn, Eric, and Sora you have my admiration and thanks for getting me into the field and keeping me engaged.

Table of Contents

Consent to Use	2
Dedication	3
Abstract	6
Introduction	7
Literature Review	9
Late 20 th Century Research	10
Contemporary Research	14
Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Current State of the Field Versus its Stated Aspirations	18
Theoretical Framework	20
Research Design	22
Sample Selection and Population	22
Data Collection Method	24
Data Analysis Method	24
Presentation of Data	25
An Overview of Resources	25
Reentry Support Ideas and Returnee Resources	27
Distinct Returnee Resources Based on Duration or Location	28
Face to Face and Beyond	29
Allies on Campus	29
When to Provide the Returnee Resources	30
External Resources	31
Gauging Success	31
Reentry Resources and the ELC	32
Discussion	33
Practical Applicability	40
Limitations of Study	41
Areas for Further Research	42
Conclusion	44
References	46
Appendix A: Data Collection Instrument	48
Appendix B: Participant Consent Form	49

List of Figures

Figure 1. U Curve p. 11

Figure 2. W-Curve p. 12

Figure 3. Reentry “Worm” p. 13

Figure 4. The Experiential Learning Cycle p. 18

List of Tables

Table 1. Institution & Methods p. 27

Table 2. Method vs. Kolb ELC Step p. 34

List of Abbreviations

ELC Experiential Learning Cycle

IIE Institute for International Education

LFAC Lessons from Abroad Conference

Abstract

Reintegration into the once-familiar community after a sojourn abroad poses unique challenges to the undergraduate population and more could be done to help returnees process their experience. Seven institutions of varying size were surveyed using a qualitative data collection instrument to determine how this sample pool supports their undergraduate students emotionally once they have returned from a credit bearing semester abroad. This capstone examines how institutions are moving students toward the fourth stage of Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle: Active Experimentation. Through this lens, a multitude of reentry approaches are explored with the aim being a comparison of the several support methods used to address the question of how to help students navigate the emotions associated with returning from an academic semester abroad. Education abroad professionals can adapt the variety of support tools presented herein to construct their own protocols best suited to their returnees.

Introduction

The number of undergraduate students going abroad for higher education has been on an upward trend for the last decade, with more people studying abroad now than ever before (Institute for International Education, 2016). The Department of State's (2016) 100,000 Strong Foundation aims to expand and diversify the number of students studying abroad in China, and the Institute for International Education (IIE)'s (2016) Generation Study Abroad initiative aims to double the total study abroad participation to 600,000 students by 2020. Through such efforts, the field of international education is poised to send even more students abroad in the near future. On campuses across the country, universities are calling for broader internationalization efforts and for their students to become global citizens (Greene, 2013).

Yet, even as education abroad professionals diligently prepare to send more students abroad with in-depth pre-departure resources, videos, alumni mentors, and mobile apps, there remains an equally important need to address reintegration support efforts. A great deal more could be done to fully address this final phase of the study abroad experience. Arouca (2013) and Casteen (2006) noticed students were receiving an imbalance of information. Prior to departure, study abroad participants were required to attend a battery of pre-departure orientations and information sessions, engage in conversations, and read page upon page of literature in preparation for a semester abroad. Conversely, the attention spent on support post program was not proportional (Arouca, 2013). Students returning from abroad feel unprepared for what to expect upon returning and can be unsure of how to navigate the complexities of their new normal (Arouca, 2013; Citron & Mendelson, 2013). This capstone asserts there is a strong need for more support for students returning from abroad. By comparing the different ways in which sending institutions help their returnees address these feelings, the study hopes to illuminate the continued need to address the emotional facet of the study abroad experience.

The research of Wielkiewicz and Turkowski (2010) examined the feelings students have when they return and identified feelings of isolation and alienation from the familiar, views that are now more critical of their home culture, and experience a shift in the relationship they had with friends and family. These feelings are important because they represent the potential to minimize the personal growth and derail the development gains attained by the traveler while abroad (Wielkiewicz & Turkowski, 2010). If reentry shock is significant, it can weaken the benefits obtained abroad (Arouca, 2013). Were returnees prepared for such feelings and emotions upon reentry, they could focus and reflect on how their experience abroad contributed to their growth rather than wondering why they were feeling a rollercoaster of emotions (Arouca, 2013). Doing so would allow students to process their emotions and move on to more the more productive aspects of the experience abroad (Arouca, 2013).

When students return home from studying abroad, the ability to eloquently speak about how their experience abroad challenged them and facilitated growth is neither innate nor immediate (Arouca, 2013). Having the skills to articulate the value of their time abroad is critical to their success as individuals and helps returnees process the emotions they are feeling by allowing them to communicate and articulate what they are experiencing (Arouca, 2013). While there is a great deal of literature on the emotional side of returning from abroad, there is a gap in studies on how to support students connect the dots for themselves. Research by Casteen (2006), and later Kammann (2008), demonstrated only 30 percent and 17.6 percent respectively of surveyed semester study abroad returnees felt that their home institutions prepared them adequately for what to expect upon their return. Their research reviewed student satisfaction with their home school's pre-departure and pre-reentry preparation and, while many felt well

prepared by their schools for what to expect while abroad, only a small percentage felt well prepared by their schools for what to expect upon their return (Kammann, 2008).

Reintegration into the once-familiar community after a sojourn abroad poses unique challenges to today's undergraduate population and more could be done to help returnees process their experience (Arouca, 2013). The purpose of this study is to catalog how sending schools support their undergraduate students who have returned from a semester abroad about what to expect emotionally and how the materials they provide can help returnees navigate the emotional aspect of the reentry process. The capstone presents, compares, and critiques a sample of current models of how the field of university study abroad offices supports the emotional needs of their returnees from semester long programs abroad. Another aim of this capstone is to provide education abroad professionals a variety of tools for constructing their own platforms to have this discussion with their returnees, with a goal of providing education abroad professionals an insight into how other institutions are addressing the challenge of supporting their study abroad returnees.

Literature Review

The literature review for this capstone consists of a definition of terms and an overview of key concepts critical to the discussion. Additionally, it establishes the current footing of the field of international higher education by describing the foundations of contemporary thinking, which is rooted in research from the twentieth century on concepts such as culture shock and reverse culture shock. The literature review then shifts to a presentation of resources produced by more modern researchers and the outlooks of professional organizations. Literature was sourced from databases such as ProQuest and JSTOR. The keywords searched were reentry, re-entry, returnee, culture shock, reverse culture shock, and returning from abroad. To obtain more

contemporary resources, an additional search was limited to the last decade. To establish a deeper understanding of how the field arrived at its present state, the same search was conducted, but with no date parameters.

Perhaps one of the more perplexing questions about returnee support is why there has not been much in the way of recent research or publications on this topic. This literature review included peer reviewed articles posted in the Chronicle of Higher Education, *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, publications by NAFSA: Association of International Educators, The Forum on Education Abroad, the Association of International Education Administrators, and *Transitions Abroad* magazine, the results of these searches turned up just a handful of articles and original research on the subject of returning from abroad, reentry and supporting students experiencing reverse culture shock. While there is not a broad range of research on this subject, a recent doctoral dissertation proved instrumental in leading to additional resources, which subsequently led to more resources. To understand the current state of the issue, it is necessary to examine the academic underpinnings of reentry, the roots of which can be found in the previous century.

Late 20th Century Research

The U-shaped curve, first proposed by Lysgaard (1955), helps travelers understand the feelings they may experience when encountering an unfamiliar culture (see Figure 1).

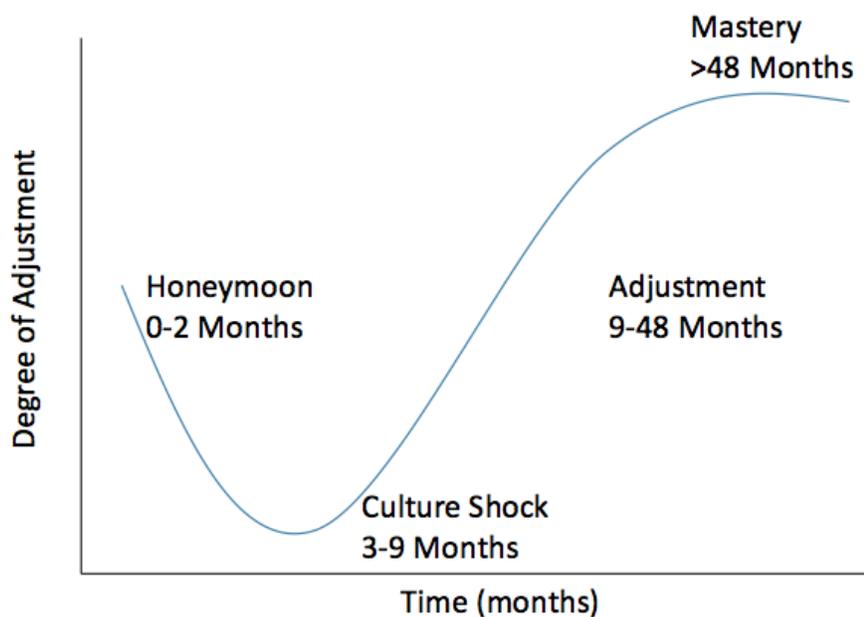


Figure 1. Lysgaard 1955: U Curve (Lysgaard, 1955). This figure illustrates adjustment to culture over time.

The research postulates that travelers first feel a sense of elation and excitement with the novelty of the new culture. Then, as time passes, travelers sink to the bottom of the U-shaped curve as they long for the familiar and begin to experience frustration with the differences they encounter with their host culture. As more time passes, travelers continue up the other side of the U-curve and begin to exhibit confidence, comfort and familiarity with their new culture (Lysgaard, 1955). Almost a decade later, Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) published an extension of the U-curve and turned it into a W shape (see Figure 2). The second U of their graph illustrates the phases felt by a traveler returning home after becoming acculturated to a different culture. This illustration of reverse culture shock shows the readjustment phase as travelers synthesize and incorporate their experiences and decide how they will adapt to their once familiar surroundings (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963).

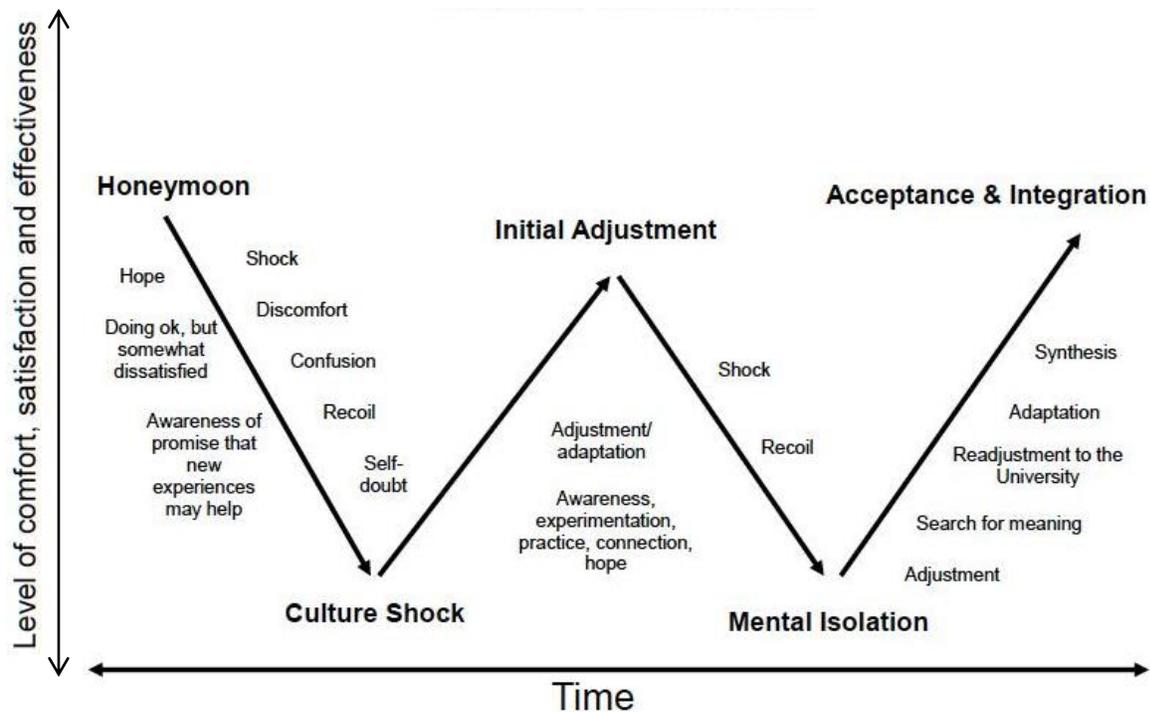


Figure 2. W-Curve (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). This figure illustrates adjustment to culture over time.

These two models are important because they shaped the prevailing thinking about how to support students returning from abroad for the next sixty years. It was not until the 1990s when another researcher would make such a profound contribution. LaBrack (2003) made major contributions to the thinking about reentry in the 1990's and the early 2000's and his materials are common to many study abroad offices. His resources, such as "What's up with Culture," and his detailed returnee resources are published on the University of the Pacific website (LaBrack, 2003). Some of the reentry challenges outlined in research conducted by LaBrack (1993), such as the critical view of the familiar culture, were quite similar to the findings of Aroca (2013) twenty years later. Despite many years and the introduction of social media, students still report strikingly similar reentry symptoms (Citron & Mendelson, 2013). These include a sense of boredom when returning to the routine, the sense that no one wanted to hear the details of the

student's personal growth, and a feeling that many listeners simply wanted to hear abroad highlights in a very condensed version rather than a long narrative (LaBrack, 1993).

Occasionally, friends and family may perceive the changes the student has undergone negatively, which results in relationships that go from close to strained (LaBrack, 1993). Additionally, an important feeling identified by LaBrack (1993) was the feeling of alienation, which came from being at home yet feeling unnatural with one's once familiar surroundings. Feelings of criticality toward the faults in society, which may have once been ignored or never noticed before the sojourn abroad, compound this feeling of alienation (LaBrack, 1993). Exposure to another society's ways of solving issues reveals alternative pathways to problem solving and it can be especially frustrating for students who wish to implement change in their home community after having been exposed to these methods (LaBrack, 1993). Additionally, LaBrack (1993) highlighted the dissonance that comes with having recently gained new skills in the areas of language, problem solving, technical, or practical coping skills needed to function in a foreign environment which were no longer needed after the student had returned. Worse still, some students lamented the inevitable loss of recently acquired skills that would only dull with lack of use. Language is a perfect example: with no one to practice with and no need to utilize a foreign language daily to function, language skills can fade. This can be frustrating for students who may have invested time in honing those skills (LaBrack, 1993). Finally, LaBrack (1993) coined the term *Shoeboxing* as it applies to the study abroad experience. Relating to the previous point of not being able to utilize skills or watching new abilities dull from lack of use, *Shoeboxing* refers to compartmentalizing the experience of study abroad into mental silos and placing them up on a mental shelf in the back of the closet of one's consciousness to only be opened as a memento (LaBrack, 1993).

In conducting this literature review, LaBrack's (1993) materials were credited, hyperlinked, or borrowed from in nearly every example of study abroad returnee publication made available by study abroad offices. His research has been credited in the works of Kammann (2008), Gray and Savicki (2015), and NAFSA (2014). However, as good as LaBrack's (1993) research has been in forming the foundation of returnee support, it is by no means the final word. In the decades since its publication, the notion of returnee support is a persistent issue that is still a long way from being resolved (Arouca, 2013).

Contemporary Research

Wielkiewicz and Turkowski (2010) surveyed 669 college students to examine how the emotions they experienced upon return related to their ability to adapt and incorporate their experiences. Some of the noteworthy feelings highlighted by this study were the feelings of isolation and alienation. Even after being back on familiar ground some students reported feeling distant from the things that they once found engaging. Students reported an increase in alcohol consumption and females experienced an increase in anxiety and depression. Other students reported experiencing an increased sense of being critical toward their home culture (Wielkiewicz & Turkowski, 2010). After being presented with another culture's approach to navigating their society's challenges, returning home where these issues may remain unaddressed or unresolved can be frustrating for students (Wielkiewicz & Turkowski, 2010). These findings are supported by the work of LaBrack (1993) and his contributions to the body of work.

Another important outcome of Wielkiewicz and Turkowski's (2010) research is the report of what students longed for once they left their host cultures. First was a longing for a sense of being interesting to others. If students were regarded as being unique because of where

they were from or the way they looked, students reported feeling bored after returning home because they were just like everyone else (Wielkiewicz & Turkowski, 2010). Second was the loss of the challenge of being in an unfamiliar culture where navigating linguistic barriers, being challenged by setbacks, and having to think on one's feet all went away when they returned home (Wielkiewicz & Turkowski, 2010). Coming back to a place that does not present challenges made some students yearn to go back. Finally, the students reported a sense of isolation stemming from no one understanding what they experienced (Wielkiewicz & Turkowski, 2010). Again, these findings echo LaBrack's (1993) contributions from nearly twenty years earlier demonstrating the enduring nature of the issue. The research of Wielkiewicz & Turkowski (2010) was particularly illuminating because students often failed to make the connection of *why* they were feeling these feelings. Had there been an effective reentry support mechanism in place to tell these students that these were normal feelings to have and that they stemmed from their time abroad, perhaps they may have been able to make quicker progress toward reaching the end of their W-curve.

Another interpretation of the W-curve came from Pusch (1997), who postulated that the curve did not have straight lines but instead undulated like a worm (see Figure 3). The smoother curves rather than the straight line better reflected the more natural progressions travelers felt as they processed the reentry experience in a more organic way rather than a purely linear way.

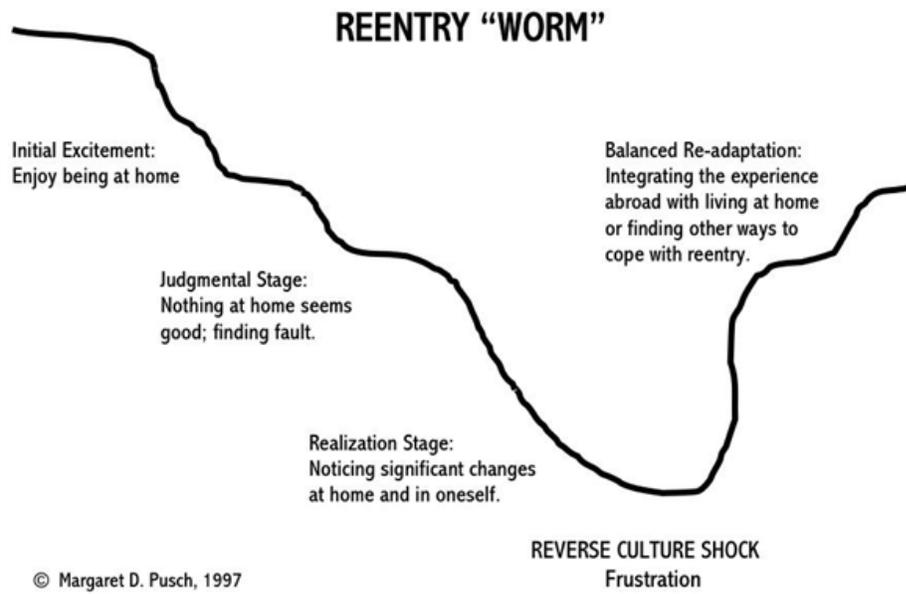


Figure 3. Reentry “Worm” (Pusch, 1997). This figure illustrates adjustment to culture over time.

Arouca (2013) conducted qualitative interviews with a select group of returnees and focused on understanding the critical role of returnee support programs. Arouca’s (2013) research demonstrated the need for a period of emotional adjustment following a semester abroad. The study focused on the dissonance felt by students upon return due to mismatched expectations. Students in Arouca’s (2013) study expected to come home to a familiar and comfortable place with a known routine, but were jarred by a reality that was not consistent with their expectations. A notable observation was the way in which returnees were treated by those familiar to them. From the eyes of the student’s friends and family, the student was only gone a few months. They did not think that a few months was enough time to experience life changing events that challenge one’s perspective on everything; however, this is often exactly what happens while a student is abroad. Friends and family experienced dissonance when they expected the same student to return, which could result in unfavorable reactions when the person returns changed. This finding echoes LaBrack (1993) as his findings were similar. If students are not informed of this possibility or prepared for it, they can find long-standing relationships

strained or even broken. Proper reentry support can ease students' transition by helping them to understand the emotions they are experiencing (Arouca, 2013).

A semester abroad is widely regarded as a time of personal growth, exploration and transformation for students (Kammann, 2008). Students are challenged by and learn from their experience overseas and return changed by their interactions and discoveries (Kammann, 2008). A semester abroad is intended to be an enlightening experience and, for many students, it can be one of the best experiences of their undergraduate career. However, if a student who returns from a semester abroad is still struggling with the emotional issues related to reentry, their ability to process and reflect on the benefits of their experience is stunted (Kammann, 2008).

Gray and Savicki (2015) published a study in the journal *Frontiers* titled "*Study Abroad Reentry: Behavior, Affect, and Cultural Distance*," which surveyed 81 semester study abroad returnees, 68 female and 13 male. The students' study abroad locations were fairly evenly distributed in Europe, Asia, the Americas, and Africa. Gray and Savicki (2015) asked a battery of questions aimed at determining how well students were readjusting to their lives at home based on how different the host culture of their study abroad location was versus their home culture. The researchers were surprised to discover that reentry stress was the result of a confluence of factors rather than attributed to any single factor (Gray & Savicki, 2015). Furthermore, there was a positive correlation between the degree of difference in host culture versus the students' home culture and the degree of difficulty students reported experiencing during reentry and assimilation into their home culture (Gray & Savicki, 2015). The research of Gray & Savicki might have provided broader utility by surveying students on summer programs as well as semester programs. It might have been interesting to examine whether an additional year of college has any impact on how students process their feelings during reentry. Had they

further separated their participants into their class standing, it might have yielded additional insights to see how juniors might differ from sophomores, if at all.

Current State of the Field Versus its Stated Aspirations

As an organization of practitioners, the Forum on Education Abroad (Forum) is looked to as a repository of guidance and direction in the field of international higher education and is comprised of education abroad professionals. The Forum on Education Abroad (Forum, 2012) cites three student learning outcomes as best practices for returned student programming: (1) reflection; (2) articulation; and, (3) integration. These engagement activities encourage students to take a deeper look at how their time abroad might have possibly shifted their perspectives, impacted their emotions, challenged their values, and influenced their actions. When students confront and realize these shifts in a positive way, it can prove to be a catalyst for growth and further processing of their study abroad experience (Forum, 2012). This connects to the capstone's theoretical framework around the work of Kolb (1984) and the Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC). If students can achieve these learning outcomes, they will have completed the ELC and maximized their experience.

The Forum (2012) suggests the opportunity for guided reflection as the first tool for achieving the aforementioned student learning outcomes. Reflecting provides an opportunity for students to be introspective and analyze the nuance of their sojourn abroad (Forum, 2012). The Forum (2012) specifically calls attention to the importance of reflecting on the feelings and emotions of coming home from abroad. Reflection can be closely compared to the second step of the ELC, which states that reflective observation is the way to further understand the experience one had while abroad.

The next outcome deals with articulation, which the Forum (2012) describes as learning how to convey what is learned abroad to a given audience in an appropriate setting. For instance, when recounting what one learned on their semester abroad, a student might answer one way if they were speaking to a potential employer during a job interview and give a different answer to a faculty member or their academic advisor on campus. The answer would also vary greatly when talking to their college roommate or friends back home versus their grandparents (Forum, 2012). By calling attention to this learning outcome, the Forum (2012) suggests that knowing how to articulate one's experience is not innate and requires some coaching and refining in order to improve.

Finally, the third learning outcome suggested by the Forum (2012) is integration, which is the intentional selection and application of aspects of the education abroad experience into one's short term and long term goals, personal, and professional endeavors. This is an important step in the self-actualization process and can be one of the most impactful outcomes of a term abroad (Forum, 2012). Integration is essentially the fourth step of the ELC, Active Experimentation, which occurs when one acts on what they have learned as a result of the previous three steps, and is the aspirational level for an experience abroad. When students take the next step and synthesize their experiences into a course of action, it allows the student to derive tremendous value from their term abroad (Forum, 2012). Since integration is a suggested learning outcome, it implies guidance is necessary to help students achieve this level of self-introspection.

Another important professional organization in the field of education abroad, NAFSA (2014), published their *Guide to Education Abroad for Advisors and Administrators*, which highlights the importance of helping student realize the change that has occurred in themselves

after a term abroad. Both the NAFSA (2014) Guide and the Forum's (2012) learning outcomes clearly spell out the need for education abroad professionals to help students make the connection between their time abroad and how to leverage the experience into self-actualization and personal development. This step, whereby students are asked to be introspective and confront the feelings associated with returning from abroad, is often missing from the support materials of many study abroad offices. It has been identified as a needed topic by both NAFSA and the Forum on Education Abroad and yet it is still not fully supported everywhere.

In summary, strides were made in the twentieth century in the area of returnee support to explain and address the concepts of reverse culture shock and reentry. In this century, additional techniques for navigating the reentry process and the accompanying emotional states have been outlined and have refined the way students returning from a semester abroad can be supported. Scholars and researchers have identified gaps in returnee support and an imbalance to the field's current approach of heavy pre-departure support and light returnee support. The purpose of this study is to highlight the existing need for better reentry support and provide insight as to which methods currently in use in the field are of most use in helping returnees process the emotional experience of returning from abroad.

Theoretical Framework

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

...(See Figure 4).

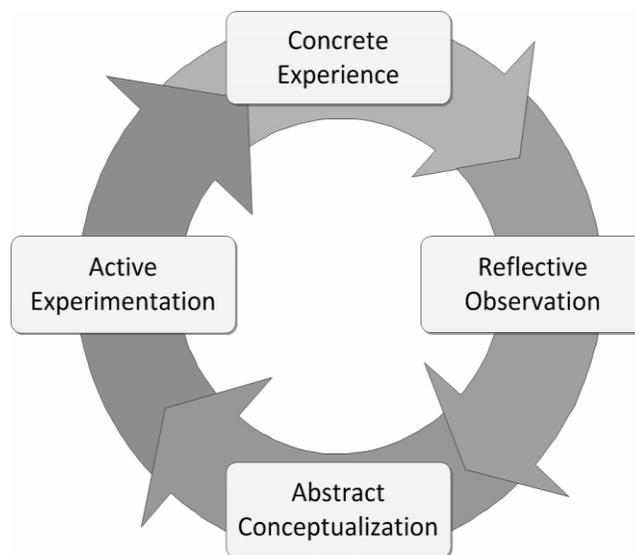


Figure 4. The Experiential Learning Cycle. Kolb, 1984. Figure shows the model for experiential learning.

Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle is the theoretical framework to analyze reentry program materials and the influence they may have on returning students. Taking the time to understand and address reentry feelings with returnees could act as the fourth stage of completing Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle. This capstone asserts that the study abroad process takes a student through the first three steps of the cycle, but never completes the critical fourth step of Active Experimentation. This capstone argues that the support provided to study abroad students is the missing the fourth step in the process: (1) Concrete Experience (the sojourn abroad); (2) Reflective Observation (taking place while abroad); (3) Abstract Conceptualization (adjourning and learning from the experience); and, (4) Active Experimentation (trying out what you have learned) which is the "now what?" moment (Kolb, 1984). Reflecting on the experience of going abroad allows returnees to integrate and process the experiences and emotions of the entirety of the experience (Wielkiewicz & Turkowski, 2010). By compiling different approaches from disparate institutions on how they help their students navigate the returnee process, the capstone examines how a variety of diverse

undergraduate institutions in the United States support the emotional wellbeing of returnees from semester long study abroad programs.

Research Design

The purpose of this study is to present, compare, and critique a sample of current reentry models to determine how university study abroad offices supports the emotional needs of their returnees from semester long programs abroad. To answer this question, a qualitative, comparative approach was used to collect and analyze data. Through this approach, this study provides an overview of how the field supports the emotional aspect of returning from abroad.

Sample Selection and Population

This study examines the reentry process at the institutional level and focuses on efforts by institutions rather than student perception of those efforts. The sample population surveyed included individual members working in the study abroad offices at the assistant director level or above and had knowledge of their institution's reentry programming. While community colleges are an important sector of the education landscape in the United States, no community colleges were contacted for this capstone because of their disproportionately small participation in study abroad (IIE, 2015). In addition, to maintain a reasonable scope of size, the sample included only credit bearing semester-long programs as opposed to shorter programs.

The study aimed to gather a thorough understanding of the returnee process from a focused set of institutions rather than to seek a cursory probe of a much wider pool. The rationale was to gain detail and nuance of a defined pool. The institutions selected to participate in the study were chosen because of their prominent ranking in the IIE Open Doors Report (2015). The Open Doors Report (2015) provides a list of the undergraduate institutions with the highest participation of students studying abroad both numerically and as a percentage of total

student body. Institutions with over one thousand students sent abroad or over one third of the total undergraduate student body sent abroad were selected for the study. Using the contact information page on each school's study abroad webpage, individuals with the job title of assistant director or above were targeted and invited to participate in the study. The study specifically targeted the assistant director level and higher because these individuals typically have the authority to speak on behalf of their institution. Those targeted as potential participants were sent an invitation to participate along with a survey.

The study abroad web pages of the selected institutions were an additional consideration in the selection of the final pool, before surveys were disseminated. Study abroad web pages were examined to determine which universities publish returnee materials on their website. In some cases, the resources consisted of a single returnee page on their study abroad website while others published multi-page returnee handbook. Institutions that were ranked highly on the IIE Open Doors Report (2015) but did not have returnee support materials available online were removed as possible candidates. The aim was to draw from a diverse range of institutions and to accumulate an equally diverse range of approaches to answering the question of how to support returnees. Thus, the diverse compilation of the sample population benefits the broadest range of practitioners as they develop their own reentry resources.

The institutions selected provide a representative sample of the main types of institutions in the United States: (1) large, public state schools; (2) small, private liberal arts schools; and, (3) Ivy League schools. Based on their high rankings in the IIE Open Doors (2015) data, twelve schools from the category of small private liberal arts institution were contacted. Of those, two declined to participate, seven responded, and two agreed to participate. Within the large state school segment, ten schools were contacted, two declined, six did not respond, and two agreed to

participate. Among the Ivy League institutions, two declined to participate, two did not respond, and three agreed to participate. One potential participant expressed interest in participating, but had to travel overseas on short notice so was not able to submit their data during the window. This institution was subsequently left out of the study.

Data Collection Method

A qualitative survey was crafted using Kolb's (1984) theoretical framework as a foundation (see Appendix A). Questions were designed to probe the institution's approach to supporting the emotional aspect of returning from abroad, as well as to provide a glimpse into how into how these various methods could be matched up with one of the four steps of Kolb's (1984) ELC. The survey was kept to nine questions, in an effort to be respectful of participants' time, with a limited number of follow up questions where appropriate. Participants were contacted via email and asked to sign and return the consent form, as well as complete the survey within the allotted three-week window. A Participant Consent Form was also collected from each of the respondents in the study (see Appendix B).

Data Analysis Method

Kolb's (1984) ELC was used as a lens to analyze survey responses. The first three stages in the ELC are (1) the Concrete Experience (or the sojourn abroad in this instance); (2): Reflective Observation (which took place while abroad); and, (3): Abstract Conceptualization (adjourning and learning from the experience). The fourth stage of the ELC involves Active Experimentation (or trying out what you've learned) it's the "now what?" moment (Kolb,1984). The reentry process is addressed in many ways by a variety of institutions, but not all activities have the same impact and value when it comes to helping students navigate the emotional side of returning from abroad. The four steps of Kolb's (1984) ELC are used to assess each reentry

approach. The first step, Concrete Experience, is assumed to have been the semester abroad itself. Therefore, each reentry activity can correspond with Kolb's (1984) steps two through four or can be a combination of multiple steps. As an activity gets closer to being a step four on Kolb's (1984) ELC, it provides a richer opportunity for students to process the returnee experience and reap the most benefits from their experience abroad.

Presentation of Data

This section presents the findings of the study. Data was gathered from a select group of small private universities, large state schools, and Ivy League institutions. Responses were received from two assistant directors, two associate directors, two directors, and an executive director. Survey question responses were arranged by question and coded by reentry resource type and themes, both emergent and connected to Kolb's (1984) ELC.

An Overview of Resources

The institutions surveyed utilized multiple types of reentry support activity, with some resource types more commonly utilized than others (see Table 1). Resources most often used to convey returnee information and provide support include alumni mentor programs (86 percent of institutions), returnee emails at (71 percent of institutions), and web pages dedicated to reentry topics (57 percent of institutions). Forty-three percent of institutions utilized reentry conferences, informal conversations, and reentry support groups. Methods least employed include activities that were more creative in nature, such as cooking contests, or were more generic, such as evaluations. On average, large public institutions provided the most variety of reentry resources.

Table 1

Methods of Reentry Programming Delivery by Institution Type

<u>Material</u>	<u>Small Private #1</u>	<u>Small Private #2</u>	<u>Large Public #1</u>	<u>Large Public #2</u>	<u>Ivy League #1</u>	<u>Ivy League #2</u>	<u>Ivy League #3</u>	<u>Total by Type</u>
Returnee email	X	X		X	X	X		5
Evaluation of experience	X							1
Alumni Mentor program	X		X	X		X		4
Returning home section of study abroad website	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
Designated website for study abroad returnees			X					1
Reentry meeting		X		X				2
Dinner mixers			X					1
Lessons from Abroad Conference participation	X		X	X				3
International Students housing			X					1
Reentry handbook	X				X			2
Informal chats over coffee			X		X	X		3
Reentry Support group		X	X	X				3
Leverage Parental Support				X				1
International Cooking Contest						X		1

Reentry Support Ideas and Returnee Resources

The first question addressed if the institution provided students with support materials geared toward helping them transition back to campus and community life post study-abroad. The answer to this question was not a unanimous yes; one of the Ivy League institutions stated that they did not currently provide any returnee support whatsoever. This same institution went on to state that although their office did recognize the need for returnee support, current resources did not allow for their personnel to provide support in this capacity.

As a follow up to question one, participants were asked about the materials provided to students and the medium by which they are given access to the resources. This question elicited a great range of approaches. As a basic resource, all surveyed institutions have a page on their study abroad website dedicated to returnee issues and referenced the work of LaBrack (1993); however, some institutions provided a much deeper range of services and solutions than others. Two institutions of different categories provided full study abroad returnee handbooks as opposed to just a few pages on the web. Additionally, while all surveyed institutions had a study abroad section of their study abroad office's web page, just one went one step further to create a separate website dedicated to their returnees.

The next resource was presented by one of the large, state institution. This study abroad office emails students while they are still abroad to refresh them about information already presented to them during the pre-departure process, thus calling their attention back to web-based materials from the orientation. Since students may have forgotten what they were told prior to departure, this serves as a reminder for what they may encounter upon return. Another technique employed by one of the small, private schools was to mandate students fill out an evaluation or

survey on their experience abroad. Sent as an automated email timed to coincide within one week of their return, the evaluation served as a reflective tool.

One approach that seemed common to all groups except the Ivy League institutions was the use of the Lessons From Abroad Conference (LFAC). The LFAC are regional conferences run by a group of volunteers from the field of education abroad. The conferences focus on skill building and the application of study abroad experiences toward a career path. The conference holds sessions on how to go abroad again, workshops on resumes, cover letters, and interview skills (LFAC, 2016). The conference is a way for universities with smaller study abroad offices to tap into a resource larger than it could provide on its own.

When asked how universities support the emotional aspect of returning from abroad, all of the surveyed small private liberal arts institutions partnered with the psychology or counseling departments on campus to set up a returnee support group which meets regularly to discuss the emotional issues returning students are navigating. In both cases, the group is student run but moderated by a professional staff member with training in counseling and support.

Distinct Returnee Resources Based on Duration or Location

All but one institution stated that they did not have a separate resource for returnees based on location of study, theme, or duration. The one outlier created a returnee resource for summer students which differed from the resources they present to their semester long students. Despite not yet being able to offer differing resources based on these factors, two institutions expressed a desire to do so. One of the small private universities detailed their partnership with their Career Development Office to create unique content to show students how studying abroad enhance their attractiveness in the job market. They host workshops showing students how to speak about their experience using language that future employers will understand and value.

Face to Face and Beyond

When asked whether there is a designated person available to meet with students one on one to provide individualized returnee support, a divide occurred between the institution types. This is an instance where scale does matter and the Ivy League institutions and small private liberal arts institutions have a numerical advantage in that their staff to student ratio is smaller than the large, state institutions. The responses from the large, state institutions indicated that they send upward of one thousand students abroad per year. Surveyed institutions stated that at these levels, it is no longer feasible to meet with all students individually. However, even the institutions with high student to staff ratios stated that they were happy to meet with any student who requested it, regardless of if it was not their institutional policy to meet one-on-one with everyone.

Another question asked was whether institutions used methods other than face-to-face conversation to facilitate the returnee conversation. This is where one of the Ivy League institutions demonstrated creativity. They hosted a cooking competition featuring cuisines students learned to cook while abroad. When asked about going beyond face-to-face conversations, a pattern in responses became apparent. On this question in particular, many institutions lamented student participation in returnee themed events. Each university reported low turnout at returnee events that were not mandatory and admitted that they struggled to entice students. One large public institution noted that interest began to rise once more time had passed since their return.

Allies on Campus

Survey participants were asked whether anyone else on campus outside of the study abroad office might be able to support recently returned students. Here, as in other questions, it

was interesting to see the variety of responses and approaches. At least one institution from each of the segments stated they try in some way to leverage existing resources available from the campus psychology department or counseling office. One of the large state institutions remarked that they collaborate with residence life to create programming. An Ivy League institution also mentioned reaching out to the residence life office to coordinate programming ideas and to reach students where they reside on campus. One of the two large, state institutions listed that they work with their version of the international student housing office to help bridge the gap. The other large, state institution collaborated with on campus groups, clubs, and organizations to provide returnees with an avenue for addressing their reentry symptoms by giving them a new sense of purpose and allowing them to focus their talents on the club's mission. Finally, student leaders were mentioned as possible touch points for study abroad students returning and facing difficulties. It was unclear from the response if the term student leaders were another name for alumni mentors.

When to Provide the Returnee Resources

Surveyed institutions were asked at what point returnees were given information about resources related to returning from abroad. Two thirds of the sample reported that students were given returnee information during the term following their semester abroad. Meaning, if they went abroad for the spring semester, the subsequent fall they would receive returnee support. Similarly, if a student were to study abroad in the fall, they would receive support when the spring semester began. For some students this could mean a gap of just a few weeks to an entire summer, depending on when they studied abroad. One of the small private liberal arts institutions makes it a point to reach out to students within a week of their return home to make sure they have the resources needed to navigate the reentry process. A large state school takes

this approach one step further and reaches out to students while they are still abroad to remind them of what to expect and to re-familiarize them with the returnee information provided during pre-departure orientation.

External Resources

The second to last question asked participants if they guided their returnees toward any external resources to help them with the transition. Three of the institutions recommended the Lessons from Abroad Conference as a resource for understanding the returnee experience and to help returnees gain additional tools to help in the job search process. The Lessons from Abroad Conferences are regional and are run on an annual basis (LFAC, n.d.). The second most referenced external resource was LaBrack's (2003) web resource, *What's Up With Culture*, which was linked by each institution with the exception of the Ivy League institutions. The final external resource mentioned by two institutions was the Peace Corps, but this was related to going abroad again rather than to help with emotional processing and returnee support.

Gauging Success

The final question asked of the institutions was how they gauge the success of their returnee support efforts. Presently, 70 percent of the institutions were not assessing the outcomes or success of their returnee support efforts. Many acknowledged that not assessing and analyzing their efforts was less than ideal. One of the large, state schools identified assessment as an area for improvement, but cited the need to show measurable deliverables in other areas and reported institutional pressure to prioritize the tasks upon which they are evaluated as a department rather than assess efforts to support returnees. Furthermore, that same institution cited a lack of institutional acknowledgement of the need for returnee support. There were two institutions that did implement some sort of assessment, both of whom were small,

private, liberal arts. One limited their assessment efforts to tracking student attendance at reentry events. The other institution conducted an evaluation and a discussion with their students, but did not elaborate on their methodology. This was another question where respondents raised the issue of the lack of student interest and participation in their reentry efforts. One institution cited a lack of student motivation on the returnee side which made it difficult to justify expending additional effort.

Reentry Resources and the ELC

By viewing survey data through the lens of Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle, each method used by the various institution types can be categorized into one or more of the steps of the ELC (see Table 2). The study makes the assumption that the semester abroad is step one of the ELC, Concrete Experience. Of the methods collected in the data, only a select few give students the opportunity to complete the fourth step of Active Experimentation for themselves. Certain ELC steps, depending on their content and how each university implements them, may offer no engagement with the ELC. The following table analyzes reentry resources and their connection to steps two through four of the ELC.

Table 2

Methods of Reentry Programming as Aligned with Kolb's (1984) ELC.

<u>Reentry Material</u>	<u>No engagement with the ELC</u>	<u>Step 2: Reflective Observation</u>	<u>Step 3: Abstract Conceptualization</u>	<u>Step 4: Active Experimentation</u>
Returnee email	X			
Evaluation of experience		X	X	
Alumni Mentor program		X	X	X
Returning home section of study abroad website	X	X		
Designated website for study abroad returnees	X	X		
Reentry meeting		X	X	
Dinner mixers	X	X		
Lessons from Abroad Conference participation		X	X	X
International Students housing			X	X
Reentry handbook		X	X	
Informal chats over coffee		X		
Reentry Support group		X	X	X
Leverage Parental Support		X		
International Cooking Contest		X		

Discussion

The purpose of this capstone is to address how undergraduate institutions in the United States support their students with the emotional aspect of returning from a semester abroad, using Kolb's (1984) ELC as a theoretical framework. The steps of the ELC are (1) Concrete Experience; (2) Reflective Observation; (3) Abstract Conceptualization; and, (4) Active Experimentation. Active Experimentation is the last step in Kolb's (1984) ELC because it is the stage when learners make the leap from concept to implementation. In the previous three steps, learners have an experience, they reflect on it, and then they create a theory to explain why that

experience impacted them in that way. The fourth step builds on these experiences and theories to shape future actions and decision making filters. Students functioning at this level have integrated and internalized the experiences they have had abroad and have processed what it means to them. If education abroad offices are not providing adequate support protocols during reentry, there may be students who are not fulfilling their potential because they are still experiencing all of the difficulties involved in returning from abroad (Lysgaard, 1955; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Pusch, 1997; LaBrack, 2003; Wielkiewicz & Turkowski, 2010; Citron & Mendelson, 2013). The following sections discuss what each institution type is doing to meet the needs of their population, detailing their self-described victories, difficulties, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

The first group was the small, private liberal arts institutions. This segment's efforts to meet the emotional needs of their student and help them grow toward the fourth step of the ELC is demonstrated in their use of returnee support groups and counseling sessions. The sessions provide an outlet for the returnee experience and the emotions they are processing. Depending on what is said during these sessions and the type of probing questions asked and the level of trust and openness of the participants, this activity could range anywhere from step two to step four on the ELC. By involving professional units such as the Psychology Office or Counseling Department on campus, a level of quality and rigor is ensured. This is an example of a scalable solution that can work at institutions of many sizes. It would require setup and facilitation, but it would be a forum for students to realize that they are not alone in the types of challenges they face when they return and it would go a long way toward meeting the emotional needs of students upon reentry.

Another path to emotional support employed by this segment is the use of student leaders or peer advisors. Without doubt, there are particular individuals on campus who are charismatic and empathetic and may have returned from studying abroad the year before and could be enlisted as a model for the recently returned on how to navigate the complexities of returning from abroad. By being able to discuss the type of emotional challenges they are facing during the return process, returnees are able to have a sympathetic ear from someone in their age group and is one of the ways LaBrack (2003) recommends returnees process and work through their experience. Furthermore, if a student were having trouble with the emotional aspect of reentry, seeing a peer who has gone through a similar experience, but is further down the path of adjustment, can give them the encouragement to see that it is possible to successfully navigate the reentry process (LaBrack, 2003). Having a peer advisor act as a mentor or listener to recent returnees serves as a dual benefit, as the peer advisor often has a chance to revisit their own experience and re-contextualize it in a way that can help them grow as well (Citron & Mendelson, 2013). This is excellent practice for when they speak with a potential employer during the job seeking process. The details of the story may change, but the mentor will be well versed in how to articulate the importance of their time abroad, an important skill according to the Forum on Education Abroad (2012). In this way, multiple students are benefiting from the process of returnee support.

A different approach proposed by one of the small liberal arts campuses was to partner with the career services office on campus to package multiple services together. The study abroad office could meet the needs of students seeking guidance on returning while the career center could help students understand how the skills they learned abroad could be translated into future career paths. By bundling two student needs in one event or session, it can ameliorate the

poor attendance rates at returnee events reported by respondents to this study. This approach is primarily a step two, reflection-based exercise because students work with counselors to identify the aspects of their time abroad can be translated to marketable skills. However, counselors can facilitate a much deeper impact by helping students have a fourth step “what now” moment by encouraging students to think about how their experiences abroad might help them identify a career path that resonates with them (Kolb, 1984). A student experiencing reentry difficulties related to sadness about not knowing what to do with themselves now that they have returned could be well served by such a session.

Institutions of this size do face challenges when it comes to returnee support. These institutions provide their students with a small student to staff ratio but still report feeling strained by trying to provide individualized service and attention to an ever-growing group of students coming home from abroad. Institutions on this scale are facing growing pains of limited staff time and resources which can sometimes be at odds with student demand for expanded services. Utilizing some of the scalable techniques from the larger institutions in the sample could alleviate some of these issues.

The second group is the large, public state institution. One sends nearly one thousand students abroad per year and the other school sends over one thousand abroad per year. The tactic used by large, state institutions was to leverage resources and staff to maximize impact for the greatest number of students. It would be impossible for even a well-staffed study abroad office to provide individualized service on such a large scale but, by making use of both internal and external resources, this institution type takes advantage of systems to multiply its impact and extend its reach.

Similar to the small private liberal arts segment, the large, state schools also make use of alumni mentor programs and peer advisors. Additionally, this segment turns to external resources like encouraging attendance at returnee conferences like those run by the Lessons from Abroad organization. Attending conferences like these can help by demonstrating the strong support networks available to students which is one of LaBrack's (2003) tips for navigating the reentry process. Conferences expose students to a large group of other students like them, as well as provide opportunities to reach the fourth stage of the ELC through sessions with topics such as *The Long Lasting Impact of Studying Abroad on Professional Life, Young Professionals & the Field of International Education*, and *International Careers: Making Your Dream Job a Reality* (LFAC, 2016). In instances where institutions are located too far away from the nearest organized LFAC, they can partner with the career services office on campus to create their own workshops centered on these themes.

Another method employed by this segment to leverage their resources is to tap another external source, parents. One of the surveyed institutions sent LaBrack's (2003) "What's Up with Culture" returnee resource to parents in advance of their son or daughter's return to help parents better understand the changes they were likely to see in their students. Another institution hosted family webinars to support family members and help them better understand the changes their students might exhibit. By being proactive and working with parents to help ease students through the returnee period, large state schools simultaneously avoid one problem and create an ally.

Since the large, public institutions had the challenge of servicing a large student body with limited staff and resources, they have made an investment in crafting very thorough, well-researched returnee support materials that can be given to students to help with the adjustment

process. In this way, the large institutions have met the challenge of having a high quantity of students by having high quality resources. One of the institutions made sure these materials did not go to waste by emailing students while they were still abroad and reminding them of these resources which had been provided during the orientation. By asking students who are still abroad to reflect and think about how they are going to solve the returnee issues they are about to be confronted with, it will be less of a shock when it happens. Students will have already thought of potential responses to some of the questions they may be asked, as well as how they might process the feelings they may experience upon return. Reflecting is not only one of the Forum's (2012) learning outcomes, but also the second step in Kolb's (1984) ELC. This solution could be adopted by both institutions large and small.

The challenges listed by surveyed institutions within this segment stem from a lack of student engagement around the issue as well as a reported lack of institutional recognition for the need to support returnees. The prevailing institutional attitude is to end the obligation to support the student once their program abroad concludes. A climate such as this may not appear at every institution, but at institutions where it does exist, work would need to be done to change this thinking.

At the Ivy League institutions, there were similar challenges to the small, private liberal arts institutions. Staff time and resources are limited and there is a growing number of students going abroad each year which increases the ratio of staff to students. However, one institution within this segment employed an international cooking competition as an innovative and experiential way for returnees to process their experience abroad and simultaneously share it with others. While more of a second step reflective exercise than a fourth step exercise, it is

relatively unique and engaging. This is another example of a scalable solution that can be utilized by institutions of different sizes.

The Ivy League institutions reportedly struggle with student engagement upon return. Surveyed institutions reported low turnout at engagement events and low interest in support activities. Interestingly, despite the findings from Kammann (2008) and Casteen (2006), demonstrating that there is a gap in returnee support, the students themselves are reluctant to attend. It is unclear why students in this segment do not avail themselves of these resources when offered. Pollis (2012) concluded from her study that it was not a lack of interest or a reluctance to attend, but a lack of awareness about resources and events. Another struggle identified by one of the Ivy League institutions was similar to the large, state institutions which was lack of institutional support. One Ivy League institution reported no institutional support for returnee students whatsoever because of financial constraints on their office. This is an important lesson for the field, as it demonstrates that even institutions whose endowments reach into the billions of dollars are still not immune to fiscal limitations.

Several ideas cross institution types, such as when reflecting on the idea of when support content is provided to returnees. Two thirds of institutions stated that it was provided in the subsequent semester. From an administrative and process standpoint, this makes logical sense as it is when the student is next on campus and most available to receiving new information. The downside of this approach is the instance of the occasional student who might be in more urgent need of support services, in which case, waiting until the next term may not be ideal. To address this, one of the large, state institutions sends an email to their students while they are still abroad to remind them of the materials. Of all of the approaches, this is perhaps the most proactive and timely and could head off potential student issues by reiterating the challenges they may face and

providing students with resources and channels before they are feeling the stress of reentry. This approach is also very scalable and easy to implement and could be done with just a few mouse clicks.

One of the small private liberal arts schools and one of the large state schools recommended the Peace Corps as an additional option for consideration for students. This option may be more appropriate for returnees seeking to go abroad again rather than for a returnee looking for assistance in how to process the feelings they may be trying to navigate post-program. However, making plans to go abroad again fits in with Kolb's (1984) ELC. By reaching the fourth stage of Active Experimentation, students are demonstrating their desire to restart the ELC by having a new experience, bringing them back to step one of the ELC (Kolb, 1984).

Survey data indicates a multitude of ways that institutions of varying sizes can approach the topic of supporting students' emotional well-being during the reentry process. Challenges exist at all institution types, and both administrators and students need to develop more awareness and engagement on this issue. The techniques may vary by institution type, but there are scalable solutions that can be utilized at all levels and effective methods can be found regardless of the size of the institution's study abroad office and available resources.

Practical Applicability

Multiple stakeholders can benefit from the findings of this study. While this capstone was written for administrators and education abroad professionals in the field, the hope is that the work will ultimately benefit the student through the utilization of a thorough and well-supported reentry experience enacted by a study abroad office with broad institutional support from the community both on and off campus. One possible population that could benefit from this line of

research is institutions struggling with returnee support and seeking additional methods of engagement. By reviewing the analysis of ideas, techniques, approaches, and resources institutions can emulate a practice outlined here or utilize the methods as a starting point for their own original reentry programming to support their student body. Adaptation is key. While surveyed institutions had several similar resources, no two were executed in the same way. So too must it be with any idea. Each must be implemented with the consideration of existing campus resources, student needs, institutional culture, and available expertise.

Another population who could benefit from this research is institutions with passionate and enthusiastic staff that wish to broaden their support of returnees from abroad, but operate in an institutional environment that may not recognize the need or value of investing in such efforts. This data, coupled with the analysis using Kolb's (1984) ELC, would provide a strong foundation for garnering support. The idea of serving the student should be the driver behind providing returnee support. A student returning from abroad is well served by a comprehensive returnee support initiative. Having such a plan in place allows for the student to complete the fourth step of Kolb's (1984) ELC that in turn allows them to fully understand and leverage their experience abroad.

Limitations of Study

Given the opportunity to conduct the data collection process again, participants would be informed that their answers and identity would be kept anonymous by default but would give institutions the option of disclosing their institution. One institution agreed to participate only after confirming that their institution would indeed be kept anonymous. Switching the survey to anonymous by default may have alleviated the concern for how their institution might have been perceived if their name and institution were revealed. Another observation that occurred

during data collection process was the frequency with which respondents declined to participate citing the lack of resources. The study took care to be as respectful as possible of the study abroad professional's limited time during a busy segment of the year; however, there were seven institutions who declined to participate citing they were unable to spare the staff time needed to reply to the survey, which speaks to an ongoing issue of support in the field. If personnel at study abroad offices are already stretched thin performing the function of sending students abroad, it might be difficult to ask them to support returning students without the allocation of additional resources. The institutions who chose to participate in the study were enthusiastic about the topic which validates the need for further probing into this area of the field. One final limitation is the possibility that some universities may have opted not to participate because their materials or methods are considered proprietary and the institutions were not willing to consent to participate.

Areas for Further Research

This capstone provided an understanding of how different institutions address the shared question of supporting students on the emotional aspects of returning from studying abroad, but it also opened the door to new questions. Opportunities exist for new research in the areas of content, timing, delivery method, assessment, and the element of social media. In addition, the method for delivery and helping students process the returnee experience is fertile ground for exploration. Future studies could seek to determine the most effective medium for delivery by examining electronic formats, in person sessions, a combination thereof, or something completely different. Along similar lines, future research could ask investigate whether one-on-one sessions are effective in helping students through the returnee process, or whether a small group setting would be a better option and explore under what circumstances that might be the

case. To delve into questions about the scalability of resources, future studies could explore the degree to which electronic materials can substitute in-person returnee sessions.

Another line of inquiry to be explored is the best juncture to have the returnee conversation. A future study could assess whether it is better to deliver reentry materials immediately upon return or after some time has passed for self-reflection. Also, if it is determined that the latter is the better option, the study could seek to determine the best duration of time to wait before delivering resources. One of the large, public institutions in this study emails their students while they are still abroad to remind them of resources. A future study could explore whether emailing students while they are still abroad provides measurable advantages versus waiting until the subsequent term. The study could attempt to determine the optimal moment for the returnee conversation to occur, or what determining variables may exist. One of the surveyed institutions remarked that they had little student interest in returnee support initially, but that it surged after more time had passed and students had more time to reflect on their own experience. Future studies could seek to better understand this phenomenon by examining if there are resources better suited to long-term follow up, such as for a student who has returned from abroad and has been home for a year.

Additionally, future research can explore if the content of the returnee conversation changed based on the study abroad experience type or duration. For instance, future studies could measure the efficacy of providing different materials to returnees from a summer study abroad program versus a student returning from a semester or year-long program. In a similar line of inquiry, a future study could determine whether or not reentry support efforts would be better served by creating tailored materials for students who studied abroad on multi-country programs as opposed to single site or single country programs. Cultural distance and linguistic

difference could also be fertile ground for future studies. If a student were to have studied in a country that is more culturally similar to their native culture, such as a student from the United States studying in Australia versus that same student studying in Uganda, a future study might examine the efficacy of creating different materials to address the differences by cultural diversity.

Finally, since many of the respondents lamented that the assessment portion of their efforts were lacking, a future study could explore how the assessment of reentry programming might be more fully developed. Performing an assessment on returnee support efforts could reveal where additional gaps exist and measure the degree to which efforts are effective. Lastly, in an era where technology has progressed far beyond the expectation of the 20th century contributors to the topic of returnee support, future studies could examine if social media plays a role in the returnee process and how technology can be leveraged to help students better navigate the returnee experience.

Conclusion

The topic of how to engage and guide students through the emotional rollercoaster of returning from a semester abroad has not received enough research attention and represents a weakness in the foundation of student support. While scholars have provided guidance on how students can manage the symptoms of reverse culture shock and move toward integrating the experience, there is a gap between the information and preparation provided prior to study abroad and the information and support students receive once they return from abroad. This is at odds with the field's stated goal of providing a comprehensive experience for students from start to finish. In an attempt to bridge the gap, this study makes use of Kolb's (1984) ELC as an evaluation instrument for rating the efficacy of support methods in use by a select group of

institutions. Using the ELC as a lens, engagement methods can be evaluated by the degree to which they ask students to actively use their experience abroad to shape future action. By offering resources that require students to engage in activities that progress through a full cycle of observation, reflection, and projection, education abroad professionals are providing students the best possible tools to overcome the challenges related with returning from abroad.

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Appendix A: Data Collection Instrument

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT FOR RESEARCH STUDY: Returning from Abroad: A Comparative Review

Dear Study Participant,

I would like to thank you for taking the time to participate in this study which aims to advance the discourse on the subject of supporting students who have returned from a credit bearing education abroad opportunity. This questionnaire is intended to be filled out by assistant director-level or above staff. Please respond to the questions below and return the finished questionnaire by email to Denver.Miller@mail.sit.edu along with your participant consent form by March 11th, 2016. Please be certain to include the consent form as any data gathered without a corresponding consent form cannot be used. Thank you again for your participation in this research.

1. Does your office provide students returning from a credit-bearing, semester abroad with resources to assist with the transition back to their home or university community?
 - a. If yes, what sort of resources are they provided and by what medium are the resources accessed or distributed?
2. Regarding the emotional aspects of reentry, how does your institution help returnees process commonly experienced feelings felt by returned students?
 - a. Would your institution be willing to furnish a sample of its returnee materials?
3. Does your institution create distinct returnee resources based on either the location of study, theme, duration, or any other factor?
 - a. If so, please list which factors and explain the rationale for having distinct materials.
4. Is there a designated person in your office who has a face-to-face conversation with returned students about what they might be feeling or experiencing?
 - a. If so, what resources do they draw upon to facilitate these conversations?
 - b. If not, please list why your office has opted not to have a face-to-face conversation.
5. Is there a person outside of your office, but still on campus, that acts in a support role to help recently returned students?
6. If your office uses a method other than face-to-face to have a returnee conversation, please expand on that below:
7. How soon after they return are students directed to these resources? Please specify days or weeks.
8. Are returnees directed to any external resources to help them during the returnee process?
 - a. If so, which resources and how are they guided to them?
9. How does your institution gauge the success of its returnee support efforts?

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH STUDY: Returning from Abroad: A Comparative Review

Dear Study Participant,

You have been invited to participate in a research study about the resources provided by higher education institutions to its participants following their return from a semester abroad. This study is being conducted by Denver Miller from the International Education Master's Program at The School for International Training (SIT) Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont. The goal is to use the data collected from this study to further the discussion around the reentry process for undergraduate students returning from semester long study abroad programs for academic credit.

Your organization was identified as a candidate for comparison and, as a assistant director-level or above individual, you are eligible to participate in the research if you so desire. Your participation will not take long and it only requires you, if you are willing, to answer a short survey of questions regarding the resources your institution makes available to participants after they have returned from abroad. The questionnaire contains a few direct questions about how the resources are provided to sojourners upon their return and how students access those resources.

There are no known risks and no costs in participating in this study. Your participation is completely voluntary; therefore, you have the right to decline. Participants in the study should have permission from their institution. If you want to withdraw at any point in the study, you have the right to do so and your information will be removed from the research. At your request, the researcher can omit the name of your organization.

By signing this form, you are stating that you agree to participate in a study regarding the reentry process for study abroad students.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact Denver Miller, Masters in International Education MA Candidate at SIT at any time by telephone: (270 844 9519) or by e-mail: Denver.Miller@mail.sit.edu

Participant: _____

Title or Position at your Institution: _____

Institution: _____

University Indicator (please circle one):

Keep institution name in documents / Remove institution name from documents

Participant's Signature: _____