

Unpacking Dreams and Reality: Creative Group Approaches for Students Upon Re- entry to Campus After Study Abroad

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Objectives

- Participants will recognize the unique experience of cultural transitions and re-entry for students in study-abroad programs, particularly students of minority status on campus.
- Participants will identify how groups can act as prevention and support for study-abroad students upon return to campus.
- Participants will discuss at least 3 separate clinical recommendations for the purpose of helping clients unpack their study-abroad experience through a group experience.

Agenda... where we are going

- Introductions & Interests
- Study Abroad (the scope of care)
- The College Counselor's Role
- Vignettes
- Groups as a model of care for returned Study Abroad Students
- Clinical Recommendations
- Take away?

Who are we?

And why do we care / how do we care?

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Theological Seminary

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Who are you?

- Name & Work
- % of study abroad clientele
- “Dream country”





Study Abroad

10% of American undergraduate college students study abroad (IIE, 2015)

2 weeks

1 year

individually

group

professor-led

outsourced

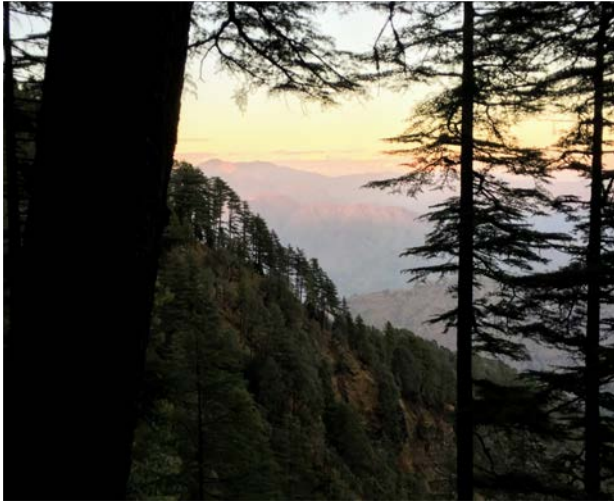
university housing

homestay

courses/classes

internship

What kinds of programs do you have on your campuses?



Dreams Vs. Reality - Study Abroad

Lots of prep work in comparison with focus on return.

Areas to consider: psychological health, expectations, identity, and cultural learning (Kostohryz, et al., 2014)

Disappointment and relief

College Counselors' Role

?



“I’m not going to lie, it can be a little annoying how bad people are at asking me questions about my experience. I understand why, and I’ve gotten very good at two-sentence answers to “How was Ethiopia?” but I’m deeply grateful for the friends who’ve sat me down and listened to me talk for hours about the people and places I met.”

Current Mental Health Issues Among College Students

- Anxiety (48.2%)
- Stress (39.1%)
- Depression (34.5%)
- Suicidal ideation (25.2%)
- Specific relationship concerns (22.9%)
- Family Concerns (21.2%)
- Interpersonal functioning problems (18.8%)
- Sleep problems (15.5%)



(AUCCCD, 2016-17)

Mental Health Concerns for Students Re-entry to Campus

- Limited time to process study abroad experience
- Inadequate and superficial debrief time.
- Students exposed to trauma, dealing with things that they have never been exposed to.
- Title IX issues occur overseas
- Feeling of disconnection from peers from US campus
- Reverse culture shock (depending on the location of the study abroad campus)
- Trauma/survivor guilt (poverty/unrest in destination country/natural disaster)
- Culture identity transition to home culture
- Mental health condition decreased due to lack of treatment availability while in destination country.

“My heart aches sometimes as I miss people, and I feel lonely sometimes. It is weird how lonely you can feel even when you are almost never alone. I really want to stay friends with people in Ecuador. I do remember how busy their lives were though, and I know mine will only get busier. So I’m a bit worried these relationships will pitter out, but I really don’t want them to. I know keeping them up will just take time and effort and intentionality, so I will do my very best.”

“Lots of people were encouraging me to finish [my international internship in the Philippines] well, which I gave an honest effort towards. But while going through the motions of that, I felt my spiritual, physical, emotional, and psychological health disintegrating rapidly. I don’t know how this next semester is going to go at all.”

Vignettes

Case Study #1: Tara

Tara is junior at Midwest University. She is an international business major and returned to MU, after studying abroad in Chile for a semester. Before leaving for Chile, Tara, started to exhibit symptoms of bulimia before she left campus. Tara's language abilities were limited and while she lived with a host family who was supportive, Tara struggled to communicate her preferences for meals and portions. In addition, she was assaulted in a robbery while out one evening with other college students. Tara returns to campus and about four weeks into the semester experiences symptoms of depression, anxiety, bulimia, and nightmares.

Case Study #2: Terence

Terence is a senior at West University studying international politics. Terence recently returned from a year long study abroad program in Nigeria. Upon his return to campus, Terence had difficulty connecting with peers with whom he lost contact after three months abroad. Terence navigated his study abroad experience quite well and seemed to have relatively no visible or self-reported issues during that season. Since returning to campus, he is struggling with academic work, poor attention span, insomnia, symptoms of depression, and anxiety. In addition, Terence's parents decided to divorce while he was abroad, and sold his family home. Communication with both his parents has been minimal since his return.



Groups



Groups, Groups, Groups

Best practice:

- Schedule for processing (time, location, length of group process)
- Have activities to engage in reflective practice (Kostohryz et al., 2014)
- Have focus on learning from experiences

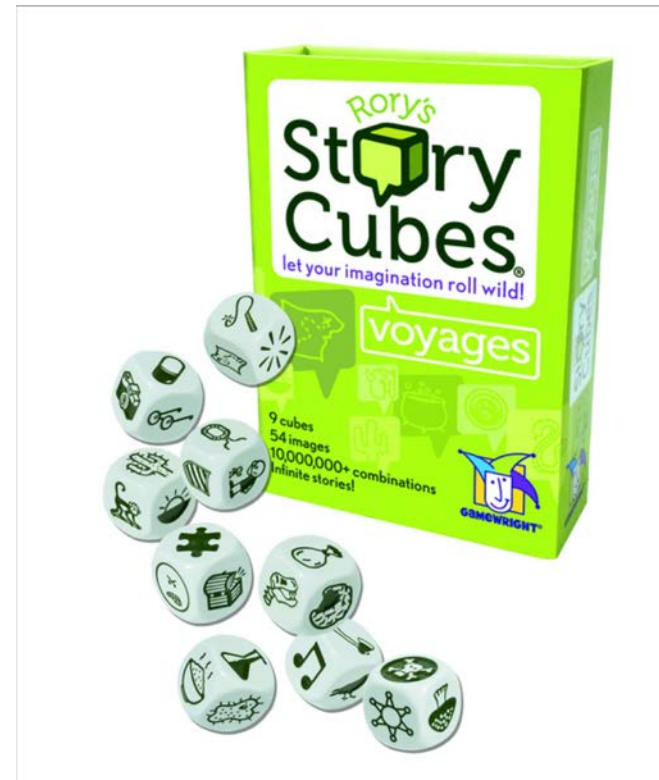
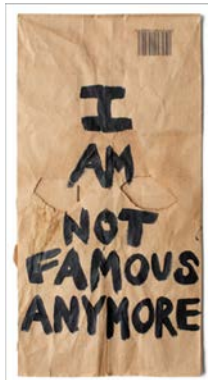


“The re-entry group was such a helpful space to hear other people say out loud what I had been thinking for weeks. It was like we all had different experiences, but could immediately understand what the others had gone through. It helps to know there are others on campus who ‘get it’.”

Group Demonstration

- Rory's Story Cubes
 - www.storycubes.com
 - App (in app purchases)

- Anonymity Bag
 - Leader
 - Member





Clinical Recommendations

“the need for post immersion reflection, some time to process and ‘unpack’ the experience by sharing with [willing] friends and family, reading journal entries, debriefing with the immersion group after returning back home and giving presentations on their experience for their local communities ”

Grief and Loss

Transitions

Expectations

It's actually quite interesting and powerful to be in a setting where you aren't able to do a lot of the things you usually do, to be helpful or productive. I haven't really been known here as an organiser and planner, or someone really into health (I've been the least knowledgeable actually ;P). In the hospital, where I'm not qualified to do anything, or in relationships and communities where I'm not already known and expected to fill a particular role, I've had to find my own way, whether I realised I was doing that for 6 months or not. Now I have to do it again.

Questions?

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*To these memories I will hold
With your blessing I will go
To turn at last to paths that lead home
And though where the road then takes me
I cannot tell
We came all this way
But now comes the day
To bid you farewell
I bid you all a very fond farewell.
~Billy Boyd, "The Last Goodbye"*

References

- Institute of International Education (2015). *Report on international educational exchange*. New York, NY author: Author
- Kostohryz, K., Wells, P. C., Wathen, C. C., & Wilson, D. (2014). More than a vacation: Exploring the impact of reentry for international sojourners. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling, 36*(4), 315-327.

Complete list can be emailed upon request.

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