



2020 API Re-Entry Toolkit

by Chelsea Kindred and Dr. Vija Mendelson, March 2020

Think back to a few weeks or months ago. What feelings did you have as you prepared to go abroad? Were you excited but nervous, overwhelmed by a variety of possibilities, and uncertain as to exactly how your time abroad would go?

We imagine you are feeling some of the same emotions again, particularly since your return home did not happen in a way anyone anticipated. We want to further support you during this critical phase of your journey, known as reentry, as you reflect on the time you spent abroad and further contextualize how global events disrupted your plans this term. Studying abroad offers us the opportunity to grow personally and professionally - to develop skills to help us navigate challenges, to consider how we are part of a much larger world, and to value the connections between people across cultures.

Your journey of learning and growth isn't over yet, even though you have had to return home prematurely due to the spread of COVID-19. We encourage you to take the time to unpack your experience, reflect on your experiences and lessons learned, and continue to find ways to apply your newfound knowledge and understanding to make our world a better place. We have created activities to guide you through this period of *returning*, of navigating unknowns and uncertainties, to help you build and articulate your specific study abroad story in ways that are meaningful to you.

Change management and resilience

Community engagement and advocacy

Empathy

Intercultural learning

Leadership

Mindfulness

Strategic planning

We've included an example activity from each of the skill areas below to help you begin to process and build your study abroad story.

Change management and resilience

*You may have heard that while we cannot control external circumstances that happen and affect our lives, we can control our responses. The skills of **change management and resilience** help us to successfully navigate challenges as they arise. Personally, preparing and equipping ourselves with skills to overcome obstacles will lead to personal growth. Professionally, employers value leaders and employees who can adapt to institutional and organizational changes in order to drive growth and success.*

Practices to build your resilience

Watch Lucy Hone's TEDx talk, "The three secrets of resilient people" at this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWH8N-BvhAw>

Lucy shares three strategies in her talk. Consider these strategies and think about which might help you continue to process this experience and build resilience:

- a. Acknowledge this situation as a part of life and work towards acceptance.
- b. Lucy talks about "selectional attention", a focus on things you *can* change.
- c. Ask yourself - "Is what I'm doing helping or harming me?"
This can be powerful and give you a better sense of control over your thoughts and your feelings. Choose not to believe the negative thoughts that might color your thoughts during these difficult time and consciously recognize that your thoughts aren't always accurate.



Reflection Questions

Take a moment to notice the positive and "tune into the good" or "hunt the good stuff". Name 2-3 things you are grateful about from your experience abroad or about returning home early

What support do you need to "move toward acceptance" regarding how your semester ended prematurely? Where can you find that support?

How are you practicing kindness to yourself? What practices surrounding this change and returning home are helping you? What practices may be less helpful or harmful for you?

Community engagement and advocacy

There is a Nguni Bantu term "ubuntu" which is often translated as, "I am because we are."

This philosophy affirms the ways in which we are in community with one another and how we are active participants in our own lives with actions and impact that touch the lives of many.

*The skills of **community engagement and advocacy** help us acknowledge the role we play in the collective whole and the power we have to support one another through times of success and times of challenge. Personally, community engagement and advocacy leads to a more connected and holistic participation in our local community. Professionally, employers value leaders and employees who can successfully identify opportunities to engage meaningfully across cultural barriers, to advocate and serve the community as a whole.*

Reflect on community engagement abroad

Consider an opportunity you engaged meaningfully with your host culture while abroad. These could be volunteer opportunities, social events, developing friendships, etc.

Identify two skills you needed to exercise to make these opportunities successful. You can reference the skills listed in the skill bank below. These skills are taken from the 2019 NACE employer survey which highlights the top skills employers value in new hires.

How did you leverage these skills to engage in the community abroad?

What advice would you give to others wanting to engage in your host community abroad in the future?
What skills should they use?

How would you articulate these skills to an employer? Can you use the [STAR method](#) (situation, task, action and result) to demonstrate how you engaged in the community?

NACE Skill Bank

Analytical skills	Initiative	Strategic planning
Communication	Interpersonal skills	Teamwork
Creativity	Leadership	
Detail-oriented	Organizational skills	
Flexibility/adaptability	Problem-solving	

Empathy

If asked to define empathy, you may start with thinking about your relationship to a specific individual who is going through a challenging time. Your time abroad required you to practice empathy toward a multitude of individuals facing unique life circumstances, including introspective empathy for yourself as you navigated new environments and outrospective empathy for others as you began to learn more about people and their unique stories. Empathy can shape our response in ways both big and small, and in a time of uncertainty and challenge, practicing the skill of empathy can lead us toward transformative moments of true connection. Personally, practicing empathy can help us form stronger connections and continue the work of engaging with the world. Professionally, employers seek leaders and employees who lead with empathy, who effectively support others and advance the work by navigating obstacles and finding solutions.

Learn about empathy vs. sympathy

Watch [this short 3-minute video](#) featuring author and speaker Brené Brown as she outlines the differences between sympathy and empathy. This video demonstrates what each looks like in practice, and the differences in impact we can make by choosing empathy over sympathy.

Image by Gracia Lam

Reflection Questions

After the disruption to your spring term and your study abroad plans, have you heard any “at least” messages from friends and family since you returned home from abroad?

What were they? Why do you think others seek to minimize your sadness about having your experience abroad so abruptly ended?

What is an empathic response you wish they would have offered instead?

Connect with a friend or acquaintance you met while abroad and practice your empathy by sending them a short message. Avoid “silver-lining” it for them, but instead practice true affective empathy.

Intercultural learning

Your experience abroad offered an opportunity to immerse yourself in a culture different from your own. While you may not be physically abroad any longer, opportunities to continue to engage across differences abound stateside, as do opportunities to connect to cultures around the world. Remember that culture can seem as large as a nation or as small as a workplace, and that the values, beliefs, and interests of a culture are worth examining. Intercultural learning promotes understanding, and facilitating understanding amongst diverse points of view, personal histories, and cultural constructs is a skill that promotes global fluency. Personally, intercultural learning facilitates connection, builds relationships, and enhances emotional intelligence. Professionally, employers value leaders and employees who can work with diverse teams in unique environments, reach across cultural barriers or bridge other communication difficulties, and embrace differences for the good of the organization.



Image from @apiabroad on Instagram

Visit a museum...virtually

We can learn a lot about culture through visiting museums. Continue your cultural understanding of your study abroad location by virtually visiting a museum that is located in your host country (it doesn't have to be in your host city).

Use [this map](#) to find a museum that interests you. View an online exhibit from the museum.

Reflection Questions

Consider sharing the exhibit link or a highlight from the exhibit with a friend or family member who is interested in learning more about your experience abroad. What would you say to them to encourage them to experience the museum?

What museums exist in your local community? What would a visitor learn about your local culture by visiting them?

In what ways did you experience unique features of your host culture abroad? How do people experience your local culture stateside?

Leadership

Only ~10% of undergraduates spend meaningful time abroad, and you have already demonstrated leadership by joining this elite group. The opportunity to refine your leadership skills in a global context has shaped your personal leadership style and will continue to impact your work as a leader going forward. Personally, leadership is an important skill to advance change, inspire and encourage others, and to embrace opportunities for growth. Professionally, employers value leaders and employees who can lead effectively, create impact, and foster opportunities for others. In this unprecedented moment where your study abroad experience was disrupted and your community abroad and at home are impacted, how can you demonstrate leadership?

Build your leadership network by connecting with a leader

Leaders don't walk alone, but rather seek the encouragement, wisdom, and support of others. In your leadership journey, finding others who align with your personal mission and examining the ways in which they practice leadership will help you continue to refine your skill-set and grow as a leader. Identify a leader to interview. This could be a peer leader, someone who demonstrates leadership through campus or community engagement or service. This could be someone in your family or community who has a leadership style you admire. This could also be someone you don't know - a leader in business, education, or the arts - who has a leadership style you wish to emulate or wish to learn more about.

You can conduct the interview virtually or consider the questions and research the ways in which the actions of this leader have demonstrated their responses. You can reach out and connect with the leader via LinkedIn and give targeted reasons why you admire their leadership style. We've provided interview questions below but feel free to adapt as you see fit.

Image by Shonagh Rae



Interview Questions

What is your personal leadership philosophy? How does this philosophy influence your actions?

How did you first get involved in [campus leadership/community advocacy/business, etc.]?

What skills do you believe are important to be an effective leader? Why?

Who is your professional or personal mentor? What role do they play in your life?

What are the specific responsibilities of your role?

Tell me about a specific challenge you've encountered that you were able to overcome. What advice do you have for others encountering that same challenge?

Tell me about a specific success you've celebrated recently. What advice do you have for others to help them achieve the same success?

What are some words of advice that you have for future leaders?

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the practice of focusing your attention purposefully to experiences happening in the present moment without judgment, but rather acceptance of your own feelings, thoughts, physiological reactions and emotions to that experience. According to the American Psychological Association, mindfulness is a "state and not a trait" (APA.org, 2012). This means that mindfulness is a "state" that can be refined through intentional practice. Personally, mindfulness can help us navigate stressful situations and extreme emotions by providing us with techniques to navigate these moments successfully. Professionally, employers value leaders and employees who can analyze a challenging situation and carefully consider thoughts and actions in response, instead of reacting in the moment without thought.

Mindfulness basics

Watch [this animated 3-minute video](#) and consider the impact of mindfulness on stressful encounters. Dan Harris affirms that practicing mindfulness can be a challenge, especially the larger the stimulus to our direct experience. He outlines some of the physiological responses our body can have to stress and asks us to consider the impact of a meditative or mindfulness practice on them.



We know the disruption of your term abroad caused a lot of stress, compounded by your return to the US and the uncertain and evolving situation we face here. You are also experiencing the expected stress of the transition back to your home culture, adjusting to old routines and patterns after spending time abroad learning new ones and challenging yourself to engage in a new environment. Many alumni report the transition home from abroad as being more challenging than the transition to living abroad. Consider the video reflection questions below as you examine the role mindfulness can play in your daily life.

Reflection Questions

What is an emotional reaction you're having today about the cancellation of your term abroad?

What do you feel in your body related to these emotions?

What stressful moments did you overcome abroad? Now that you have an idea about what mindfulness can look like in practice, are there any routines or actions you have taken in the past that facilitate a mindful state?

What goals do you have around mindfulness? What could help you in your mindfulness practice? What could you do the next time an obstacle presents itself, as we know life isn't an "endless parade of unicorns and rainbows"?

Strategic planning

"What's next?" This is a common phrase students hear after returning home from abroad, and in this specific moment of uncertainty and global challenge, you may feel anxiety at trying to come up with an answer to this question. The skill of strategic planning can help you navigate what may be a complex response to this question. Personally, strategic planning can help you define priorities, set goals, and create a pathway forward during uncertain times. Professionally, employers value leaders and employees who can provide solutions, think critically and creatively, and prove to be flexible and adaptable as your work responsibilities evolve.

Inventory your soft skills

In order to effectively and strategically plan for the next steps in your professional and personal development, you need to be familiar with your skill set; your strengths, your weakness, your opportunities for growth. Read "[The Most Popular Interview Questions to Identify Key Soft Skills](#)" from the LinkedIn Talent Blog to learn more about what soft skills interviewers look for when interviewing new hires.

Reflection questions

Rank the six key soft skills in order of your proficiency, with 1 being the skill you MOST need to develop and 6 being the skill you LEAST need to develop.

For each of the key soft skills:

Provide one example of how you strengthened this key soft skill during your time abroad. Write it out- this may be something you could use in the future for a graduate school admissions letter, a cover letter, or in a job interview.

Provide one example of how you could continue to strengthen this key soft skill in the upcoming weeks/months. Write this out, too. It will hold you accountable to refining this skill and could be useful in responding to interview questions about your perceived "weakness" with a specific action plan to continue to grow in this area.

Wrap-Up

Change is difficult, especially during times of continued uncertainty. By effectively managing change and growing our skill set, we can approach future challenges with confidence. This is an ongoing process - just as you are learning these skills, the people around you may also be continuing to refine their skills. Share what you have learned. If you still need help or are struggling to manage emotions throughout this change, we encourage you to seek the support of campus counseling centers, local counselors or other mental health support professionals.