

Welcome Back!



We know you're currently feeling a lot of emotions; you are happy to be reunited with friends, family, and a routine that is comforting and familiar, but you may also be struggling to figure out how to fit all that you have learned and gained while abroad into your daily life back home. Your time abroad was a transformative experience that will take time to fully process, and it will continue to shape your identity for years to come. Such extended time with **difference** (different sights, sounds, smells, cultures, languages) allows for the opportunity for **challenge and growth**, which can require some personal reflection and adjustment. It can be difficult to articulate how you have changed and grown as a person to everyone who wants to know, whether it's your family, your friends, or potential employers who spot your education abroad experience on your résumé. Furthermore, expressions of these changes can come in a variety of forms, including this journal, blogs, presentations, videos, artwork, volunteer work, political activism, and more.

This journal is a space for you to push through the outer layers of your experience (e.g., the photos and souvenirs you brought back) to help you make meaning and develop a deeper understanding of all that you experienced while abroad. This journal will challenge you to recognize the changes, large and small, in your identity and your perceptions of the world so that you can effectively share your story with others. It is important to the future of this global world that we share these stories of difference to help promote connections, inclusion, and tolerance in an increasingly polarized world.

As you are working your way through this journal, keep a few things in mind:

You are unique.

Fewer than 10 percent of your U.S. university peers participate in international programs. Your experience is unique to you and the ways you engage with the world. Share your story with your communities (personal, campus, local, and national communities) because diverse stories of the world demonstrate that the path toward an inclusive and tolerant world is one paved by the connections built and maintained through direct experience.

You are changing.

This is a distinct time in your life; you are progressing into adulthood and navigating the challenges of our contemporary world. Your time abroad has impacted the way you see the world and the people

in it. You may have picked up new skills, developed a different viewpoint, or made an unexpected connection. It is important for your own sense of identity and self-worth to explore the ways in which your education abroad experience has impacted you, and this journal will help you do so.

You are not done learning.

Your international experience wasn't a box to check off a list or something that can be easily packed away and separated from the remainder of your life. Education abroad scholar Bruce La Brack describes the compartmentalization of international experiences as "shoeboxing," whereby you keep mementos from your time abroad (e.g., train ticket stubs, napkins from your favorite cafés, etc.) in a physical shoebox and, in doing so, mentally view the experience as a separate time in your life that is over and complete (La Brack 2003). This journal will give you the space to explore your personal "shoebox," unpack it, and discover tangible ways for you to keep your shoebox open throughout the rest of your life.

You are not alone.

You are surrounded by a community of like-minded travelers who share your passion for global engagement. Your friends and family may grow weary after hearing your travel anecdotes multiple times, but we assure you that there are people who want and need to hear your story. This journal will help you build that story and then show you how you can share it with others.