

INTERNATIONAL PRACTICUM STUDENT HANDBOOK



INTRODUCTION: ASKING BIG QUESTIONS, SEEKING NEW HORIZONS

As we explored possible answers to our initial questions, we soon discovered that many more queries emerged. But, maybe that's the whole point of this exercise. As you read through the following questions, we encourage you to use this as a mere starting point as you begin your own journey. We are sure that you will have many more questions. We acknowledge that our exploration of these issues comes from our own experience as white middle-class heterosexual Canadian women whose international experience has been predominantly in Africa. This places certain limitations on the diversity of experiences that we are able to account for in this document. We have invited other students to share their experiences and insight and we would invite you to do the same. If you feel that there are any gaps or questions and issues left unaddressed feel free to contact Miriam Curtis at the School of Child and Youth Care to add your thoughts. It is our intention that this be a constantly evolving document.

Let the questioning begin!

Nashira Birch and Paula Klassen

PRE-DEPARTURE: ARE YOU READY TO LEAVE YOUR BOOKS BEHIND?

Am I a suitable candidate for overseas work?

Before considering an overseas placement, you should honestly examine your attitude and approach to life. What are your bottom lines? Will you be cranky for eight months if you don't have your daily cup of coffee at Starbucks? Will you be able to cope without regular internet access? Accessibility to creature comforts can vary enormously from placement to placement so it is best to think about what you are able to do without beforehand. With this in mind, a sense of humor is an essential asset.

The *Canadian Guide to Living and Working Overseas* by Jean-Marc Hachey provides a comprehensive list of qualities found in successful overseas candidates. Here are some starting points:

- Enjoyment of change and adventure
- Desire to seek challenges
- Open mindedness and curiosity
- Embracement of differences and ambiguity
- Non-judgmental attitude
- Self-reliance, strong sense of self
- Good communication skills
- Emotional stability and ability to deal with stress
- Flexibility and adaptability

Do I have enough time to prepare?

It is recommended that you start thinking about your plans, talking to people such as practicum coordinators, and doing research **about a year** in advance. Why the prolonged timeframe? The

primary reason is that you will need ample time to prepare both logistically and psychologically. Additionally, communication between Canada and other countries can be slow, even in this cyber age, and it can take some time to find and set up an appropriate placement. International applications often involve a lot of bureaucracy so be prepared to invest time, energy and effort into this lengthy process. You may be required to write essays, submit official documentations, and prepare for several interviews. Once accepted, you will be required to organize your passport and possibly work permits. As you can see, there is a lot of background work that needs to be done before going overseas! But it can definitely be worth it.

I'm a CYC undergraduate student, at what point in the program can I do an international practicum?

For undergraduate students, typically an international placement is done in your final year of CYC. Your final practicum is your opportunity to fulfill your remaining learning goals for your degree. Think about this when you are thinking about doing your practicum internationally. Ask yourself: What do I want or need to get out of this practicum for my learning or for job requirements down the road? With this in mind, going into your work placement with unrealistic expectations will lead to disappointment and frustration. Don't expect that you will be able to "save the world." On the contrary, expect to be changed as a result of this incredible learning experience. Hopefully, you will make a worthwhile contribution but don't get carried away. Your patience and positive attitude will carry you through the ambiguities of your experience and allow you to "go with the flow."

I'm a CYC graduate student, at what point in the program can I do an international practicum?

All graduate students are required to do at least one practicum as part of the MA program requirements. You also have the option to do a second practicum as an elective. Typically, the 4th term of the program is an ideal time to consider doing your practicum, but there is some flexibility. Graduate students are responsible for finding their own practicum placement (be it local or international). Be sure to communicate your plans with the faculty coordinator before finalizing any practicum arrangements. For more information, go to the following link: <http://cyc.uvic.ca/downloads/cyc553.pdf>

How do I begin setting my learning goals for my practicum?

Before diving into the wealth of information that is available, determine a focus. Are you drawn to a particular region in the world? Or perhaps you may have a particular field of interest such as HIV/AIDS or Early Childhood. Limiting your focus will help you narrow your search so that you won't be overwhelmed by the seemingly endless possibilities. Here are some guidelines to help you choose a potential country:

- Safety, money, language, politics, placement possibilities, available contacts, culture, attitudes toward foreigners, attitude toward children, emotional support, health
- Would you prefer an urban or rural setting?
- In a country not so dissimilar to Canada (ie: Australia) or a less 'developed' one (ie: Malawi)?

- How far out of my comfort zone do I want to be?
- Talk to people who have done international work and/or travel about which countries they would or wouldn't recommend.
- Talk to the School of Child and Youth Care about which countries the University is willing to send you to. Because of liability issues, there are a few countries that the University will not send you to because of the current safety/political issues. You may wish to consult Canadian Consular Information for Canadians Abroad (http://www.voyage.gc.ca/consular_home-en.asp) and Dept. of Foreign Affairs & International Trade <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/> to verify travel advisories, visa requirements, inoculations, etc.

What kind of support do I need to meet my learning goals?

It is a good idea to approach people who will be able to support you in achieving your learning goals for your practicum. Baird (1996) encourages us to ask the question, "Is this someone I think I can work with and who I think would be interested in helping me learn?" (p. 6). It is very likely in any placement, and especially in an international placement, that your theoretical orientation and the way this plays out in your practice is very different from that of your practicum supervisor's. This can be beneficial to learning, but you also might think about how open you both are to new approaches and what type of support you need.

Establishing a regular 'communication plan' with your course instructor in Canada before going overseas is strongly recommended. This will enable you to de-brief and share both your personal and your professional learning throughout the entirety of your practicum – not simply when you return to Canada.

Additionally, seeking a local mentor could greatly assist your learning while working overseas. Again, your communication skills will be put to the test. Will gender, educational background, or language, among other factors impact your relationship with your mentor? How rigid are you in your expectations of yourself and of others? Do you stick to your initial goals at all costs? You must also remember that your mentor may have many other responsibilities and that your learning objectives may not be his/her priority. Again, your flexibility and patience will be enormous assets to help you deal appropriately with the dynamics in your relationships with your colleagues. Be prepared to let go of 'the task-orientation' norms of many North American professional settings.

Should I go alone or with someone else?

It can be an exciting challenge to do your practicum alone, but it may also be an isolating experience adjusting to an unfamiliar place and a new culture by yourself. Alternatively, if you go with someone, although having support and stability from home may be comforting, it can sometimes inhibit you from immersing yourself into the culture and making new friends while there. What is your comfort level as you consider the safety level of the country?

On one hand, there are benefits in deciding to go with someone such as having a traveling companion and having someone with whom you can debrief. On the other hand, going with

someone can also be challenging as you may be living, working, eating, socializing, traveling together. This adds up to **a lot** of time spent in one another's company. With this in mind, it is important to discuss your expectations of one another. What follows are some ideas of questions to help you decide whether or not you are compatible with one another (adapted from Camp Danbee's Co-Counselor Worksheet):

- What are your learning goals/ intentions in doing an international placement?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses as it pertains to working with children/youth/families/communities?
- What makes you nervous about this practicum?
- What drives you crazy? Pet peeves...
- How do you react when stressed? How do you unwind or relax when stressed? How might you be able to de-stress while abroad?
- Are you a rule follower or a fly by the seat of your pants person?
- What is the best way to approach you when we disagree or are frustrated?
- What is the best way to deal with you when you are sad, tired, cranky, homesick, etc...?
- Discuss how you were raised in your family? How does that affect the way you interact with the world, travel, and practice in the field of CYC?
- What is most important to you: respect, fairness, or kindness? Why?
- How are we going to communicate to make sure we are supporting each other?

How do I find a placement?

Unlike Canadian practicum placements, international practicum placements are set up by the student. You will receive support in this process from the School, but the finding of a suitable placement is the beginning of your learning journey. This is a really good opportunity for you to network and learn about what is out there in the field of international work, or in the Child and Youth Care field in a particular country. Here are some suggestions for starting points:

- What do I envision for my practicum? What are my needs? (See Psychological section and Setting Learning Goals Section)
- Talk to people and network with people who work internationally, or are from, have visited, have worked in, know about, know people in the country you want to go to.
- Talk to other students who have done international practica. This does not mean that you will be able to replicate their practicum, but they will inevitably have ideas for you of what to consider when looking. Remember, what fit for them in a placement may not fit for you.
- Surf the internet.
- Research organizations working internationally, or local organizations and programs within the country you wish to go to.
- Read: Hachey, Jean-Marc (2006). *The Canadian guide to working and living overseas*. Ottawa, ON: Intercultural Systems.
- If you choose to take the route of a placement with a formal international NGO, see the following section (although these questions may apply to any program or organization in which you end up working).

How do I choose an organization for my placement?

As you begin researching, think critically about the impact of the international work on the local community where your potential work placement is taking place. Do your background research on the history of the NGO with which you wish to work. Request a basic information package from organizations you are interested in, or check their web sites. Some questions to consider are:

- Were they invited by the local/ national government to begin their project?
- Do they have a strategic plan in order to ensure that their program activities are sustainable?
- Where does the project receive its funding? What obligations does the project have towards their funders and most importantly towards local community members?
- Do you agree with the rationale and philosophy of the NGO? Does it best represent your own values and beliefs? Look critically into the politics of dependency and development within and between countries, and about what is beneficial change and for whom.

Examining my intentions: Why do I want to go?

For quite some time now I have resisted the idea of international work, seeing it as a form of colonization that I did not want to be a part of. I didn't want to be another naïve, white, North American university student who wants to save the world by bringing Western ideologies, resources and programs to vulnerable parts of the world. However, over the course of this past year, with the help of some influential professors, articles, and conversations, I have begun to see that what is important is the attitude that one brings to the experience. I have also begun to see the truth behind the statement that the well-being of children and families is a global concern. When I see myself not just as a North American citizen, but as a global citizen, international work represents an opportunity to be a part of what I hope to be a process of global change. I hope to go into the experience with an openness and eagerness to learn and be a part of that change, rather than with an assumption that my current ideologies about praxis are relevant or helpful elsewhere or that I can change or "save" the world.

-- CYC Student, after 3-month practicum in Malawi

Consider why you want to do your practicum abroad. If main motivation is to travel, you may want to consider other options to fulfill this drive (See the Other International Opportunities Section below). Keep in mind that doing a practicum internationally may sound very exotic and exciting, but you will be working within the constraints of your commitment to your placement and the academic requirements of the course. Although it is easy to concentrate on personal gains that may result from an overseas experience (learning a new language, getting a great tan...), consider how your actions and decisions may affect others. For instance, if you will be working at an orphanage with children who have spent their whole lives having to let go of adults they become attached to, what is the cost-benefit analysis of you coming into their lives for three months only to leave again? If you want to go to "save children in Africa," think about where that need is coming from and what it means to "save" people. Going hastily into an international situation with a blind belief in your ability to rescue a "poor" child, you may quickly find

yourself in a situation like Madonna! Every community is complex and different and you may not be aware of the existing support structures in place. With this in mind, you should also assess your potential impact on the community, host organization, children/ youth/ host family.

Consider the following questions:

- What will I be doing in this project?
- Who defines this as being important?
- Do my learning goals fit with the present objectives of the project?
- How will I respectfully and honestly establish relationships with my colleagues, host family and youth/children during my overseas placement overseas?
- Will I maintain these relationships once I have left the community? If so, how?
- What is the environmental impact of your trip? Plane travel is one of the highest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions in our atmosphere (Sustainable Travel International, 2003-2005). For more information check out Sustainable Travel International at <http://www.my-climate.com/>.

I really want to go but can I afford it?

An international practicum is generally more costly than a local practicum because of several additional costs. Consider the following:

- Plane travel
- travel expenses before, after, and during your practicum
- travel/health insurance,
- vaccinations (many of these are covered by your medical plan – look into it before you dish out money for them – they can be expensive!)
- anti-malarial pills
- tuition (remember, you are still in school!)
- course materials
- communication expenses (phone calls, internet, faxes, etc. to keep in touch with the school and with friends and family – can be very expensive.)
- food and accommodation

Where will I get the money?

Ideas for starting points:

- UVSS Travel Pool Fund (\$100, must be backed by CYC Student Council, see UVSS office for application form)
- Office of International Affairs (OIA) Student International Activities Fund (SIAF) (<http://www.oia.uvic.ca/assets/documents/SIAF0607.pdf>)
- For more information, ideas, and resources see the OIA Student Funding website (<http://www.oia.uvic.ca/students/studentfunding.asp>)
- Hold fundraising events
- Hold a bake sale! (you'd be surprised how much money you can make this way)
- These can also be good ways to raise money to contribute to the programs that will be hosting you during your practicum.

- Ask for sponsorship from businesses, etc., especially those where you have a personal connection (people like to give money to people they know and trust).
- Other charitable organizations (i.e. The Legion, The Shriners, etc.)

Where will I live?

Finding a living arrangement for your time abroad can be difficult when you are still in Canada. You may wish to live with a host family as it will likely be cheaper and it will give you a more immersing experience. This said, you may choose to live independently or with other volunteers or practicum students, as it could give you more of your own space and time to debrief and unwind. In some cases, your placement may have accommodation available to you. This could be a great immersion into the experience, but could also be overwhelming. Think about your personal needs (self-care!) and what you want/need to get out of the experience, what would be most valuable to your learning and to the community. For finding accommodation, you may be able to look online, ask your supervisor for advice, or talk to others who know the country, or figure it out when you get there and understand the context and the options better.

LOGISTICS: THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF PLANNING YOUR TRIP

What logistical things will I need to do before leaving?

(list compiled in part from *Foreign Service Guide*, Foreign Affairs Canada)

- Arrange passport and work visa.
- Arrange finances (student loans, rent, debts)
- If you are using a Credit Card or Visa while there, make sure to contact them and let them know you will be using it in a different country so they don't think it has been stolen and cut it off.
- Get a physical examination (make sure to get all the necessary shots before leaving)
- Health/travel insurance
- Adapters for your electrical appliances (if appropriate)
- Organize first aid kit, sewing kit, and basic tool kit
- Get appropriate clothes (though these can sometimes be purchased easier and cheaper once in the country)
- Plan goodbyes with people and places
- Look into getting an international driving permit if you think you will be driving
- Photocopy and scan all your important documents (passport, birth certificate, vaccination cards, prescription for medicines and glasses, plane tickets, contact info while away etc.) and leave a copy with a friend or family member, bring a copy, and leave a scanned copy in your email account. **A COPY OF EVERYTHING MUST GO TO YOUR PRACTICUM COORDINATOR BEFORE YOUR DEPARTURE.**

- Remember to look into vaccination and visa requirements for all countries you will be spending time in well in advance of your departure, as many vaccinations have time delays, and some visas require prior application (especially given the length of stay you will be in your primary host country).
- Visit the Canadian Consular Affairs Bureau Website (http://www.voyage.gc.ca/consular_home-en.asp) for extensive logistical travel information

Some other travel abroad resources you might want to consider:

- Lansky, D. (2006). *The rough guide to first-time around the world, Edition 2*. Rough Guides.
- Lonely Planet Travel Guides
- UVic's Office of International Affairs website also has several travel abroad resources. (<http://oia.uvic.ca/travel/index.asp>)

As a person with special needs, what are some things I might consider before leaving?

In some countries, people with physical or mental disabilities are openly marginalized. Think about how you would deal with this type of discrimination. On the other hand, your “dis” ability has the potential to change pre-existing attitudes. Other things to consider: transportation, new mobility challenges, access to medical facilities and support, maintenance of any special equipment you may need (even something as simple as prescription eye glasses).

What are some other international opportunities that I may pursue outside of school?

You may decide that it makes more sense to save your traveling and/or international working experience after you have completed your degree. There are many opportunities to study, work, intern, volunteer or teach English overseas. Here are just a few of the many organizations out there that provide international volunteer opportunities. Keep in mind that this is merely an introduction. As you begin your research, you will find more information along with more referrals to other organizations.

- Volunteers for Peace (<http://www.volunteersforpeace.org>)
- Aga Khan Foundation Canada (<http://www.akfc.ca/>)
- Save the Children (<http://www.savethechildren.ca>)
- Canada World Youth (<http://www.cwy-jcm.org/>)
- World University Service of Canada (<http://www.wusc.ca/>)
- Youth Challenge International (<http://www.yci.org/>)
- SWAP Working Holidays (www.swap.ca)
- UVic Career Services International Work Resources (<http://www.careerservices.uvic.ca/resources/international.html#thinking>)

You may also wish to consult Queen's University's International Centre website (<http://www.queensu.ca/quic/wsa/opportunities/index.htm>) which has links to several overseas opportunities.

CROSS-CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS: LEARNING TO “SEE” IN A NEW WAY

What do I need to know about the country in which I will live before I leave Canada?

Before leaving, get background information on the country you will be visiting.

Consider:

- Language
- History/ Colonization
- Religion/ Ways of Thinking/ Philosophy
- Traditions
- Class Structures
- Political realities
- Food/Clothing
- Role of women
- Sexuality (i.e. customs and attitudes around gender roles, homosexuality, polygamy, etc.)
- Social conventions/etiquette/ public displays of affection
- Beliefs and practices around children
- Should I bring gifts? If so, what is appropriate/needed?

The Centre for Intercultural Learning provides cultural information on several countries and offers both a local and Canadian perspective on the abovementioned points. (http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/country_insights-en.asp?lvl=8). Another useful starting point is the Citizenship and Immigration Canada Cultural Profiles Project website (<http://www.cp-pc.ca/english/index.html>). Although one can never make generalizations, this is a useful starting point to begin to see the variances in perspective. Also this opens the door to reflection to what will be their reception and perception of you (including socio-economic status, race, nationality, gender, ethnicity, religion).

What do I need to know about the community in which I will live before I leave Canada?

Research the specifics about the community in which you will be working. Consider:

- Rural/urban
- Ethnic make-up
- Religious communities
- What particular issues are they facing?
- Level of education/livelihood/ average income of community members
- What type of position does your agency hold in the community?
- Programs/ resources available within the community
- Stakeholders Analysis: Who makes the important decisions?

(Adapted from Garthwait's Beginning a Community Analysis Workbook Activity, 2005)

How can I integrate into the local community?

Chambers (2000) urges people going overseas to realize that every local community is diverse and complex therefore, it is essential to be 'people-centered' in your approach when working with community. This begins by acknowledging that each individual holds knowledge and is capable of making a contribution.

Make a genuine effort to:

- Stop, listen, watch and learn.
- Unlearn.
- Be optimally unprepared.
- Embrace error.
- Relax.
- Hand over the stick. They can do it too.
- Ask lots of questions! Talk to people!
- Be nice to people.

This can be summed up by an African proverb, "If you can walk, you can dance. If you can talk, you can sing." Your genuine interest, enthusiasm and involvement in the local community will go a long way.

What will it be like to live in a new culture?

Arrival is physical and happens all at once. The train pulls in, the plane touches down, you get out of the taxi with all your luggage. You can arrive in a place and never really enter it; you get there, look around, take a few pictures, make few notes, send postcards home. When you travel like this, you think you know where you are, but, in fact, you have never left home. Entering takes longer. You cross over slowly, in bits and pieces. You begin to despair: Will you ever get over? It's like awakening slowly, over a period of weeks. And then one morning, you open your eyes and you are finally here, really and truly here. You are just beginning to know where you are.

All my former knowledge and accomplishments seemed useless to me now – all the critical jargon I carry around in my head, tropes and modes and traces, thirteen definitions of irony, the death of the author, the anxiety of influence, there is nothing outside text.

-- (Jamie Zeppa, 1999, p. 101)

No amount of research will entirely prepare you for the reality of being in your host country for the first time. Sometimes there are no words to describe the sights, sounds and smells that you will experience 'in the flesh.' As you adjust to this new way of life, realize that you will be challenged on several levels. Your values and beliefs may be questioned. You may be singled out among the crowd and consequently lose your sense of anonymity and privacy. Non-verbal gestures that you are accustomed to using in Canada may no longer apply in this new context. All of this can lead to feelings of disorientation, alienation, frustration and fatigue. This is what many refer to as 'culture

shock' (UBC, 2006). As some people begin to process their way through this difficult phase of 'not fitting in,' they can begin to compare the local culture in relation to theirs. Although this is normal, it is important not to judge the local culture as being inferior. This may lead to feelings of defensiveness and hostility.

What will it be like to work in a new culture?

You will most likely be faced with cross-cultural learning experiences in your work placement. Consider as some starting points:

- punctuality
- dress-code
- gender relations
- respect for authority
- structure of the workday and holidays
- conception of time
- work ethic
- the role of religion in the workplace
- treatment of children
- conceptions of child development

How can I prepare myself in order to be able to effectively work cross-culturally?

Do some self-reflection before going and while there.

- What is my culture?
- What are my beliefs and values?
- What biases am I bringing with me? How can I deal with these?

Here is a more comprehensive list of questions to work through (Adapted from Garthwait's Identity and Self-Awareness: A Workbook Activity, pp. 145-46)

- How would you describe yourself in terms of gender? Race? Ethnicity? Socio-economic class? Religion? Age group? Minority group? Sexual orientation? How would this change in a global context?
- What are the positive aspects of each of these group identities or memberships for you? In your local context? In a global context?
- What are the negative aspects of each of these group identities or memberships for you?
- How might your identity, characteristics, and membership in particular groups affect your work with clients who are different from you?
- What are your most common thoughts and feelings when you encounter people who are different from yourself?
- Describe a time and place when you were in a minority in terms of your race, skin colour, ethnicity, or religion (i.e., most others present were of a different group?). What were your feelings about this experience?

- Describe your earliest memories of realizing your own identity in terms of your gender, race ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and religion.
- What positive and negative characteristics were ascribed to your gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and religion by your family? Your relatives? Your neighbours? Your classmates in elementary school and high school?
- What steps can you take to improve your skills in working with diverse clients?
- What biases and stereotypes, if any, have you identified within yourself as you have encountered clients who are different from you? What can you do to ensure that these do not colour your work?

How should I deal with feelings of judgment towards other cultures?

Here are some tips on how you can deal with feelings of judgment (adapted from UBC, 2006):

- Know your own values and recognize that others may not share the same beliefs as you.
- Find people whom you can trust (such as a local mentor, your practicum supervisor) to process times of frustration and confusion.
- Focus on self-development (developing a more accepting, non-judgmental attitude through interactions with different types of people).
- Find ways to maintain your own personal identity (listening to music from home, treating yourself to food/magazines from home).

What should I know about cross-cultural differences before working overseas?

It was much easier to incorporate myself into Mexican society despite the differences, because although there is definitely poverty in Mexico, it isn't nearly as widespread and ingrained as in Nicaragua, a tiny country that has suffered brutal dictatorships, stark inequality, attack from the outside, destruction of its infrastructure, and a trade embargo. Until the late 70s most people didn't know how to read; children weren't protected from disease; half the population was malnourished. Mexico is a modern, cosmopolitan country, with a proud, ancient culture. There were some reforms in the 1930s that created a safety net of sorts, a social security system and some degree of common ownership of the land. There was never the sense that the people I met viewed me as some version of Santa Claus. Down to the last person, the Mexicans have pride in their heritage and just love to show off for foreigners, everything from their cuisine to their pyramids. The main difference between their life experience and mine was cultural: religion, language, male dominance, etc.

-- Canadian volunteer, after living in Nicaragua for 6 months and Mexico for 6 years

Most Canadians belong to a *low context* culture where the primary focus is based on tasks. On the contrary, many countries prioritize *relationship building* within their culture. An awareness of contrasting values can lessen internal/external conflict when

overseas. (Adapted from Centre for Intercultural Learning, Pre-departure worksheet, n.d. www.cfsi-icse.gc.ca/cil-cai/)

High Context Culture	Low Context Culture
Process focused	Results focus
Indirect communication style	Direct communication style
Group orientation	Individual orientation
Hierarchy	Equality
Disagreement personalized	Disagreement depersonalized
Time-polychromic	Time-monochromic

How might my sexual orientation influence my experience abroad?

Sexual identities are defined, understood, and approached differently from culture to culture. Familiarize yourself with the customs and laws of your host country, as homosexuality is illegal in some countries. In this case, for your own safety, you may be advised to hide your sexual orientation. Is this something you feel comfortable doing? If so, you may want to think about ways you can maintain your identity while overseas. Conversely, there are countries where attitudes towards various sexual orientations may be more open than at home. In this new context, how will you adjust? And how will you adjust back to your home community after this experience? If you choose to come out while abroad, think about how you will disclose your sexual identity to friends and family when you get home. They may react by dismissing this news as being a phase, rather than by acknowledging this as a lasting part of your identity.

What should I do if I am being sexually harassed?

Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature (UVic Counselling Centre, 2006). Many cultures may have different attitudes towards what some Canadians perceive as sexual harassment and may not adhere to policies and procedures that are in place in Canada. Be prepared that even your perceptions of what constitutes sexual harassment and where your comfort level lies may change in a new context. You may want to outline a protocol for action with your instructor before leaving so that in the event of an incident you will know where to go for support. Be prepared that people may have preconceived notions about Western sexuality that are based on travelers who have come through in the past and on Hollywood films. For more information about sexual harassment, refer to UVic's Counselling Centre's website (<http://www.coun.uvic.ca/personal/sharass.html>).

How will I adjust to living in a new culture?

Being able to feel comfortable in a new cultural context takes time. It is important to remember to know how to maintain a sense of well being as this will play a huge role in your ability to be productive and effective overseas. Many people going overseas experience a common pattern of adjustment to life in a new culture: Honeymoon Stage, Cultural Shock, Recovery Stage, Adjustment Stage. Below are some common symptoms that you may experience while living overseas (Taylor, 1999):

Honeymoon Stage: *I can't believe I'm actually here! This is AMAZING!* High energy levels, feelings of excitement, strong desire to explore and to discover.

Cultural Shock: *Oh dear! What kind of decision have I made?* Feelings of irritability, fatigue, discouragement, boredom, stress and confusion. Some people chose to react to the stress of culture shock through: withdrawal or aggression towards the other culture or use of drugs and alcohol.

Recovery Stage: *I'm going to be O.K.* Energy level returns, a renewed sense of optimism and interest, establishment of routines, friends, feeling less judgmental, gaining skills in intercultural communication.

Adjustment Stage: *I'm enjoying my life here.* Sense of adventure, willingness to seek new learning opportunities and to try new approaches.

For more a more detailed discussion on these stages, refer to:

- Culture Shock & The Problem of Adjustment to New Cultural Environments. http://www.worldwide.edu/travel_planner/culture_shock.html
(This is an editorial providing a comprehensive discussion of this cultural adjustment process, including the stages of culture shock.)
- Online Cultural Training Resource for Study Abroad, from Bruce LaBrack, at the University of the Pacific, "What's Up With Culture?" <http://www.pacific.edu/sis/culture/>
- (Comprehensive, interactive cross-cultural resource for students going abroad and returning from abroad.)

How important is it to learn the local language of the community in which I will live?

Dedicate some thought to this. How much time are you willing to invest in learning the language? What gains do you foresee in learning the local language? Work related? Building relationships? Understanding culture? What is the best approach for you to learn the language? Books? Tapes? Language courses? Think about how living and working in a context with an entirely new language will impact your learning. Will you be able to communicate effectively with your supervisor, co-workers, or the people you will be working with? Will you be able to get the support for your learning process that you need? (Cumyn, 2001)

It's good too to remember that things take time, especially anything that involves other people. And it's not because they're trying to screw you, rather it's because you're screwed and don't speak the local language. Even if you speak the national language, you probably won't speak like the locals. Try not to get frustrated by these things, just try to expect that there's going to be a lot of things that you don't expect. Also remember that most people are helpful, but they've got schedules, so they can't be helpful all day long.

Don't feel discarded if someone walks away from you, they've probably just got something to do and you don't speak the language well enough for them to explain that to you!

-- Canadian Geography student after a one-year language exchange in China

What will it feel like being a minority?

I might as well have been naked and covered with sparkles. It wouldn't really have made any difference. You stand out because you ARE "out" here.

-- Canadian ESL teacher in Korea

For some, going abroad may be your first experience of being a minority. Your experience of being a minority in another country will vary depending on your own background, and the country to which you choose to go. Think critically about what you are representing. What are the implications for you? What are the implications for the people with which you will meet and work? How will these implications affect your interactions with people there? Consider the history, culture and ethnic relations of your host country. What role are you representing from this history? Think about the colonial power relations you might be representing. Colonization is an important and deep-rooted part of the history of the world, and this may play out closer to the surface in many countries than it does in Canada (although it is important to consider Canada's colonial history as well). Even if you are not an ethnic minority in your host country, the very fact that you live in one of the most privileged and powerful countries in the world and can afford to travel to another country makes you a global minority. Think about this before you go and while you are there.

How do I overcome feelings of 'First World Guilt?'

Sometimes referred to as 'First World Guilt,' this is an overwhelming awareness of one's minority position of privilege in the world. Consequently, some people become paralyzed by guilt about the reality of the inequalities existing in our world. Coming to terms with these feelings of guilt is an important part of cross-cultural work and it involves being able to make peace with yourself and all that you cannot change. From here, you will be able to gain more clarity in the role that you can play to create a more just world. Acting from a place of guilt doesn't necessarily help anyone, including yourself, nor does it necessarily make the situation better.

People often refer to being in another country as a white person as something that can help this individual feel the experience of being a visible minority and the potential discrimination, racism, and prejudice that comes along with that.

However, in every country worldwide, the experience of being a white person will always be different. As a white person, the position I represent, as a colonizer, oppressor, missionary and walking dollar sign is very different than the position represented by any other given ethnicity. I could be the only white person in the middle of Africa and my position as a minority and experience of that position would still be different than that of an African person in the middle of Victoria. Numbers alone do not dictate the experience of being a minority.

-- Canadian CYC Student, before a three-month practicum in Malawi

What are some ethical/moral issues I may encounter while overseas?

Here are some experiences and words of advice from previous students:

“I’m here to help but I’m not Santa Claus”

There was a little girl in Nicaragua who wanted me to bring her home with me, I still think about her sometimes. It's so hard to explain that though there is a relative imbalance in wealth, it doesn't mean we're Santa Claus with an unlimited supply.

-- Canadian volunteer after living in Nicaragua for 6 months

Notes from the field: I am a walking dollar sign. For once, I would like to be able to interact with people without symbolizing extreme wealth. I don't know what to do with my position in the world. Obviously, I believe morally that the wealth of the world should be evened out, but in the moment, when asked for money, I obviously can't give money to everyone who asks, and there are other complex factors at work. Like if I believe giving money to someone begging is really the solution or just reinforcing a dependency dynamic? I want to be able to talk to these people without my screaming dollar sign getting in the way.

-- Canadian CYC Student, on practicum in Malawi

You may want to refer to an interesting section of the British newspaper, *Guardian*, called “Ethical Money,” where you can investigate some of the issues around where your money is going when you are abroad or even at home. Check out <http://money.guardian.co.uk/ethicalmoney/>. Of particular interest here is Ed Ewing’s article “Pennies From Heaven?”, which delves into the issues surrounding child begging.

“Know your boundaries.”

Remember that that these situations are ones where you need to make the decision for yourself about what you feel good about doing and what seems right in the situation. As Baird (1996) reminds us, “Simply because you want to believe you can help someone, does not mean you are justified in proceeding” (p. 30). It is important, as well, that we recognize those times when we are struggling and find our boundaries and the guidance we need. Once again, Baird reminds us, “Consistent with the principle of 'Do No Harm,' knowing our limits means that no matter how much we may want to help others, we must recognize the extent and limitations of our abilities and seek assistance or supervision when we need it” (p. 30).

"You can't help everyone."

One of the most valuable pieces of advice that I received before leaving and which I took as a mantra with me throughout my time in Malawi was that you may be confronted with a lot of people who are struggling, if not in your placement, on the streets, in your off time, and it is easy to become overwhelmed with feelings of guilt, thinking you could have done more, but there is only so much one person can do and you can't "save" everyone. But really, can you ever “save” anyone??

-- Canadian CYC Student, after a practicum in Malawi

“There are many ways to give.”

I sure could relate to the being uncomfortable about the appearance of wealth and wondering whether there's inherent virtue in poverty. I used to feel so badly about the distribution of wealth in the world, so much so that soon after returning from Central America when I was 16, I gave away my inheritance of \$10,000 left by my grandmother, to OXFAM to build houses in poor countries.

The trouble with this is the lack of balance and foresight. I'm not sure it really came from generosity so much as shame, and I really don't think any good can come of acting out of shame. It also put me in the position of not having all that money to spend on my education, which was what it was for. I had no idea at the time just how hard it would be even in this "rich" country, to find work that would allow me even to get by from paycheque to paycheque, and I spent years working at anything I could find, frequently needing to ask for help, and living in housing that was probably even more unhealthy and uncomfortable than the housing situations of those people my donation went to help all those years ago. Hmm. I've come to believe that to really help anyone we have to help ourselves first. Generosity is a wonderful quality, but only when it comes out of abundance, not out of a sense of guilt. But the main thing any of us has to give is our positive energy -- a smile, a hug, time listening to other people. That took me such a long time to understand!

Maybe that's one of the things to be learned from living in poor countries. When people have so little materially, they are still generous in spirit. They live in the moment, extracting the most from everything. I remember how in Nicaragua people would tell and retell the same joke, over and over, laughing as much each time. They'd make light of the little hardships.

-- Canadian volunteer after living in Nicaragua for 6 months and Mexico for 6 years

How Do I Confront Different Cultural Beliefs and Practice Around Child Development?

Being in another country and culture, the beliefs, practices and resources available to children will inevitably differ from those in Canada. This is what one person had to say about her experience:

One thing that comes to mind is how child development is different depending on the expectations of the culture. Specifically, in Canada we expect small children to be possessive and greedy, and they comply. In Mexico and Central America they've never heard of the terrible twos, and consequently they don't exist. Children throwing tantrums are the exception, something that

raises eyebrows and brings immediate attempts to placate the child. It's almost as if the kids absorb expectations through their pores. When we moved back to Canada, my daughter was two and a half, and she was cheerful and easy to get along with. She had very few toys, maybe enough to fill a small box. Almost as soon as we got here, people started showering her with toys, and, whether consequently or incidentally, she suddenly began lying on the floor and screaming when she didn't get what she wanted. She turned into a typical Canadian two year old.

*There was a daycare centre I used to visit in Mexico to pick up my neighbor's daughter. It was brightly painted and cheerful, but there were almost no toys. The children mostly played with each other. The interesting thing was, I don't remember them ever fighting over the few toys there were. They took turns and looked out for each other. I think it was the same way in Nicaragua. I remember the teachers would lead games and sing songs with the children, but there were hardly any toys and it was never a problem.
-- Canadian volunteer after living in Nicaragua for 6 months and Mexico for 6 years*

HEALTH AND WELLBEING: KEEPING IT TOGETHER DURING UNCERTAIN TIMES

Where might I find health information?

Here are some starting points for obtaining health information. Take the time to look into health concerns for your destination but don't get too hung up on them – you can be cautious and prepared without being paranoid. Be sure to consider a variety of sources, your local GP may not be aware of specific health concerns of other countries. You may want to consult a doctor who has experience with common health problems for travelers.

- UVic Health Services (Although not a travel clinic per se, they are very helpful in providing you with necessary information, immunizations, etc. free of charge for UVic students.)
- Travel clinics (Provide you with up to-date travel and health information and a wealth of knowledge and experience.)
- Lonely Planet travel guides
- World Health Organization (<http://www.who.int/en/>)
- MD Travel Health Website (<http://www.mdtravelhealth.com/index.html>)

How do I know if the water and food are safe to drink and eat?

Water-borne diseases are a major problem in developing countries. Tap water may be unsafe to drink because of contamination, poor sewage disposal, or inadequate purification. The degree of contamination may vary significantly from region to region. It may be a good idea to talk to your local colleagues about the water and their recommendations for treatment. Keep in mind that what may be safe on a local stomach

may not be on yours. As your stomach becomes more adjusted, you may choose to sample local fruit drinks and street food. Again, your colleagues can help you with your choices. Of course there are always risks involved and health problems that may manifest themselves much later. But you don't live in a bubble, and you will have to gauge how adventurous you wish to be. When buying bottled water, check the seal and the taste. If you suspect that the bottle has been tampered with, don't drink it!

Besides bottled water, there are many methods to make it safe to drink. Do your research (consider methods such as boiling, filtering and treating), as empty water bottles can quickly accumulate in local landfills.

How do I refuse food or drink without offending my hosts?

You will likely be invited to many people's homes and offered food and drink. If you are offered tea, coffee or bottled pop, chances are it is safe to drink. Use your judgment for fruit juices, food, milk, water, and drinks with ice. Don't be afraid to respectfully decline an offer on the basis that your stomach is still getting used to the local fare.

What precautions do I need to take for malaria?

Since malaria is an important health concern facing travelers and remains a serious public health issue for most tropical countries, it is important that you have some basic information about it. The world malaria situation is constantly changing, so it is important that you get up to-date information on the region you will be visiting. See Health Resource Section (or see Brigham and Women's Hospital information on malaria at

<http://healthgate.partners.org/browsing/Content.asp?fileName=14588.xml&title=Malaria:%20Beware%20the%20Mosquito>

Are there any special considerations for women for health and travel?

Some specific health considerations might be: Weight fluctuations, menstrual irregularities, pregnancy, yeast infections. Her Own Way – Advice for the Woman Traveler (http://www.voyage.gc.ca/main/pubs/PDF/her_own_way-en.pdf) may be a valuable resource to help you further explore these and other travel considerations.

What do I need to know about HIV/AIDS before leaving?

Do your research, as HIV/AIDS is an important issue worldwide. You may find the pervasiveness of the virus and the way in which it is approached to be different. Remember to act responsibly because the ways you would avoid infection in Canada apply elsewhere. As access to medical facilities may be limited while overseas, get tested and know your status before you leave, and when you return. For more in-depth discussion HIV/AIDS and the issues surrounding it, here are some starting points:

- Singhal, A. & Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Combating AIDS: Communication strategies in action*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Endless websites on the internet (such as the US department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/HIV/default.htm>)

- Lewis, S. (2006). *Race against time: Searching for hope in AIDS-ravaged Africa*, 2nd ed. CBC Massey Lectures. Toronto, ON: Anansi Press.

How do I maintain my sense of wellbeing while abroad?

Before leaving for overseas, it is important to think about your support systems both in Canada and while abroad. When thinking about your support structures, do not limit yourself to your relationships. What are the important things in your day-to-day life that keep you sane and well? Consider some of the following components (adapted from Cumyn, 2001):

- Hobbies
- Sleeping/exercise/eating patterns
- Prayer
- Work
- Entertainment
- Music
- Writing/Journaling
- Reading

How do I cultivate healthy boundaries throughout my placement?

Boundaries help differentiate you from something or someone else and can help you maintain healthy relationships by showing where you begin and end. Establishing reasonable limits enables you to remain centered, energized, and able to be productive. Developing healthy habits and helpful routines is an ongoing process and will come in handy when challenges come your way. Take it slow, but steady. Remember there are no instant fix-its. Baird (1996) explains that "an internship should stretch your knowledge and skills but you must not extend beyond your abilities to a point that would be dangerous for yourself or your clients" (p. 8). Consider the following questions:

- What are my expectations/assumptions about my experience? Do they make sense? Can I achieve my goals or I am setting myself up for failure?
- What are my needs?
- What do I want to get out of this? Personally? Professionally?
- What challenges do I anticipate encountering?
- What can I do to prepare for these challenges? What strengths do I have as a person/professional to get me through these challenges?
- What weaknesses do I want to acknowledge/work on before going?
- What strengths can I bring to my work there?
- What skills, or "CYC tools," will it be necessary to bring?
- What kind of hours will I be working?
- Will you be living on site? If so, how will that impact your personal space, self care, etc.? If not, will you be able to live nearby?
- How will you get to and from your placement?
- What are your boundaries around time commitment or intensity of your placement? For instance, you may decide that going to a new country is enough of a new and challenging

experience, without throwing yourself into an orphanage with hundreds of AIDS infected children. Or, you may decide, that this is exactly the type of challenge that you want for your learning.

What should I know about traumatic stress while overseas?

Working overseas can be very stressful at times. Being able to identify the source of stress can assist you in coping. Learning more about the effects of stress can help you protect yourself against them. For more insights on coping with stress, refer to the Action Without Borders website at

http://www.psychosocial.org/psychosocial/resources/field_aid_stressmgt.html

Here is a synopsis of different types of stress (adapted from Self-Study Unit Module 1: Understanding and Coping with Traumatic Stress by Lisa Mckay):

Critical incident stress or acute stress

Critical incidents are marked by serious threat or harm. Examples include being assaulted, being in situations where many people are dying, being within range of gunfire, or experiencing car accidents, bombings or sexual assault.

Vicarious or secondary trauma

These trauma reactions can occur in response to witnessing or hearing about traumatic events that have happened to others. In these cases, other people are the victims, and you see them undergoing suffering.

Cumulative stress

Cumulative stress reactions are more gradual and are often related to feeling overwhelmed by unmet needs. These feelings can be triggered by a chaotic work environment, communication difficulties or inadequate preparation or training.

How do I process what I'm experiencing and share that with others?

Bring a book to write in. Scribbling down your thoughts can really help you process everything that is going on around you, and helps you understand things you couldn't quite define in thoughts. Writing is also good to look back on throughout the experience, especially when you're home sick, it can remind you of the things you really enjoyed when you first arrived.

-- Canadian Geography student after a one-year language exchange in China

Writing can help you process your experiences and document the challenges and the growth and changes you have undergone. Writing can take several forms such as: letters to friends and family, journaling, travel blogs or poetry. Include detailed descriptions of sights, smells, sounds, tastes and touch. The Headington Institute page provides a list of guided questions to assist you in writing about your experiences overseas. Here is a

sample (adapted from "Dear Diary": Guided Journaling for Humanitarian Workers, Headington Institute, n.d.):

- What faces and stories of people have you met that have stuck with you?
- What are two ideas or experiences you want to share with family and/or friends back home?
- Where, or in who, did you see hope?
- What did you learn about yourself?

RE-ENTRY: UNPACKING YOUR BAGS AND OTHER STUFF

What is re-entry shock?

The hardest thing, I think, was coming home. That was when I really experienced culture shock, and found that most people didn't really want to hear about what I'd experienced. They wanted short, simple answers and vignettes, when the experience I'd had changed who I was from the inside. Travel does that. It's the best school you'll ever find.

-- Canadian volunteer after living in Nicaragua for 6 months

As Jean-Marc Hachey (1995) warns us, "Re-entry shock is not to be taken lightly" (p. 95). Even when we make all the necessary preparations for adjusting to being in Canada again, there is still no way we can predict this experience or prevent the challenges we will face. Nor should we be able to. The challenges we face when returning home can be very enlightening for us, and for those around us. Give yourself the space and time to explore these challenges and, above all, take care of yourself through the process.

What should I remember to do before leaving my host country?

As in any practicum, closure is key to effective and ethical therapeutic, personal and professional relationships. In the case of international practica, proper closure can be even more important because you are likely leaving the country. Here are some thoughts on making effective closure happen:

- Make arrangements well ahead of time for proper closure with clients, community members, friends, host families, etc. so that you have sufficient time to say goodbye and so that no one, including you, is surprised by you leaving.
- What type of contact are you willing to maintain? Be careful of the promises you make, knowing that it will be easy to get caught up in your busy Canadian life again upon return. What will it mean if you make promises to send things or money from Canada?
- Consider asking for a letter of recommendation, as this will be a valuable reference and future employers may not want to make international phone calls to get a reference from your supervisor.
- Each culture has its own rules and customs around how closure is executed. It is important to find out about these and follow them. Your effort will be appreciated and remembered. (La Brack, 2003).

How do I prepare myself to return home to Canada?

When you are abroad, keep your re-entry process in mind, especially as your return date approaches. What do you want to get out of your return home? What are your expectations of the place, the people (especially your friends and family), the culture, yourself? How will you describe and share your experiences? How are you going to stay connected to your “new home”? What will you need when you return home? How will you meet these needs?

The experience of coming home may be the most important part of your experience abroad. This is when you begin to process and integrate your new context and experience with your seemingly familiar context and experience. It can be challenging, depressing, lonely, frustrating, and overwhelming, but it can also be exciting, eye opening, and very valuable for your personal and professional learning and growth. In the words of Bernard from the television show, ‘Northern Exposure’, upon returning to Alaska from Africa:

In a sense, it is the coming back, the return, which gives meaning to the going forth. We really don't know where we've been until we come back to where we were – only where we were may not be as it was because of who we've become, which, after all, is why we left.

Two very important things to keep in mind during this time are:

- The experience of coming home can be a long one; so don't expect it to be over when your jet lag leaves. It will probably take months, or for some, even years, for you to feel settled again.
- Everybody's process of re-entry is different. There are models of re-entry adjustment, which can be valuable, but just like culture-shock models, they may not apply for everyone's experience, and you may experience the stages in an entirely different order.

What follows is an adapted list compiled by Dr. Bruce La Brack at the University of the Pacific of tips for this preparing for re-entry process, and also for the re-entry process itself:

- *Prepare for the adjustment process.*
Know how returning home is both different and similar from going abroad.
- *Allow yourself time.*
Give yourself permission to relax so that you can fully process of your new experiences.
- *Understand that the familiar will seem different.*
With new perspectives, what was once familiar may now seem unfamiliar.
- *Reserve judgments.*
Resist the urge to hasty judgments about behaviours once back home. Be assured

that mood swings are common throughout this process.

- *Respond thoughtfully and slowly.*
Think about how you will respond to people's questions about your experience.
- *Cultivating sensitivity.*
Be aware that as much as you may want to share your experiences from while you were away, people from home will have stories to share as well.
- *Beware of comparisons.*
As difficult as it may appear to be, try not to be too critical of your home culture and avoid glorifying the culture you have just experienced.
- *Remain flexible.*
Try to maintain old relationships while making room for new ones and redefinitions of old ones.
- *Seek support networks.*
Get involved in your local community, there are many people who have gone through their own re-entry experiences would be willing to support you through yours.

What are some common re-entry challenges?

There are lots of reasons to look forward to going home but consider some of the following challenges (Adapted from La Brack, 2003). Keep in mind that that these challenges do not occur in a prescriptive order, nor does everyone encounter the same challenges. For a more in-depth discussion of these challenges, refer to La Brack, 2003, <http://www.odu.edu/ao/oip/studyabroad/studentsreturninglongprogsreentry.shtml>).

- Boredom
- “No One Wants to Hear”
- You Can't Explain
- Reverse “Homesickness”
- Relationships Have Changed
- People See “Wrong” Changes
- People Misunderstand
- Feelings of Alienation
- Inability to Apply New Knowledge and Skills
- Loss/Compartmentalization of Experience

How have others adjusted to life back in Canada?

Coping with the challenges of adjusting to being home, is really an individual process; what you need to do for yourself through this process depends on you, on your experiences, and your context. What follows are some personal testimonies that may help you.

“It’s your own amazing experience.”

Coming back this time was a lot different. It was my fifth time coming home after a long trip, so even my friends were used to it, and I just melted back into my old groove pretty well like nothing had changed. Of course it had though. And I spent many long nights talking to all the friends I left, on MSN and Skype-Out. The internet is an easy way to keep in touch these days.

It can be hard to come home though. Especially when you realize that other people don't care as much as you do about your experience, except maybe parents and grandparents. You've got to remember though that the trip and the experience wasn't for them, and it wasn't to be able to tell wild stories about crazy jungle voyages, the trip was about you and the reasons you had for going. It's your own amazing experience that you get to keep, and you'll never be able to replicate it exactly like it was, in story or in reality, so treasure it, and you'll always be able to go back to those memories and re-live the experience. That's what you get to keep from a trip.

-- Canadian Geography Student, after a year in China

“Is there life after jet lag?”

Trying to figure out what time zone I'm in, when I should sleep, or when I should drink coffee proves futile and my thoroughly air-conditioned head and stiff body turn into zombie mode just waiting for the opportunity to enter the real world again. And when you do, you are faced with the reality that there is a reality and that functioning in it is far more complex than the air-conditioned, encapsulated cocoon life. And yet still all you can manage is attempts at teaching your body the time of day and trying to sleep and stay awake and force food down your still-dry throat, trying to hide your pale complexion and bloodshot eyes from the strange people around you who curiously seem to be functioning in this so-called real world and seem to know you and wish you to join them in their world. And yet I don't even know who I am anymore, let alone these people who I knew a lifetime ago...but what seems like only a few days ago...

-- CYC Student, day of arrival home from 3-month practicum in Malawi

“The end of a dream...now what?”

I have done one one-year exchange and I am now on my second one. My first one was to Spain when I was sixteen, and by far the most difficult part for me was culture shock on coming home. When I got to Spain I experienced culture shock, but I was happy because I was living my dream of learning a second language and living in a foreign country. Then when I got home I was no longer living my dream. I had accomplished what I wanted to do and now I was lost and without direction. I had grown and changed but I didn't know how to share my experiences with my family and friends and I didn't have the energy to re-acclimatize myself. It took me almost the same amount to get through my depression as I had spent on my exchange.

Despite spending a year fighting depression after coming home, I feel like I am a better person for having had the experience and here I am doing it again. I would

encourage most people to spend some time working in another country, but I would warn anyone that it can be very hard at times.

-- Spanish Student, after 1 year high-school exchange in Spain, currently on 8 month University exchange in Mexico

“You’ll be like a living movie to them.”

To share your trip with friends, it can be really nice to organize a slideshow. Set a date in the future and tell everyone about it, friends, family, family friends, etc. Do it once and do it big, lay it all out, go a little bit too long, tell all your funniest stories, and re-create the noises and describe the smells. You'll be like a living movie to them, and they'll love it. And maybe there will be a bunch of people who really wanted to make it but couldn't and heard that it was great, and really really want you to do it again... And then you can if you want. But yeah, an organized slide show is a great way to share your story with an interested audience. They'll come because it's an event, and it's their only chance to hear about your whole experience.

-- Geography Student, after 1-year exchange in China

How do I put my experience into words?

One of the most common frustrations people returning from abroad report is not being able to put their experience into words, and yet there are so many people to explain it to! Here are some suggestions for sharing your experiences (Adapted in part from the University of Puget Sound’s International Programs, Strategies for Successful Re-entry):

- Put your pictures in a photo album right away and label them; the longer you wait, the more you'll forget where and when pictures were taken.
- Sharing your pictures can be a good way to help the stories start to come out.
- Cook a typical dish from your host country and host a dinner party for friends/family.
- Exchange stories with friends who have also been abroad and look at their photos too. It is probably less work to help these people understand your experience.
- Share with family and friends feelings you had while living abroad.
- When people ask “So, how was Africa?” or other equally impossibly large questions, try answering with how you are *now* in relation to your experience, and this may lead you back to where you were then. It can be challenging to summarize experiences that you are still processing and sorting out in your head.
- Publish some of your writing from your experience in the local or campus newspaper.

How do I stay connected to my experience, to the people and places I left behind?

Sometimes after returning home, where everyone is living in an entirely different reality, keeping your experiences abroad alive can be difficult. Some people find it valuable to find ways to stay connected to the people, the culture, or the work they were doing while abroad. Here are some suggestions of things other students have found helpful:

- Send pictures of your Canadian home to your friends abroad.
- Join community or campus groups related to the nationality or culture of your host-country.
- Hold a fundraiser for the agency where you were working, or other projects you know are happening there. This can be a valuable way to feel like you are still contributing.
- Find out about agencies in your community that have connections to your host-country (i.e. fundraising projects that are already happening).
- Seek out people in your community who have been there, or are from there.
- Serve as an advisor for other people who want to go to the same country.
- Visit local grocery stores or restaurants from your host-country.

How can I continue to make a difference?

In being in Malawi I tried hard to move away from the constant cloud of guilt that haunted me when I saw the stark contrast between opportunities and life in Canada and those in Malawi. But working from a place of guilt helps no one. I have learned, instead, to accept my position in the world and to use it to my advantage to do something about the issues the world faces. By giving up my Canadian citizenship and the \$3000 to my name, I might help one person. But by living consciously and minimally within my position, I hold the power to help many more people. My experience in Malawi has inspired me to do just this and has laid the first stepping stones toward future endeavors in community development, international collaboration, and positive globalization, both within my own community and worldwide

-- CYC Student, after 3-month practicum in Malawi

For some people, coming home to Canada after working in a developing country, can make you feel gluttonous in your lifestyle and as if you are no longer making a difference in the world. There are many ways to continue to make a difference on an international scale without having to hop on the next plane back. In fact, you may discover that there is much to be done at home.

The University of Puget Sound's International Programs, Strategies for Successful Re-entry List suggests the following ideas:

- Find ways to meet international people or others with international experience:
 - Become a host to an exchange student
 - Join an international club or intercultural group
 - Participate in another international program in a different part of the world
 - Volunteer to teach English as a Second Language

Additionally you might consider:

- Volunteer with international organizations, or with international students, refugees or immigrants in your community.

- Forming or joining solidarity groups to address the ways that actions in Canada affect the experiences of people in other countries.
- Many employers value people who have international work experience. Think about jobs where you might be able to use your experience
 - i.e. Non-governmental organizations, University Study Abroad offices (or equivalent), refugee or immigrant settlement agencies, international organizations (i.e. UNICEF, Amnesty International, etc.), tourism, any job that requires cross-cultural skills.
 - Think about what skills you have gained from your experience abroad and how these could be put to good use in your work with children, youth, families and communities.

What are some local resources to help me stay connected to the international scene?

There are many resources, and even workshops, to help you network with others interested in international development work or even help you translate your international experience into future employment.

- UVic International and Exchange Student Services <http://www.iess.uvic.ca>
- UVic Office of International Affairs <http://www.oia.uvic.ca>
- UVic Counseling Services <http://www.coun.uvic.ca/>
- UVic Peer Helping
- UVic Career Services <http://careerservices.uvic.ca/>
- University of Puget Sound International Programs. Returning Study Abroad Students. <http://www.ups.edu/x11897.xml>
- Dr. Bruce La Brack's What's up with culture? Online Cultural Training Resource for Study Abroad. <http://www.pacific.edu/sis/culture/>.
(You can skip to Module 3, which is the section on Re-entry.)

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For resources on a specific topic, refer to those listed under each topic.

Websites:

- Headington Institute- site that offers psychological and spiritual support for humanitarian workers <http://www.headington-institute.org/>
- Psychosocial.org: Action without borders: lots of good online resources <http://www.psychosocial.org/>
- Dr. Bruce La Brack's What's up with culture? Online Cultural Training Resource for Study Abroad. <http://www.pacific.edu/sis/culture/>.

Comprehensive, interactive cross-cultural resource for students going abroad and returning from abroad.

- Centre for intercultural learning (Department of Canadian Foreign Affairs: some interesting links to pre-departure preparation. <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/cfsi-icse/cil-cai/home-en.asp>

Movies:

Beyond Borders

The Constant Gardener

Syrana

Human Trafficking

Hotel Rwanda

Three Needles

Born Into Brothels

Baraka

Rabbit-Proof Fence

City of God

Novels:

Zeppa, J. (1999). *Beyond the sky and the earth: A journey into Bhutan*. Toronto, ON: Doubleday Canada.

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Bailur, S. & Rana, H. (Eds.). (2003). Introduction. *Volunteer tales: Experiences of working abroad*. Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press.

Collins, J., DeZerega, S., & Heckscher, Z. (2002). *How to live your dream of volunteering overseas*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.

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Check out GapYear.com's Travel Books (<http://www.gapyear.com/books/>) for a list of more books on travel and living and working abroad.