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BUFFS ABROAD

OFFICE OF STUDY ABROAD

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CULTURE SHOCK

Have you ever been to a place different than your own and felt that you didn't quite belong? Have you ever noticed the way people act or speak made you feel confused? Have you experienced troubles adapting to a new way of life? If so, you may have experienced culture shock.

Associate Professor of Education, Dr. Yvette Castillo says culture shock is a reflective process. "It can be expressed as feelings of confusion or uncertainty, through physical symptoms of distress such as sleep difficulties, heart palpitations, headaches, and upset stomach, or via emotional referenced difficulties, such as irritability, homesickness, and loss of identity." Castillo, whose past research has focused on the development of multicultural competencies in counseling students, explains that exposure to new experiences, environments, and emotions can activate the neuroplasticity of the human brain. "Due to the different experiences with climate, food, language, customs, and social arenas, the brain receives messages that produce stress hormones, activating its need for and ability to adapt to the nuances of a new environment." Castillo adds, "your brain, in response to experiencing a new culture, then, deletes the neural pathways and connections that are no longer useful or necessary while strengthening the synapses necessary for adaptation. With repeated exposure, practice and attention, the brain actively rewires itself."

Culture shock is often experienced in stages. First, in the honeymoon stage, the person is filled with excitement, optimism, and memories of their home life. These serve as a protective barrier to their identity and enthusiastic exploration. The next stage is disintegration or frustration, which illuminates cultural differences; this stage serves as an antagonist and brings upon confusion and longing for familiarity and homebound support. What appear to be small gestures, such as arranging



for transportation, ordering food, or tending to basic needs often become triggers. The third stage of reintegration or adjustment surfaces when travelers report being more familiar with the new environment; the people, food, and languages of the surrounding spaces no longer perpetuate fear or loss of interest. Finally, when a person is able to navigate and thrive in their new environment, the acceptance stage is reached. It is not a natural flow; sometimes one can shift in and out of any given stage. At the end, despite the discomfort, the experience itself is reflected upon with much positivity. Typically, occurrences akin to the ones mentioned yield amazing experiences that last a lifetime.

Culture shock is not always experienced the same way, or at the same time. Dr. Channel Rodriguez, Assistant Professor of Education, who has been a faculty-leader in several study abroad programs, explains that "a lot of it has to do with personality and life experiences. A seasoned traveler who actively interacts with the culture they are exploring is less likely to experience culture shock, while a new traveler who hasn't ventured much outside their hometown is going to have to deal with a lot more culture shock."

CULTURE SHOCK (cont.)

Some indicators of culture shock that Rodriguez has observed among students include:

- **Body Language:** Are the arms crossed? Shoulders hunched? Head down?
- **Eating Habits:** Is the student trying new foods? Pushing food around the plate? Constantly saying they are hungry?
- **Anxiety or Fear:** Does the student comment on how nervous they are? How they don't want to try things? Are they always asking "What If?" questions.
- **Homesickness:** Does the student mention how much they miss their parents, siblings, or children? Do they talk about how guilty they feel for leaving them?
- **Irritation:** Does the student complain about having to do things on the itinerary? Are they not getting along with others in our travel group? Are they irritated when things don't go as planned?
- **Impatience:** Is the student constantly commenting on things taking too long? On the transportation being late?
- **Isolation:** Does the student constantly want to leave the group? Stay in the room for meals? Not participate in group activities?

Castillo and Rodriguez emphasize the importance of talking about culture shock. Castillo explains that "assimilating to a new culture with levels of difficulty is completely normal, especially when there is a loss of social support and familiarity while exploring a new environment. Becoming aware and expressing symptomology associated with culture shock is nothing to be ashamed about, as doing so allows one to gain the support required for the success and of enjoyment of the experience itself." Rodriguez adds that "culture shock is a normal part of experiencing a new culture. The more people talk about it, the easier it will be to get to the stage of adaptation, where the traveler feels a high sense of comfort in the new culture."

Recommendations for students experiencing culture shock

- Research your host country: their history, politics, currency, norms, sense of time orientation, etiquette, language, and educational systems.
- Speak to others who have been abroad, and especially to the country you plan to visit, as it decreases anxiety and creates a more logical sense of expectations upon arrival.
- Find activities that you enjoy, along with friendly people in the environment to help soften the symptoms felt from new experiences.
- Understand normative styles of dress, food, and verbal and non-verbal expressions; it will help you adapt and adjust in a more positive light.
- Keep a journal and share the excitement of the immersive experience.
- Remind yourself what will be gained from the opportunity, despite the temporary discomfort; this is always a positive approach when preparing to travel abroad.

Recommendations for faculty leaders to help students prepare for culture shock

- Preparation is key. Informational sessions that tell the students what to expect will help prepare them.
- Model taking cultural risks. Speak a language you are unfamiliar with in front of your students. Try the food first. Partake in all of the activities on the itinerary.
- Share your own experiences with culture shock.
- Provide opportunities to immediately reflect on the experiences.
- Acknowledge that culture shock can happen, and that it manifests in a variety of forms.

If you need someone to talk to,
contact WTAMU Counseling
Services at 806.651.2340 or visit
the Student Success Center 116.

THE TRUE COLORS OF LONDON'S TREASURES

By Jessica Williams

My first day in London, I was overwhelmed with the sheer number of people, but soon I realized more people equals more personalities and more coloration. There are many color spectrums to look at when it comes to London. The emotional spectrum of London is also reflected in the colors by the extensive amount of artworks, the unique career, the festivals, and everyday life. In the cliché words of Frederick R. Barnard "one look is worth a thousand words." I choose to convey this with photos from my time there.



Perhaps one of the most iconic features of London was the London Eye. This photo shows the uniqueness of the magnificent Ferris wheel. Then, between the cords of the wheel, it shows the gray scale colors of the cloudy sky highlighting the constant gloomy skies of London.

By the London Eye, there is a year-round festival, and in the middle, one of the most historic carnival pieces: a carousel. This shows aspects of the playfulness of London. The festival itself is full of color and full of colorful people, all surrounding the carousel in the middle. The carousel is a combination of colorfulness and playfulness and how it brings people together to enjoy their colorful nature.





The young boy in the water shows the colorfulness of youth, and gives an insight into the boy's playful personality by his choice of colorful jacket. Finally, there is his playful nature by kicking the water of the fountain and finding fun in an unlikely place.

In Oxford, the majority of college students and even professors ride their bikes to school. This bike bell on an Oxford street shows the colorfulness of everyday life in London. The student's personality is shown by this bike much like we put stickers on our cars. The mural on their bell is a look into their life and how they choose to keep spirits up. The owner's personality shines through as vibrant and outgoing.



Lastly, the mime; while she is not colorful in the traditional sense, she shows the uniqueness of London's traditions. She was painted gold and dressed in 1920s fashion. This was a unique spin on the traditional mime done in order to incorporate her own style, fashion, and personality.



It was rather hard for me to narrow down my pictures because of the massive amount of uniqueness and colors of London, which in a way shows how vast the personalities of London are, not only in the everyday life of everyday people, but in artwork.

1. Tell us about your upcoming study abroad program to Western Europe (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland).

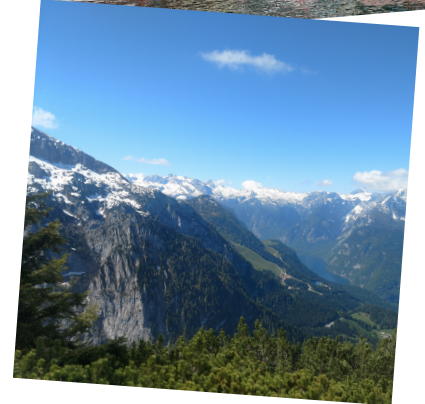
This is a trip that the College of Business has been operating since 2014 that I was fortunate enough to be a part of in 2017. On that trip, with Dr. Anne Macy and Mrs. Betty Stocker, we had an amazing time with the students. While there was a smaller group of 15 students, this was many of our students' first time abroad, or specifically in these European countries. Some of the more interesting educational components from this trip, that I hope to replicate on the upcoming trip, are all the financial sector stops while in Frankfurt, which include the Frankfurt Stock Exchange, the German Central bank, and the Money Museum. Given that Frankfurt is Germany and the EU's financial hub, this is an amazing opportunity for students to see firsthand how this massive financial center operates. Outside of this, my favorite things are generally all the museums and other cultural components that can provide so much more context to their knowledge of an area and its history. I have a couple new things planned, and I am excited to finally unveil them to the students when we have our final itinerary ready.

2. What motivated you to take students on study abroad programs?

The two biggest motivators for me are providing students transformative learning opportunities and access that wouldn't normally be there. Being able to see students learn in a different context and see excitement through their eyes is quite an amazing thing. There is such an impactful event that happens when you can actually see a student enjoy themselves and open their mind up to a new concept or a new experience. It can be as simple as seeing their face as they take their first step off a plane into another country for the first time or trying food outside of their comfort zone that they thoroughly enjoy. It is hard to describe, but the feeling is quite remarkable. For many reasons, this opportunity is only available to some students in this context, be it due to finances, comfort level, or just timing and them being able to be a part of study abroad. This is truly a transformational experience since, without it, they may never have this opportunity again. I know when I was a student, many factors would have prevented me from participating in something like this. This is why the support from the Paul and Virginia Engler College of Business, The David and Sherry Schaeffer Foundation, and the Paul F. and Virginia Engler Foundation are so important to our current and future study abroad efforts.

3. What is something students can learn studying abroad that they do not get in your classroom?

To make knowledge stick, context and experience are important, and this is where study abroad can excel. If I am in a classroom and say something interesting about German businesses, which operate in a major hub like Frankfurt, information could easily be forgotten. Because these businesses operate mostly



From top to bottom: 1) Dr. King;
2) Houses along the waterway in Copenhagen, Denmark; 3) Overlooking Lake Königssee, in Berchtesgaden, Germany; 4) Group of students near Yuyuan Garden, Shanghai, China. Photos provided by Dr. King

in cash and are near to so many countries, they need to have a good conversion calculator and a medley of different currencies on hand. However, it is different when we are sitting at a restaurant and we can actually see a waiter provide change in different currencies when someone forgets euros and only has dollars, or would like their change in kronen because they will be going back home after the trip and don't want euros or dollars. These little interactions lead to memorable experiences that really stick in a student's mind.

4. What challenges can faculty encounter when taking students on study abroad programs?

Changes to the program and individual personalities are things that always will need to be managed and monitored while on a study abroad. For the trip itself, there are always things that need to change, and sometimes it is at the last minute. On the last trip to Scandinavia, we had a time slot that changed at least a dozen times from the planning stage until the day of. We finally just assumed it wasn't going to work out, then we had a person come through at around noon for a 4:30 meeting time. It was quite an interesting presentation and the student's loved it, but it was pretty stressful having something planned, then changed so many times so close to the deadline. As for the personalities, this is a long time with people in tight spaces, so we constantly need to be watching for potential clashes and providing enough time away where students can stretch their legs in smaller groups to have a bit of a break from the whole group. There is some relief being able to walk around a park with one or two others compared to being in a group of 25 constantly.



*Dr. King with group of students in Frankfurt, Germany.
Photo courtesy of Dr. King*

5. What are some of your favorite moments with students while abroad?

It sounds cliché, but there are so many great moments from the trips that we have been on. From meeting up with a former WT Student in Zurich and taking an extensive, mountainous hike that none of us were prepared for, to hanging out with a random group of Germans in a Chinese bar, there is always something interesting to do while abroad. Also, one of my favorite things from our programs is to capture student's stories, moments, and memories in Vlogs. By doing this, we allow students to create a diary of events and learning opportunities so they can revisit them later.

6. What are three items you never leave at home when traveling?

I like to think of myself as a minimalist: a universal charger, my cell phone (mostly for photos and navigation), and a passport. Everything else is negligible. I confirmed this when the airlines lost our bags in China and all we had for the first four days were the clothes we had on and anything we had on us at the time.

7. What are some of your favorite places ever visited?

Each place is unique in its own way, but I think the most interesting location was China simply because it was such a different culture from what I am accustomed to. Beijing and Shanghai are both somewhat "westernized", but there is still enough of a difference to make the trips extremely enjoyable.

8. What are some places you look forward to visiting in the future?

I am always up for travel, so I would go anywhere I am able. I think the UK and surrounding areas are the next probable locations simply due to their ease of entry and exit. Something I would love to do is to have a trip to Latin America and one to the Middle East. Both are areas that have such rich histories, but often can be seen in a negative light for one reason or another. I could only imagine how much of an impact on students a trip to Jerusalem or Egypt has to offer. This would obviously take a lot of planning, but it would be epic.

Dr. Robert King is Assistant Professor of Marketing & Wilder Professor of Business in the PVECOB.

The original interview was edited for length and clarity.

Greetings from Abroad!



Saludos desde España!

My last semester as a WTAMU student is looking a little different than normal, but I wouldn't change a thing!

Leaving what we know is always bittersweet. It definitely felt weird not being on our regular campus for the first day of class, (or wearing maroon on Wednesday) and of course there were adjustments to be made, but Málaga has become a home away from home. It's rather difficult to put into words the feelings I get when seeing new things, going new places, and experiencing new cultures. It's an amazing feeling and is worth exploring. I encourage you all to seek and go discover the wonders of studying abroad!

Be comfortable being uncomfortable.

El mundo te espera! Go buffs!
Claudia Jantes - Malaga, Spain

Hey Buffs! I've been studying abroad in Florence Italy for the past two months, and I have about two more to go. This experience has been amazing; it has really made me step out of my comfort zone and completely adjust to a new culture. Everyday I walk the same steps as Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci, and so many more amazing artists. If anyone is thinking about studying abroad whether it's for a week, a month, or a year I would say do it. Although it has been inspiring to be in such a historic place, I can't wait to be back in the halls of West Texas A&M.

See y'all in January!

Valerie Santos - Florence, Italy





International Education Week



NOVEMBER 18 » 21

A week of events dedicated to celebrating, discovering, and learning about study abroad experiences and opportunities.

IEW Schedule of events

Nov 18- 21 “Buffs Abroad” 2019 Photo Gallery

Exhibit of photos from study abroad participants in the Cornette Library Gallery. Photos will be in display for the entire week.

Nov 19 “We are one” panel: Diversity in study abroad

Learn about study abroad from diverse students who will share their unique experiences. JBK Senate, 12pm to 1pm.

Nov 20 Passport fair

Apply for a US passport here on campus! Bring your photo ID (original and copy), birth certificate (original and copy) and your checkbook. JBK Hallway, in front of the world map mural, 9am to 2pm.

Nov 21 Photo Contest reception

Join us to celebrate students who studied abroad in the past year and announce the winners of the photo contest. Reception will be held at the Cornette Library, 1pm to 2pm.