

2021



Inclusive Re-entry Program Design

Research and Course Content



CENTRE FOR
INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

00 Introduction

While study abroad can advance intercultural competencies, students often face difficulty articulating transferrable intercultural skills, and explaining to prospective employers how their international experience sets them apart.

This can be particularly challenging for students in underrepresented groups with unique experiences including, first-in-the-family, LGBTQ2S+, BIPOC, and those with disabilities. Thus, the development of an innovative re-entry program, that integrates post-experience reflection, will allow students to critically assess their mobility experience from a professional development and intercultural lens. In honing their skills, this program prepares students to succeed in a rapidly changing and increasingly international labour market.

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Careers and Skill Development

Affirming Their Academic and Career Goals: whether it is shifting their interests or confirming their passions, the student's time abroad was often viewed as an important experience in affirming their goals.

Enhanced Communication and Adaptability: were important for the students in order to respect the local culture, as well as, keeping them safe when navigating different social norms (e.g. disclosure of sexual orientation)

The Challenge of Communicating Hard and Soft Skills: while students could communicate their soft skills gained, they had difficulty expressing their value or application in terms of employability. Students who participated in work, volunteer, or research placements had an easier time articulating hard skills gained while abroad.

Identity

A Deeper Connection to Cultural Identity and Canadian Identity: several BIPOC students enjoyed learning more about their racial or cultural background. Students also reported a heightened sense of their Canadian identity.

Identity and Issues of Micro-aggressions, Harassment, and Stereotypes: female students reported safety concerns and one BIPOC student noted unwanted flirtation due to her gender and ethnicity. Members of the LGBTQ2S+ community expressed concerns about disclosing their sexual orientation or having their identity dismissed.

Overcoming Isolation, Seeking Connection and Community: members of underrepresented groups faced discrimination and isolation, and therefore, sought out individuals and communities with similar backgrounds.

Navigating White Privilege: some students reported being viewed in a higher regard based on their skin colour, which made them question their western privilege.

Transition Back to Canada

Conflicting Emotions: between the excitement to be reunited with family and friends, not wanting to leave the positive elements of their international experience, their need to come back due to a lack of money or homesickness, and the sense of loss and disconnect once back, students expressed a wide range of emotions during their re-entry experience.

Transition Period: many students had limited time to transition to the next phase of their life (e.g. work, school, or more travel), which left little time for reflection on their experience.

Re-entry Programming

Strong Student Desire for Re-entry Programming: to help navigate the conflicting emotions, readjustment period, and mental health concerns, students saw the importance of having a re-entry program available.

A Call for Connection, Check-Ins, and Support: students were looking for group connections and a peer community to share their experiences. They also expressed interest in counselling services, check-ins, and further administrative support.

Addressing Mental Health, Career Advising, and a Call for Flexible Programming: asynchronous, and extended access to re-entry supports is needed to allow students to access them when needed. Students were also looking for a variety of activities (e.g. written, group debrief, skills development, interactive, etc.) and the option to remain anonymous if desired.

02 Recommendations

Our research led us to the following three areas of recommendations:

1.0 - Implications for Re-entry Programming

2.0 Implications for Pre-departure

3.0 Implications for Promotion



02 1.0 Implications for Re-entry Programming

1.1 - Creating Inclusive Spaces During and After an Outbound Student Mobility Experience

Underrepresented groups of students actively sought out shared social circles and inclusive spaces both during and after their international experience. Students who identified as Black, Asian, and as members of the LGBTQ2S+ community, expressed an interest in connecting with people of similar backgrounds to feel a sense of belonging and help overcome issues of isolation.

With the increasing popularity of field schools, professors should be aware of group dynamics and intentionally create inclusive spaces so that students who may be underrepresented feel a greater sense of acceptance.

As students often reported that their family and friends could not relate to their experience, re-entry programming should create a space for students to connect and validate their experience amongst peers of common identity and cultural background.

1.2 - Providing a Reflective Space and a Range of Supports

The re-entry phase is often a transient period for students as they experience, in many cases, a deep sense of loss, disorientation, disconnect and struggle to readjust to life back home. Re-entry programming should be delivered in a flexible manner that helps students articulate their emotions and feelings, reflect on how their identity impacted their experience, and reflect on how their intercultural skills translate to the workplace. Student feedback also suggests that re-entry programming should include mental health support, credit transfer support, and check-in supports to allow students to talk about their experience.

1.3 - Communicating Transferrable Skills

While students could articulate examples of how they gained specific skills (such as communication and adaptability), they had difficulty expressing the value or application of their international experience. Students struggle to make the link with their experience and identifying the professional skills they acquired that will be crucial to their transition to the workforce. This suggests a beneficial focus area for re-entry supports to help students reflect on and identify the transferrable employability skills gained through their international learning experience.

02 2.0 Implications for Pre-departure

2.1 - Emphasizing the Interplay Between Identity and Safety

International offices should emphasize the interplay of identity and safety and how this is impacted within different cultural contexts. Students who participate in an outbound mobility program should have training that prepares them to reflect on their identity and anticipate how they may have to navigate issues of privilege, stereotypes, harassment, and micro-aggressions, for example.

Students should also be equipped with learning activities that help them to contemplate how they might navigate sensitive issues and what the implications may be in a different cultural context. Emphasis should also be placed on developing strong communication and adaptability skills to navigate both the local context and more complex social norms where implications for student safety are at play.

This research highlights the need to develop pre-departure training opportunities that offer tangible help and a community of support to deal with discriminatory issues such as sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, and feelings of isolation.

02 3.0 Implications for Promotion

3.1 - Promoting the Opportunity to Explore Identity

Promoting study abroad as a way of exploring identity may appeal to many students. For example, LGBTQ2S+ students may be drawn to programs that give them a comfortable opportunity to understand sexual identity in a different cultural context. Promoting programs with diverse student identities in mind could help traditionally underrepresented students see themselves participating in international programs.

03 Course Content

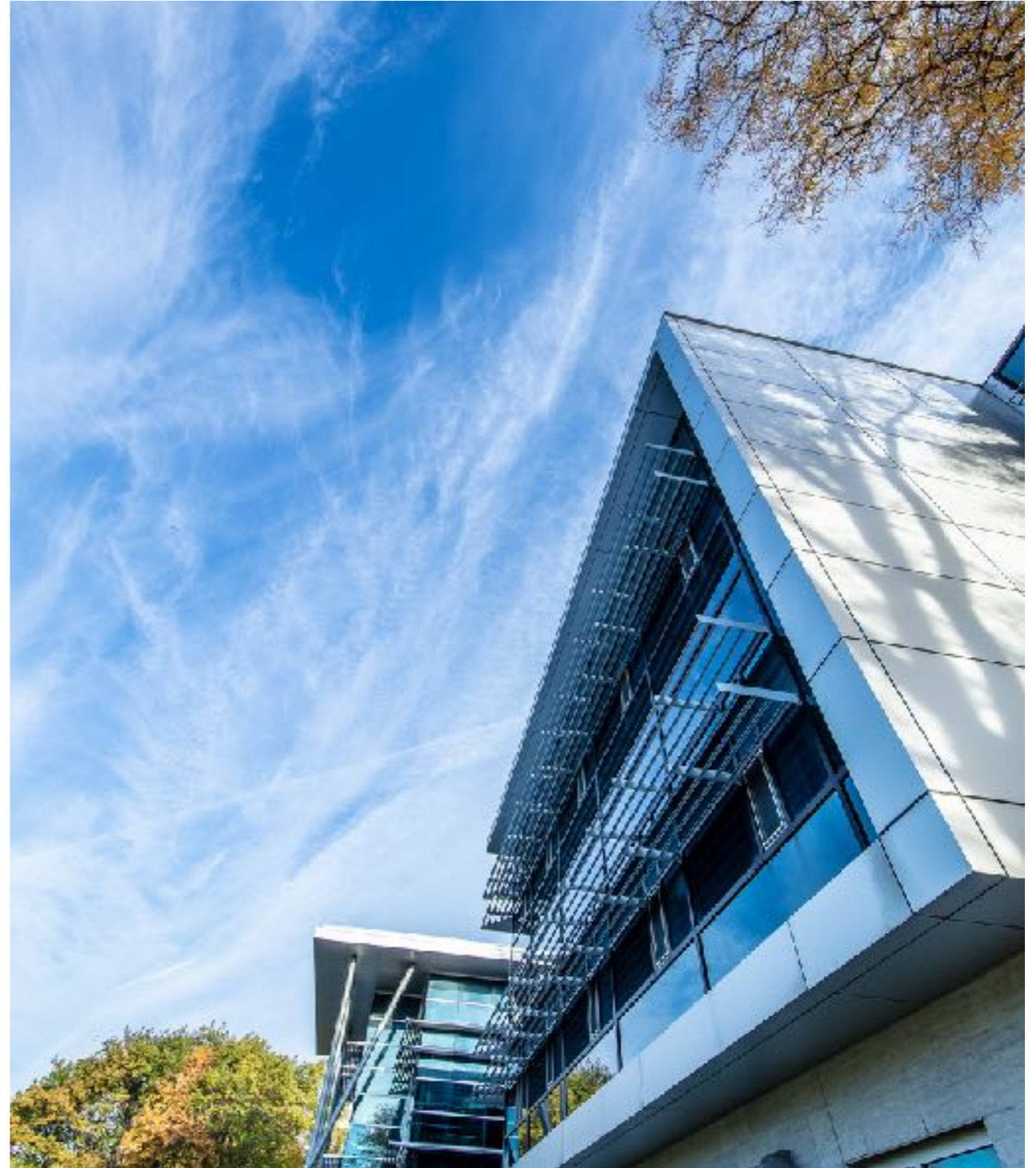
Our re-entry program is broken down into the following modules:

Module 1: Self-Awareness

Module 2: Intercultural Competence

Module 3: Employability

Final Assignment: Postcard Gallery



03 Module 1 - Self-Awareness

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, students should be able to:

1. Reflect on their international experience and analyze how this experience shaped their self-awareness (social/cultural identity, feelings and emotions, values and beliefs).
2. Review their health and wellness after returning from an international experience and identify supports and resources available to them.

Structure

Feelings and Emotions: students reflect on the range of emotions they may have felt over the re-entry period and recognize that other students who have returned from abroad may be going through a similar experience.

Values and Beliefs: the cultural iceberg was adapted to represent the re-entry experiences that students expect (above the surface, eg: unpacking, jet lag, re-establishing a routine, etc.) and those unexpected ones (under the surface, eg: loneliness, sense of accomplishment, etc.). Students then reflect on some of their own 'below the surface' changes and the impact this may have on their life moving forward.

Social/Cultural Identity: students are asked to reflect on the elements that are core to their identity while at home, and compare the elements that were core to their identity while abroad. Did they change, stay the same, or what did they notice about their identity abroad versus at home?

Health and Wellness: the health and wellness of students are important during this transition period, which can be a difficult time for many. Resources for students' physical and mental health and wellbeing are listed/linked for students' use.

03 Module 2 - Intercultural Competence

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, students should be able to:

1. Define culture and intercultural competence
2. Identify the attitudes, knowledge and skills required to develop your intercultural competency
3. Evaluate how their international experience may have helped broaden their cultural understanding and intercultural competence.
4. Articulate what they can do to enhance their cultural knowledge and intercultural competence.

Structure

Understanding Cultural and Intercultural Competence: using Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competency Development, students will explore the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they gained while abroad and how they can use these experiences to support their intercultural competency development.

What You Can Do to Enhance Your Intercultural Competence: the process of intercultural competence development is lifelong, therefore, students are provided with resources, volunteer opportunities, readings, and more to continue their IC development.

03 Module 3 - Employability

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, students should be able to:

1. Articulate and categorize the transferrable skills that you gained during your international experience.
2. Describe specific examples that illustrate the skills you developed abroad, which will be helpful in preparing resumes and preparing for employer interviews.

Structure

Identifying Transferrable Skills: a sample of transferrable skills are provided along with some examples of how those skills may have been acquired while abroad. Students are then asked to reflect on at least 5 of the transferrable skills they developed during their international experience.

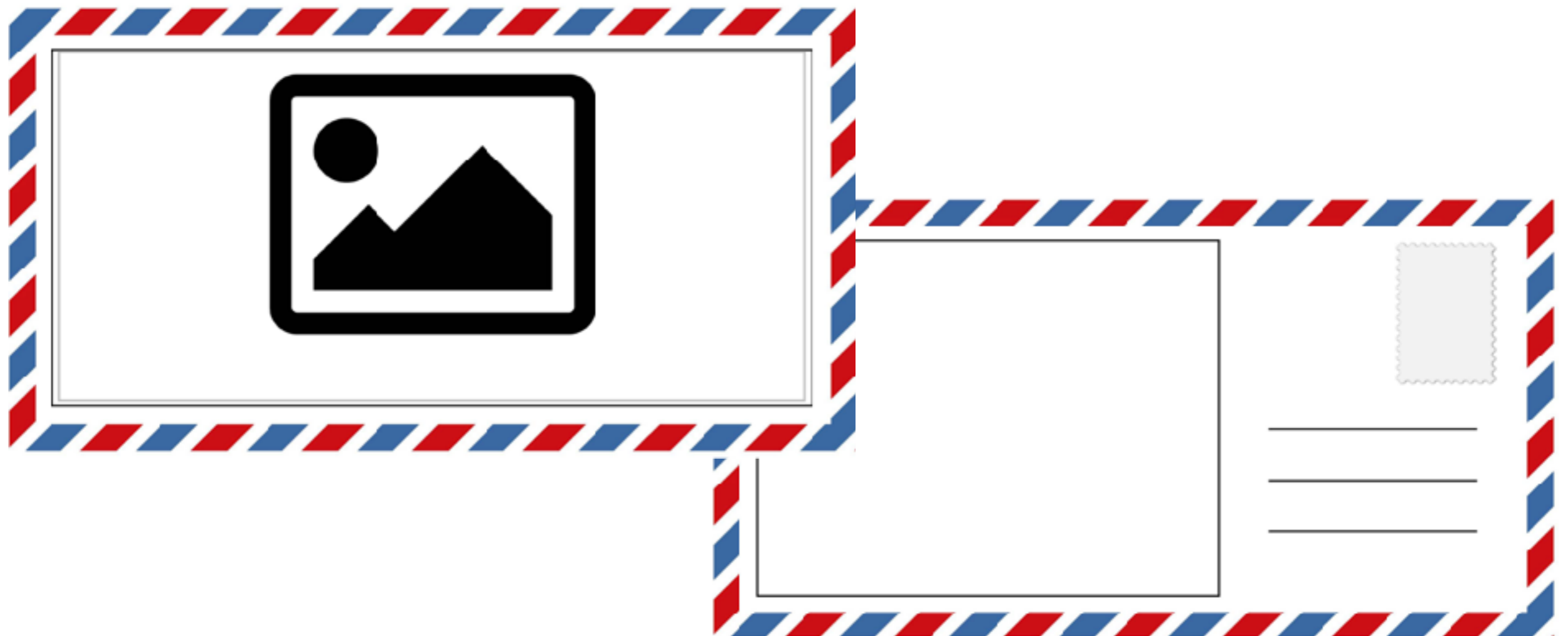
Communicating Your Transferrable Skills: students are asked to use the transferrable skills that they identified and the S.T.A.R acronym (situation, task, action, result) to practice and become familiar with answering behavioural interview questions.

03 Final Assignment - Postcard Gallery

Structure

Students will use a template postcard (shown below), where they insert a photo on the front and a brief description (50-150 words) on the back, to illustrate a learning moment while abroad.

Students will share their postcards through a discussion board with other students in the re-entry course, which will allow them to connect with and learn from each other's experiences. They will also have the ability to up-vote postcards that resonate with them, helping to create a sense of connection and shared experiences.



04 Contact Us

Contact Information

If you have any questions about the information presented here, please contact:

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