

Turning your frustrations into actions: Making a Difference

The following list includes recommended ways of transforming your experience into useful action. Do not consider this list comprehensive, but a suggestion for places to begin.

1. Stay in touch with your cohort in order to stay current, share information, and share experiences.
2. Continue to have conversations your host country: engage people on the issues you believe are important. (Caution: remember talk is cheap, **do** something also)
3. Write letters to the US government, the Congress and Senate, expressing your views and concerns. When appropriate, include as many signatures as possible. Do not underestimate the impact of a letter!
4. Stay in touch with some of the people you met during your study abroad—it is a true mark of friendship and a hallmark to bridge-building.
5. Have parties for family and friends when you return to the US. Use this time for show and tell presentations on what you've learned while overseas.
6. Volunteer to make presentations about what you learned to civic organizations, retirement centers and high schoolers in your hometown.
7. Start a website, blog and/or Facebook page to advance whatever cause you wish to promote: direct readers to web links, articles, books, etc.
8. Get permission to start an official club on your campus to address the causes that you would like to promote—if you are interested in a Study Abroad Club, let the Office of Education Abroad know!
9. Write about what you've learned in the editorials of your campus and home-town newspaper.
10. Continue to read more about your international interests and frustrations. If you can't afford to buy the books, check them out of the library, or request the library carry them.
11. Write your local and national media networks—TV, Radio, Newspapers—requesting that they increase the number of programs and documentaries on your host country. Offer suggestions on subject matter.
12. Volunteer to work with your school's Student Life office to sponsor cultural events on different countries. Pick a country and showcase foods, films, and current event issues. Include students from other organizations and departments and faculty, international students and community members.
13. Write your academic department chair or academic VP requesting that they offer more courses related to your host country in your school's curriculum. Get your friends to do the same.
14. Write your school's media center, curriculum library, etc., and request that they increase their holdings (books, DVDs, etc.) related to your host country. Do the same with your public library. If a shortage of money is an issue regarding this or regarding #13 then have a fund raising drive to get the money.
15. Start an "International movie night" series at your campus, church, or community center. Have a discussion afterward on the issues and themes raised by the movie. A faculty member or other qualified moderator could assist in facilitating the discussion. You could do the same thing with a book club.
16. Recognize the **difference** between **knowledge** and **wisdom**. "Those with **knowledge** know the things they should do. Those with **wisdom** do them."
17. Don't retreat from your campus community, no matter how frustrating that community might sometimes be – it's important to stay engaged.
18. Ask your professors/elders: what are 3 things they wish they had thought about when they were 20, and 3 things they wish they hadn't worried about when they were 20.
19. Consider taking a year off after graduation to seek an internship, fellowship, or scholarship operating in your host country or any other region you deem worthy of attention!
20. Get more involved in general social justice issues. Join a social justice club, or start one if none exists! This is one of the true marks of what we've hoped you have learned while abroad: if you can apply what you have learned in a broader form, not just to your host country issues specifically.
21. To go back to the beginning and repeat ourselves: stay in touch with your cohort – you will not regret it!

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

What is my “30-second answer” for people who ask about my experience? What is my “30-minute answer”? How will I know the difference between people who are asking but have limited time and/or interest and people who will listen to the longer story?

What are the most significant things I have learned? Can I communicate these things simply and directly?

What have I been given? What can I offer others? Am I morally obliged to share my story?

What things about my host country’s history, culture, religion, values do I still not understand? What questions do I have now that I didn’t have before? How can I continue to learn? In what areas do I continue to struggle with attitude or with value assessments or with comparisons in the area of culture or spirituality? In what areas do I still find the culture of my host (or home) country difficult to accept or tolerate as fully as I might wish?

How have I changed this semester? Is this what I expected?

What significant things have been happening in the lives of my friends and family back home? How can I support them in these things?

Who is my most solid support base? Who do I know that I can go to with struggles and questions? How can I be a support for them?

What stories am I okay with repeating over and over again? What do I want to be more careful about sharing? How do I avoid the tendency to share negative stories first because they are more memorable? What positive cross-cultural experiences have I had that I can share?

What have I learned about spirituality while abroad? What genuine connections can I make between my faith or the predominant faith of my home country and the faith of my host country? What boundaries do I continue to maintain?

Are there lifestyle changes I want to implement? Which of my goals are realistic? What temptations and challenges do I foresee that might cause me to just fall back into an “old routine”?

Which issue/problem/conflict/cause am I most interested in? In what practical ways can I get involved, locally? How can I stay focused and avoid compassion fatigue?

Having gained an “outsider’s perspective” for a little while, what things about American culture and society do I appreciate? How can I cultivate these things? What things do I truly object to, and why? How can I resist these things?

If I don’t ever come back to my host country, how can I integrate this experience and what I’ve been given into my vocation, my values, and my life?

What do I need when I get/while I am home? How will I take time to rest and recuperate without succumbing to laziness and boredom? What expectations do I have of myself and those who will be around me?