Study Abroad Course Development: Pre-Departure Sessions for Post-Secondary Students

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STUDY ABROAD COURSE DEVELOPMENT: PRE-DEPARTURE SESSIONS

ABSTRACT

Study abroad is a highly encouraged component of the undergrad business program at Bella Lake University, with the large majority of undergraduate students choosing to study and live in a foreign country to expand on their international experiences. Currently, there is no learning structure or learning outcome expectation for students that will participate in the study abroad experience. This project focuses on the development of a course that supports students in the pre-departure phase of their study abroad journey and prepares them to set goals, understand the learning process and the practices of experiential learning to encourage students to achieve both personal and professional goals, and encourage the development of intercultural competence. The discourse surrounding the perceptions and efficacy of the course development is based on a self-assessment survey completed by 121 undergraduate business students that participated in the pre-departure sessions prior to leaving for study abroad in March 2016. The self-assessment results overall showed that the course achieved its aims with the majority of students rating that they were more likely to understand and engage in experiential learning, set goals for their study abroad experience and felt more prepared for study abroad after attending the pre-departure sessions. The project concludes that in order for the pre-departure course to maintain its value, the conversation with students surrounding experiential learning in study abroad needs to continue with further course development focusing on both during and post-study abroad. Further exploration can also be done to find varying ways to motivate different students to engage in the learning potential of study abroad.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The growing awareness of today’s global environment is shaping the way adult learners are developing as effective citizens, both locally and globally. Emerging concepts such as glocalization (integrating a global perspective and an understanding of local related issues) (Cai & Sankaran, 2015), and internationalization (“institutional efforts to integrate an international, global and/or intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of universities” (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada [AUCC], 2014, p. 3)) are some of the latest buzz words being attached to trends in education. The goal of opening borders and opening minds to perspectives beyond a students’ own culture and nation, and fostering the growth of global citizens is being demanded of our education system. One way in which some post-secondary institutions in Canada, including Bella Lake University, are actively addressing these demands is through study abroad programs designed for students to study at a university in a foreign country for one academic semester, or a full academic year, and earn credits toward their degree at home.

This project will focus on Bella Lake University, a mid-sized university in Ontario. Bella Lake University is a Canadian institution actively developing its international profile and working within a strategic framework defined specifically to build internationalization within the institution. It was also chosen for this project because the undergraduate business program at Bella Lake University has shown increased enrollment and increased interest in study abroad over the last 15 years and currently has a large volume of the students choosing to study abroad with over 350 students participating each year.

What is Study Abroad?
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At Bella Lake University, the undergraduate business program offers students the opportunity to study abroad. Managed out of the International Centre, every student has the option to participate in an academic exchange by spending one term at a post-secondary institution outside of Canada; study abroad is not a mandatory component of the program. Over the last 14 years, as Bella Lake University’s partnerships with educational institutions around the world grew, so did the popularity of studying abroad. In 2001/02, Bella Lake University had less than 30 partnerships with international institutions with 43% of business students studying abroad. In the most recent academic year of 2015/16, 86% of Bella Lake University business students participated in study abroad with the choice of attending one of 102 institutions around the world. With this growth, study abroad has become an integral part of the undergraduate business program and amongst the many advertised benefits, it is encouraged throughout the school as an opportunity to strengthen cross-cultural skills and gain a global perspective.

While students are participating in study abroad, they are enrolled as full-time students at an international partner institution and are required to take a full course load during the term, which is the equivalent to five courses at Bella Lake University. Students have the ability to choose the courses they would like to take at the partner institution and prior to enrolling all courses are evaluated and approved by Bella Lake University to ensure they also meet the business program requirements. Credits earned at the partner institution transfer to a student’s home transcript. Students participate in study abroad independently, although sometimes more than one student may be attending the same institution, and choose to live in either on-campus housing provided by the institution or rent their own private accommodations off-campus. Although guidance is provided by both Bella Lake University and the partner institution in preparation prior to students’ departure, the students are ultimately responsible for their own
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arrangements, including travel, study visas and accommodations. Outside of the requirement to enroll in a full-time course load, Bella Lake University does not have any other expectations for study abroad. Students are not required to complete any additional assignments or evaluations related to study abroad prior, during or after their experience abroad. Contact between the International Centre and the students is minimal during their experience, and besides transferring credits once a student returns, in-depth interactions with students post-experience is rare.

The Students

On countless occasions, students indicate that one of the deciding factors in choosing to attend Bella Lake University was the opportunity to study abroad. The business program is rigorous, beginning right from the admissions process, and it generally attracts ambitious, multi-talented and competitive students. It is most common for students in the business program to study abroad during their third year of study and by this time students are heavily focused on their academics and pressured to be involved with many extra-curricular activities including campus committees, conferences, case competitions, internships and career development.

Through the most recent study abroad application process at Bella Lake University, it became apparent again the difficulty in adequately preparing students for study abroad. In general, the business students currently have low awareness of what study abroad actually is before they embark on the experience, and through the application process struggled to identify their goals for study abroad and the potential opportunities that await them in the experience. Prior to departure, most students can easily identify the opportunity to travel extensively as a motivator and benefit of study abroad, but often find it difficult to expand on goals outside of travel which could include learning a language, being submersed in and learning about the local culture, or taking a course not offered at Bella Lake that is unique to the school and region.
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The International Centre

The International Centre currently oversees the administration and execution of the study abroad program for over 400 business students each year. The Centre has two exchange coordinators, which are the primary contact for students throughout the entire study abroad process and very often understand the students’ reality best due to their interactions with students before, during and after their study abroad term. These coordinators are expected to be administrators and advisors, not only overseeing the administrative tasks required to run a study abroad program, but also advising and supporting students through academic and personal issues that often arise while living abroad.

Currently the International Centre has no structure or material that is used to encourage the students to push their cultural learning and build on new goals during study abroad. The Centre focuses heavily on the logistical operations of organizing study abroad and staff, including exchange coordinators, often only have time to react to students’ communication and needs, and are not able to be in the position of pro-actively communicating and encouraging the students’ learning. Without a guiding framework, this priority becomes minimized and staff are left on their own to understand and encourage learning during study abroad.

Study Abroad Challenges

On the surface, the idea behind study abroad seems to address the demand for building global citizens and increasing a student’s cross-cultural competencies. However, simply studying in another country does not automatically create a new global perspective or demand cultural learning from a student. In fact, many institutions struggle with how to implement facilitated learning during the experience to the degree that students may commonly view study abroad as simply a vacation and have little interest in immersing themselves in the local culture
and learning (Lutterman-Aguila & Gingerich, 2002; Passarelli & Kolb, 2012;). As seen at Bella Lake University, the university administrators are well equipped to support the logistical and administrative issues surrounding study abroad. However, the study abroad experience is primarily intended to be a learning opportunity for students and little structure or guidance exists to support the exchange coordinators in advertising, encouraging and facilitating the student is learning experience. With the restraints of time and resources, there has been limited opportunity to explore the learning environment of study abroad to assist both students and staff to maximize the potential of study abroad before the students even leave home.

Furthermore, the setting of study abroad brings about unique challenges for facilitating and encouraging learning. Each student sets off on their study abroad journey alone, being independently responsible for their own experience and choosing the interactions and environment they want to surrounded them. Each student is immersed in a different culture, language, city, and country, which are all influential factors to the learning process. The challenge then exists to create a framework for learning that not only encourages 500 students to learn independently, but also is also adaptable to each of their unique environments and personalities.

**Significance of Course Development**

Study abroad starts at home. Students pack their bags thoroughly, thinking of all of the clothes, books, toiletries and electronics they will need over the term before leaving their homes to live abroad. There are conversations, checklists, research and planning all required so that nothing is forgotten and the experience is as enjoyable and successful as possible. As educators, we are responsible for facilitating the same process for enjoyable and successful learning. Students need to be guided and given a platform to prepare, plan, converse and understand the
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learning environment they will be living in and the tools they need to pack in their learning suitcase before they travel abroad.

Currently there is no coursework that frames the study abroad experience for students at Bella Lake University. The purpose of this project is to create a pre-departure course, implement it with approximately 450 business students, and assess the students’ perspective on the course, post-delivery. The course will provide the framework and tools to assist the students in preparing for and understanding their roles in the learning process during study abroad. It will help students recognize the possibilities that exist in study abroad and empower the students to take ownership of their learning while they are away. The course will also serve as a guide for exchange coordinators, which they can adapt to their needs and the students’ needs each year, and allow them to step into the role of facilitator. The course will address the need for both students and staff to dig deeper into the conversation surrounding study abroad and begin to prepare and plan for the development of cross-cultural skills and a broader global perspective.

If institutions are committing to the development of new student perspectives and cultural skills, structure and learning outcomes for the study abroad experience are necessary for the success of both students and facilitators of the experience. Successful course development addresses the learners’ needs effectively and efficiently and is in complement to the environment in which the learner exists. In order to do this, the content, strategies and setting used in the course development and delivery must be created with a thorough understanding of the study abroad opportunities, realities and potential.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Study abroad has become an integral component of the business program at Bella Lake University over the years. Students are encouraged to participate in the experience each year based on a perceived value in the experience, but unlike most components in their undergraduate program, there is no framework for learning. Without a framework, without an understanding of the potential learning opportunities, without creating discussion it would be difficult to expect any student to be accountable for their educational experience during study abroad.

This literature review will explore the areas of competency development most commonly associated with the study abroad experience: cultural competency development and personal and professional growth, to understand the current reality of the study abroad experience. Further, it will consider the process of learning that students experience while they are abroad, areas to support the learning, and strategies in which to best prepare students for their departure and to build a course that meets these needs.

Personal and Professional Development & Study Abroad

The potential exists that studying abroad will be an opportunity for students to grow personally (Heffron & Maresco, 2014). Further, this growth and competency development has the potential to be useful for students’ employability and future career development (Trooboff, Vande Berg, & Rayman, 2007-2008). However, it is important to explore if students are indeed aware of personal and professional competency development during study abroad, and how they are exploring this development.

Personal Growth

A number of studies posed questions regarding personal development during study abroad to students. Upon return, and in evaluating their study abroad experience, both current
and alumni business students agreed that study abroad had the largest impact on their personal and emotional development (Heffron & Maresco, 2014; Orahood, Woolf, & Kruze, 2008) and in multiple instances students recognized an increase in emotional growth and confidence as a result of their study abroad (Braskamp, Braskamp, & Merrill, 2009; Franklin, 2010; Orahood et al., 2008). In a study conducted by Braskamp et al. (2009) 245 American students participating in a one semester study abroad program completed both a pretest and posttest at the beginning and end of study abroad, to self-assess their global learning and development. The results were analyzed to determine if a students’ global perspective changed due to the experience abroad. The second largest difference in the students’ pre- and post-test responses was in the evaluation of personal confidence. Students’ self-evaluation of their confidence level increased post-experience and through further analysis by the researchers on other similar measurements of well-being, it was concluded that study abroad might positively influence a healthy self-image.

When alumni were asked to reflect on their experience many years after returning and describe competencies they developed through their study abroad experience, they consistently described a number of interpersonal competencies including communication, flexibility (Orahood et al., 2008), independence, adaptability, capacity to learn and problem-solving (Franklin, 2010). The concept of “well-roundedness” was also a term that alumni frequently used as an overall description of the combination of interpersonal competency development and personal growth achieved through study abroad (Orahood et al., 2008).

Through these studies, it is apparent that personal growth can occur during study abroad, but it is also important to explore how students are applying this new knowledge and skills after the experience. Alongside the positive findings of Braskamp et al. (2009) study, they also found that students could not make the connection between their knowledge learned from study abroad
and the opportunity to apply it outside of the classroom. In measuring the students’ growth in cognitive knowledge (what students know and understand) as opposed to their cognitive knowing (critical thinking) in both pre- and post-tests, it was determined that there was little growth in the cognitive knowing for students post-study abroad. This finding supports that critical thinking and reflection may not be stressed as part of the learning process in study abroad, at least not as much as gaining new knowledge is, which may result in students not developing the ability to integrate their cultural experiences into deeper applications of self-discovery and personal development. The study concludes by challenging coordinators of study abroad to create an environment where experience, reflection and critical thinking are integrated into the curriculum of study abroad to better support students’ learning and encourage the connection of applying new knowledge to deeper and broader levels of personal development and future applications (Braskamp et al., 2009).

**Professional Development**

The influence that study abroad had on a student’s career has also been studied (Franklin, 2010; Orahood et al., 2008). Of specific interest to Franklin (2010), Orahood et al. (2008) and Trooboff et al. (2007-2008) were the perspectives of both employers and student alumni on study abroad’s potential for professional development, multiple years after the study abroad experience was complete. Alumni and employers both made similar general links between study abroad and international work. Overall, alumni felt drawn towards or more receptive to international or multicultural opportunities in their professions (Franklin, 2010; Orahood et al., 2008), and reversely, firms that had international aspects (firms indicated 25% or more revenue from international sales) placed a higher value on the study abroad experience for employees then firms that had less international aspects (Trooboff et al., 2007-2008). It appears there is a
connection, and potential value, between being exposed to study abroad and later being involved in professional international opportunities.

However, in a study conducted by Heffron and Maresco (2014) that compared students’ pre- and post-study abroad attitudes, students felt they received higher value in personal and social development post-experience while their perception of study abroad as a value to employers decreased post-experience. The concept of friendship was a large factor in students first choosing to participate in study abroad, and continued to be an influencing factor post-experience as high value was placed on the opportunity to meet people and create social networks, over the value it had for future employment opportunities (Heffron & Maresco, 2014). It would be interesting to further explore the results that indicated the perceived value of study abroad as a professional development opportunity decreased post-study to better understand if students are being supported in building employability skills during study abroad and understand their level of awareness for applying these skills to future professional applications.

When employers were provided a list of qualities and skills an employee is preferred to have, based on a mix of intercultural/global skills and standard nationally approved employee skills, the employer placed a relatively high value on the intercultural/global skills in the list such as adaptability, listening and observing, and working under pressure. Yet, these same employers also responded that they were not convinced that study abroad enhances these employable skills and qualities. However, in exploration of the findings by Trooboff et al. (2007-2008) an interesting connection was evaluated; employers that have participated in study abroad themselves place a higher value on the experience when hiring then those that did not study abroad (Trooboff et al., 2007-2008). Therefore, those that are familiar with the study abroad experience perceive some employable value in it. There is a lack of research on post-secondary
students’ own understanding of their learning of employability skill development that occurred during study abroad and the understanding of how it occurred. Clearly those that have been involved in study abroad place a value to the experience, but what meaning does competency development, or specifically employability skill development, have for a student that studied abroad? As this study shows, post-secondary students may not be recognizing and interpreting the development of competencies and skills related to employment while studying abroad and further, as Trooboff et al. (2007-2008) suggest, more needs to be done for students to learn how to express their development and enhanced abilities to external parties such as a potential employer.

**Cultural Competency Development & Study Abroad**

There have been multiple terms used to describe the learning outcomes of an intercultural experience including global competency (Olson & Kroeger, 2001), global citizenship (Stoner, Tarrant, Perry, Stoner, Wearing, & Lyons, 2014), global learning and development (Braskamp et al., 2009), intercultural proficiency (Clarke III, Flaherty, Wright, & McMillen, 2009), cultural intelligence (Tuleja, 2014), intercultural competency (Bennett, 2009; Taylor, 1994a) and intercultural sensitivity (Olson & Kroeger, 2001).

A further study by Deardorff (2006) was conducted with international scholars and university administrators in North America, which had the goal of defining intercultural competence in the context of a student outcome through internationalization in post-secondary education. Although an exact and singular definition was not agreed upon in this study, the overall general consensus by the participants was that intercultural competence consisted of three elements: attitudes (examples include respect, openness, motivation), knowledge and comprehension (examples include self-awareness, language, cultural knowledge) and skills
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(examples include the ability to listen, the ability to analyze, the ability to self-reflect)
(Deardorff, 2006; Gopal, 2011).

There have also been various models and frameworks that support the process of developing intercultural competencies and illustrate the ability to shift or develop a new cultural perception, attitude or skill as a result of an international experience (Olson & Kroeger, 2001; Taylor, 1994b) including the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 2009), the Global-Mindedness Scale (Clarke III et al., 2009) and the Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2006). Regardless of the term or framework, what all of these concepts have in common is the belief that an international experience has the potential to be a learning opportunity that can positively affect an individual’s knowledge, attitude or skills.

The framework of transformative learning has often been used to describe the process of developing new or different understandings and perspectives surrounding culture. Transformative learning is the process of questioning and revising a perspective and frame of reference, resulting in a new frame of reference (Cranton, 2006). A frame of reference is often formed by both cultural assimilation and influences from those that surround us in childhood and these frames of references can only be changed if an individual is aware of their current point of view and habit of mind and is engaged in discourse and critical reflection to transform their current beliefs (Mezirow, 1997).

Transformative learning itself focuses not on the specific learning of skills, but the learning and acceptance of new perspectives (Cranton, 2006). A study by Taylor (1994b), was designed to explore the learning process for individual’s that had participated in an intercultural experience through living abroad. In defining the outcome of a successful intercultural experience, the study supported that the learning outcomes are not just the development of new
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skills, but more accurately, the outcome is the transformation to a new or altered perspective towards the culture one has lived in. However, one conclusion of the study indicated that the transformative learning framework does not recognize what previous skills, knowledge or experience learners gained and what their influence on the transformative learning experience might be (Taylor, 1994b).

Similar to experiential learning, actively engaging in reflection is necessary in transformative learning to change a frame of reference (Mezirow, 1997). Tuleja (2014) supports this concept through her study on the practice of mindfulness to encourage the development of cultural intelligence. Mindfulness begins with an individual’s prior knowledge and skills, and is the process of consciously and critically reflecting on how one’s knowledge is applied through personal behaviours when in new cultural settings. Without this critical reflection, the knowledge an individual has is not useful in personal intercultural development and the individual cannot change or shift their behaviour (Tuleja, 2014). Both the study by Taylor (1994b) and Tuleja (2014) highlight that transformative learning and a shift in cultural awareness may indeed begin with previous intercultural competencies of specific skills and knowledge and serves to highlight a gap in defining transformative learning as the process that encompass all learning outcomes in an intercultural experience.

The process of transformative learning has been used to explain the shift in overall awareness and changes to sensitivity. My development of a second framework has been designed to outline the learning that takes place prior to the transformative learning, and address the development of intercultural competencies of skills, abilities and knowledge that influence the shift. What has been learned prior to the onset of transformative learning may be equally important in understanding an individual’s full intercultural development. Learning new
technical and practical knowledge can lead to the questioning of a frame of reference, and ultimately transformative learning (Cranton, 2006), so it would be equally important to first develop and understand the new attitudes, knowledge and comprehension and skills, as acknowledged by Deardorff (2006), that are being learned in a cultural setting before transformative learning can even progress, especially for students experiencing study abroad for the first time. This gap in learning may best be explored and filled through the framework of experiential learning.

**Experiential Learning in Study Abroad**

The concept of learning through both past and on-going experiences, or experiential learning, lends itself well to study abroad. Experiential learning is often used as a term to represent the relationship between experience and learning, as well as being frequently supported as a strategy to use real-world experiences to make learning authentic (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

During study abroad students may find themselves in situations, both intentionally and unintentionally, in which they are being exposed to something for the first time in an unfamiliar culture or new environment. In study abroad, it is often assumed that as students encounter new experiences, they intuitively learn from them and over time build a repertoire of knowledge and cultural awareness simply due to his or her exposure in a new environment. However, one of the key aspects of experiential learning is that the experience itself is not the learning, and the experience alone is not enough to illicit new knowledge. The experience does however have the potential to act as a motivation for learning (Lutterman-Aguila & Gingerich, 2002; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). As Kolb’s model of experiential learning describes:
In order to transform experience into knowledge, learners must begin with their own concrete experience, then engage in reflective observation, move to a stage of abstract conceptualization, in which they begin to comprehend the experience, and then engage in active experimentation of the concepts. (Lutterman-Aguila & Gingerich, 2002, p.45)

There have been various models of experiential learning developed by educators such as Kolb, Jarvis and Tennant and Pogson, nevertheless key practices in experiential learning including reflection, individual and group learning opportunities, and educator involvement are represented in each model to support the experience and the learning opportunity (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Reflection

A crucial element in adult learning, and specifically experiential learning, is reflective practice. During experiential learning, reflection is a conscious activity that commonly occurs after the experience has happened (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). In Kolb’s theory of experiential learning, reflection is an engrained step in his four-staged process of learning that includes experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting. To move through the learning cycle, and potentially achieve deep learning, students must reflect and be mindful of the experience in order to test, act on and integrate the learning (Passarelli & Kolb, 2012). In a study conducted by Lamm, Cannon, Roberts, Irani, Unruh Snyder, Brendemuhl, and Rodriguez (2011) involving 17 post-secondary American students participating in a short-term study abroad course in Costa Rica, reflective journaling was implemented as an experiential learning practice and was a requirement for the students. The journal entries had specific requirements, but students were allowed to develop their own journaling style. The study concluded that not all students used the journals as an effective means to promote reflection or progression through the experiential
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learning cycle. Through analysis of the students’ different learning styles, the study’s results indicated that although it is effective for some, reflective journaling may not fit the needs of all students, and may not be a best practice for all learning styles (Lamm et al., 2011).

Reflective journaling may simply be one means to encourage reflection in study abroad, but other means of reflection were also found to elicit a similar result including social group reflection sessions (Lamm et al., 2011), mindfulness (Merriam & Bierema, 2014), and one-on-one or group debrief sessions (VeLure Roholt & Fisher, 2013). Depending on the learner’s preference, one or more of these methods may be more attractive to a student and encourage deeper reflection. A study conducted by Douthit, Schaake, Hay McCammant, Grieger, and Bormann (2015) required two groups of short-term study abroad groups to use different reflection exercises, reviewed by the facilitator to determine if students’ learning objectives were achieved. One group of students studying in Australia used online blogs while a second group studying in Argentina used hand-written journals. The conclusions indicated that there was no advantage to one type of reflection being more likely to help a student meet their learning objective; blogging and journaling both had their strengths and weaknesses. However, the students that blogged showed more overall improvement in reflection and enthusiasm over the trip, as measured by the facilitators, through review of the two groups’ writing. As this result could be due to a large number of factors, one observation highlighted that posting blogs publicly for friends and family to read may have encouraged greater effort by the students (Douthit et al., 2015). This observation draws an interesting connection to the opportunity for reflection to be not only a private independent exercise, but also a shared group exercise.

Furthermore, studies have suggested that direction, instruction and structured time surrounding reflection may better support learners, especially for learners that are new to the
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practice of reflection in learning (Lamm et al., 2011; VeLure Roholt & Fisher, 2013). These findings support the need for reflection to be integrated into the study abroad experience, and focus on the importance of allowing flexibility and creativity to the means that students choose to reflect.

Individual & Group Learning

In developing the theory of experiential learning, Kolb also developed the Kolb Learning Style Inventory (KLSI) to accompany his theory and cycle of learning. KLSI assesses individual learning styles and identifies an individual’s preferred or most common means of learning in one of nine categories: initiating, experiencing, imagining, acting, balancing, reflecting, deciding, thinking, analyzing. Kolb argues that a learning style is not a fixed trait and that an individual has the ability to change or flex his or her learning style should they choose to. Understanding one’s own preferred learning style and being aware of the ability to adjust a learning style depending on the situation is a powerful tool in taking ownership over personal individual learning. Likewise, in order for students to be engaged in the study abroad experience, they need to have ownership over it (Passarelli & Kolb, 2012). Providing students with the knowledge and awareness of their learning style empowers the learner to be responsible for his or her unique learning process and learning goals (Lutterman-Aguila & Gingerich, 2002). Learning style knowledge may be especially motivating for students that are participating in a study abroad experience by themselves, as they can understand and gage their own individual growth and learning in relation to their learning style, and monitor any personal increases in flexibility between learning styles.

Experiential learning does not strictly have to be done in isolation of others. In VeLure Roholt and Fischer’s (2013) reflection of challenges that can occur during study abroad
programs, they explored the execution of their program to a group of social workers participating in their short-term study abroad to South Africa, the Netherlands and the United States. As the study abroad instructors, VeLure Roholt and Fisher (2013) felt that even though they encouraged participants to engage in conversation with the locals, they did not involve local country facilitators enough in debriefing or reflection sessions. They concluded that using practices of experiential learning, such as inviting local facilitators to join the group reflection, share their expertise and provide understanding of the local context would have been beneficial to the students and could have provided the opportunity for deeper reflection for the students (VeLure Roholt & Fisher, 2013).

This study supports the idea that communities of practice may be beneficial in building the connection between experience and learning for students. Communities of practice is another strategy commonly used in experiential learning to support the learning and are commonly developed by bringing together a group of people who have a common shared interest but the group consists of individuals with different levels of knowledge, expertise and attitudes surrounding the interest (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Passarelli and Kolb (2012) suggest that in study abroad, this community of practice could consist of a wide array of individuals including exchange students, foreign and local administrators and faculty, local community members engaged in cultural elements of the host country, and host families or roommates. Supporting the student’s experiential learning through the participation of communities of practice creates the opportunity for discussion, a further enhancement to critical thinking and reflection. This practice also reinforces a healthy learner-centred environment over a teacher-centred environment to further empower the student (Lutterman-Aguila & Gingerich, 2002). With the potential variety of experiences and knowledge that exist within a community of practice,
students can actively question and challenge their own experiences and attitudes against the many others as a process of collecting and analyzing new knowledge, skills or beliefs. Schwartz (2013) eloquently summarizes the need to build meaningful relationships in experiential learning at every level from: “learner to self, learner to teacher, and learner to learning environment” (p.2). Experiential learning embraces not only independent learning, but also learning with others and within one’s own environment.

Role of Educator

As independent as a study abroad experience may be, there is still a crucial role that the educator plays. In the context of study abroad, this educator could be defined as a university administrator, a faculty member or a teacher that may either accompany or not accompany the students to their host country. The role of the educator is not to instruct or tell students what to do while participating in study abroad, but instead to guide students through their learning, be flexible in working amongst the various learning styles, and be available and open to the students (Passarelli & Kolb, 2012; Schwartz, 2013). If students are made aware of their learning styles, then educators should also be aware of the students’ styles in a goal to move and challenge the students to develop their learning through the experiential learning cycle. The educator can also be encouraged to share his or her own experiences with students to support the learner-centred environment, through the practice of role modeling; they too are an active learner in the process of self-development (Kolb, Kolb, Passarelli, & Sharma, 2014).

Another role of the educator is to guide students in creating activities (Schwartz, 2013) and clearly defined learning goals for study abroad (Lutterman-Aguila & Gingerich, 2002). Providing the opportunity for students to create their own activities allows the learning to have more personal relevance and meaning, however the educator can take on the role of guiding the
STUDY ABROAD COURSE DEVELOPMENT: PRE-DEPARTURE SESSIONS

students to challenge themselves so as not to get bored or frustrated with activities that may be too easy or difficult (Schwartz, 2013). Goals do not need to remain static, as many students struggle to define their goals prior to study abroad as they are not fully aware of the experience that awaits them. With the guidance of an educator, goals are encouraged to be flexible with the learning and reassessed as the student experiences and reflects.

**Course Development**

Exposing students to an international setting, with the possibility of developing intercultural competencies is often encouraged for the ultimate goal of developing ‘global’ citizens ready for the real world. To set students and facilitators up for success in meeting these goals, it is crucial to align the hands-on learning of study abroad with pedagogy that is supportive of experiential learning even before their departure for study abroad (Holmes, Bavieri, & Ganassin, 2015; Stoner et al., 2014). As Holmes et al. (2015) noted in their evaluation of students’ perspective on pre-departure programs, students’ first intercultural need was to gain practical knowledge and information on how to manage their daily life in a foreign country. Many students were more concerned and distracted with looking for information on the country, culture, daily routines and the basic ‘how to survive’ advice. Considering how all-consuming a basic psychological need can be, it important to first fulfill this basic need before being able to move to the introduction and exploration of the self and of intercultural competency development during a pre-departure session.

To assist the students through the learning process, setting clear learning outcomes for study abroad will guide the students’ experience (Schwartz, 2013; Stoner et al., 2014). As discussed, students have the ability to create their own experiential learning activities and goals; however, these activities can be created under the overarching learning outcomes set by study
abroad facilitators and the institutions (Schwartz, 2013). As post-secondary institutions are promoting these ultimate learning outcomes through the creation of study abroad, the goals and activities established by students should fall within the themes of the larger learning outcomes.

The learning process during study abroad is complex and for many students study abroad may be the first or longest period they will be challenged to learn independently, and in addition, will be doing so in a new and unfamiliar cultural environment. A pre-departure session will be the first opportunity that students have to work with peers and facilitators to begin to scratch the surface of learning in this particular environment. Interactive spaces, time for reflection and debriefing, and a slow teaching pace can be used throughout the session to encourage the students to make meaning of concepts such as intercultural, personal and professional competency development in their own lives (Holmes et al., 2015). Scaffolding of activities and reflection exercises can also assist in breaking down the complexity of these concepts and create time for adequate processing (Holmes et al., 2015; Stoner et al., 2014).

**Conclusion**

The literature indicates that both post-secondary students and facilitators involved in study abroad perceive an opportunity for development in participating in the experience, whether it be through personal growth, professional growth or intercultural competency development. However, as Holmes et al. (2015) support, developing these competencies is unlikely to happen on its own. Pre-departure sessions exploring the learning outcomes and potential opportunities that study abroad can bring is necessary for students to begin their engagement with the learning process. Providing a space during pre-departure for students to begin the exploration of the competencies they have, the competencies they could develop and the tools they can use to
explore these competencies with each other and with students that have completed the study abroad experience is an important first step.

All opportunities available to students through post-secondary education should provide the opportunity for students to actively participate, take responsibility, learn, grow and better understand whom they are. With experiential learning as a model for framing the study abroad experience, this learning can be brought to life for students in a real and applied way. The practices of requiring reflection, building knowledge around personal learning styles, encouraging discussion in groups, participating in the culture and guiding the students through goal setting can empower both the study abroad administrators and the students to better understand and take ownership over their roles in the study abroad experience. Encouraging the active participation of learning during study abroad and centering the learning towards the real needs and experiences of the students increases the overall value of study abroad as an educational tool.

This project will combine the practices of experiential learning as developed by Kolb (Passarelli & Kolb, 2012) and Deardorff’s (2006) Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence to create a framework for developing a pre-departure session for study abroad. Creating this course will provide guidance to both the students and the institution in setting realistic objectives and learning outcomes for the study abroad experience.
CHAPTER 3: STUDY ABROAD COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Rationale for the Pre-Departure Sessions

The course was designed to fill a gap that currently exists in the study abroad exchange program for post-secondary students at Bella Lake University. Students participated in the session prior to their departure for study abroad in the business program. Overall, a learner-centred design guided the development of the course and was built upon some of the foundations of curriculum development in philosophy, psychology and sociology. Specifically, a humanistic design was considered during the course development to support a learner-centred approach in curriculum design. Elements of a humanistic design include the emphasis on the experiences and interests of the person and the group. There is heavy influence on the individual and their unique experience in this design, as well as still having some emphasis on encouraging participation in a community and understanding social good (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013).

Taking the humanistic approach to developing this course compliments many similar values also found in study abroad including independent learning, learning through social activities, awareness of self-concept and personal identity, the importance of student input in the curriculum development and the responsibility of learning shared by the student (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013). Furthermore, self-reflection is an important element in an experiential learning experience for students (Passarelli & Kolb, 2012), and using a humanistic approach as a base in developing the course kept these key aspects in the forefront of the course.

Philosophical Foundation

The International Centre, responsible for overseeing the study abroad program, has a unique educational philosophy. On top of the overarching educational philosophies at Bella Lake University, which already guide the execution of the undergraduate program overall, the
Centre also incorporates the philosophy of reconstructionism, which will be incorporated into the course. Students are being encouraged to move outside of Bella Lake University and be active in learning and participating in a global environment. Exchange coordinators act in the role of educator both prior and during the study abroad experience; however, they do not, and cannot, simply ‘teach’ global citizenship. Instead, the course was designed for coordinators to guide the students in understanding the independent learning processes to encourage change or deeper awareness of personal, social and cultural issues (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013).

**Psychological Foundation**

Critical thinking can be described as self-directed, self-disciplined and self-monitored (Paul & Elder, 2006). As the study abroad experience itself is an activity that students participate in independently, and away from the rules and structure of their home university and culture, critical thinking is a natural fit for the learning theory associated with the experience. The course promoted critical thinking in experiential learning to encourage students to explore, question or think deeply about generalizations, assumptions, consistencies and relationships (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013) before they are abroad, and while they are in the study abroad experience. The course was designed to assist the student in being aware of the possibilities of learning that will soon surround them abroad, and the opportunities to use critical thinking and reflection in the process of learning.

**Sociological Foundation**

In creating the course, it was important to keep in mind that the social values and norms in Canada and within our university system did not dominate the course development and there was freedom for students to reflect and think through an experience without cultural restraints. The course itself needed to be free of assumptions, stereotypes and prejudices that could exist in
STUDY ABROAD COURSE DEVELOPMENT: PRE-DEPARTURE SESSIONS

Canada and could restrain the growth or change of a student. As schools can also commonly be distributors of cultural capital (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013), and culture in the schools and classrooms while abroad may be different, the sessions, likewise, needed to provide an opportunity for students to think through these differences and the social and global effects of their own assumptions, values and norms.

**Framework for Course Design**

The course was designed by weaving together both Kolb’s (2014) framework of experiential learning, and Deardorff’s (2006) understanding of intercultural competence. Through both the Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (2006) and Process Model of Intercultural Competence (2006), two models that Deardorff created to explore the process of developing intercultural competence, she has remained consistent in emphasizing the development of attitudes, skills and knowledge as three key foundations for increasing intercultural competence. The specific attitudes, skills and knowledge that students have are unique to each individual and could be dependent on many factors such as their level of awareness, level of exposure to other cultures and understanding of their own culture.

Regardless of where the student may be prior to study abroad, Deardorff (2006) highlights the importance of understanding the development of intercultural competence as an ongoing process, where absolute intercultural competence may never be achieved, but may always be improving.

To understand this ongoing process of intercultural competency development, Kolb’s (2014) cycle of experiential learning was used. The experiential learning cycle consists of four stages, which the student can progress through, and repeat again multiple times in cyclical fashion. The stages of experiential learning are concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, active experimentation (Kolb, 2014). This course was designed on
the idea that the cycle of experiential learning can support the continued development of attitudes, skills and knowledge as defined by Deardorff’s models of intercultural competency, and the cycle may continue be repeated a number of times as the attitude, skill or knowledge builds and improves and goals are achieved, in the ongoing process.

![Figure 1. Framework for Course Design](Figure1.png)

This course laid the foundation in helping students understand the concept of experiential learning in relation to study abroad prior to leaving for study abroad. In the pre-departure stage, students uncover and reflect on their current attitudes, skills and knowledge in a cultural setting as a starting point in understanding their level of intercultural competence and beginning the process of questioning and moving away from cultural assumptions and stereotypes (Tuleja, 2014). This served as an introduction to the concept of intercultural competence, since for many students it was the first time encountering this concept. For this early stage, the course also
focused heavily on the concept of reflection and helped students explore reflection exercises that they may use while studying abroad. As one of the four stages in Kolb’s (2014) cycle of experiential learning, reflection is crucial if students are to progress through the cycle and build on previous attitudes, skills and knowledge. The aim of discussing reflection within the sessions was to provide students the opportunity to be mindful (Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Tuleja, 2014) discuss their experience with others (Cai & Sankaran, 2015) and reflect on their own (Gopal, 2011), all important practices within experiential learning and ultimately encourage students to use these reflection practices on their own to support the development of intercultural competence both prior and during study abroad.

The session was also delivered using the practices of experiential learning. Students were encouraged to be active participants in the activities and discussions delivered throughout the sessions to mirror the active participation that will be required of them in their own independent learning while studying abroad. Students were divided into predetermined groups and worked with this group throughout the three sessions as an introduction to the model of communities of practice (Merriam & Bierema, 2014) and encouraged students to engage deeper in the conversation with their peers who had different and varying perspectives on the same topic. As the study abroad experience can be heavily influenced by social interactions, creating social networks and meeting new people (Heffron & Maresco, 2014), becoming familiar with the concept and value of communities of practice aimed to encourage students to not only continue connecting with the students in their group during study abroad, but also encourage them to create their own unique communities of practice with the people they meet while studying abroad which can act as a both a support system and social learning system (Coryell, 2011) through their experience. Further, students were challenged to create their own self-motivated
STUDY ABROAD COURSE DEVELOPMENT: PRE-DEPARTURE SESSIONS

goals to encourage engagement in their individual learning, make students accountable for their experience and build a base for significant and established learning outcomes important to experiential learning (Mak & Kennedy, 2012).

Design Method

The course was created using backward design, with the support of tools created by Understanding by Design (UbD) (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). By establishing the desired results of the curriculum first, in stage one of UbD, the focus remained on developing a course that met the established goals and forced the facilitator and students to continually check-in with the essential questions key to encourage critical thinking and meaning-making throughout the course. Working backgrounds after goals were established, through the development of performance tasks in stage two, and then moving on to the final stage of designing the learning plan ensured that the creation of activities did not drive the course development, but instead the established goals remained the focus and were guidance in determining if an activity was appropriate and valuable in the course (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).

Description of the Pre-Departure Sessions

Aims

To create a pre-departure program that supported students in preparing for personal and professional growth in a cultural setting, and helped them recognize the learning potential that occurs during study abroad. The course focused on three specific aims:

- Attitude: encouraging self-motivation, openness and respect (Deardorff, 2006)
- Knowledge & Comprehension: building self-awareness, cultural awareness & knowledge, global perspective (Deardorff, 2006)
- Skills: recognizing skills transferrable to professional and personal practice

Pre-Departure Summary
The sessions were designed to build students’ awareness in the learning opportunities and learning strategies commonly aligned with study abroad. The sessions were delivered in three consecutive sessions, with each session building on the knowledge and practices of the last session. Beginning with the practices of experiential learning, students interacted, brainstormed and explored experiential learning opportunities and practices of reflection best suited for their learning style and environment. Students then critically reflected on their current behaviours, attitudes, skills and knowledge in various cultural environments and established realistic goals they want to achieve in the development of these attitudes, skills or knowledge while studying abroad. Students worked with their peers during the sessions and had the opportunity to create dialogue with both students soon departing for study abroad, and those that had recently returned from study abroad to encourage multiple perspectives and experiences being involved in the conversation and challenged students to think about their upcoming experience in a more holistic way.

**Delivery**

The three sessions in the course were delivered in a one-day session prior to the students departing for study abroad. Staff of the International Centre at Bella Lake University facilitated the sessions to approximately 400 business students that will be participating in study abroad during the 2016/17 academic year. Each session was 40 minutes long, and proceeded in the following order:

- Session 1: Choosing My Adventures
- Session 2: What’s My Attitude?
- Session 3: Building My Skills

**Essential Questions**
STUDY ABROAD COURSE DEVELOPMENT: PRE-DEPARTURE SESSIONS

The essential questions outlined in each session served as a guide throughout the course and were intended to keep students considering and questioning larger concepts both during the session and continued throughout their experience. The concepts behind the essential questions appeared multiple times throughout the sessions to help students make connections between all pieces of the course, and reminded the facilitator of the underlying common goals of each session.

Impact on Implementation

Currently there is no coursework surrounding the study abroad experience at Bella Lake University. Although it is considered an academic component of a student’s undergraduate program, there is no structure or guidance to facilitate learning in the experience, neither pre, post or during study abroad. As Cai & Sankaran (2015) noted, for a student to achieve learning goals it is important to have structure around the learning and to also link the pre and post coursework to the experience abroad for a holistic understanding of the learning outcomes. As a starting point, this course focused on the pre-departure study abroad experience for students to participate in prior to leaving for study abroad.

Not only did this course benefit the students’ learning opportunities in study abroad, it also provided guidance and clarity for the exchange coordinator in the educator role. Furthermore, the course created an expectation that currently does not exist; the students will be accountable and responsible for their time abroad and meeting learning goals.
Session Outline 1 - Choosing My Adventures

Goal
To explore strategies that will encourage self-motivated independent learning during study abroad.

Objectives
- Students will consider why they are participating in study abroad and create a Personal Vision Statement
- Students will understand the experiential learning cycle and will identify an experiential learning opportunity for study abroad
- Students will develop and discuss reflection practices that are both appropriate to their study abroad environment and are personally engaging

Essential Questions
Student should keep considering the following questions throughout Session 1:
- Why am I choosing to study abroad?
- What can I get out of study abroad?
- What must I do to develop competencies in an independent environment?
- What environment and strategies best support my learning?
- How can I reflect on my behaviours, attitudes, knowledge and/or skills?
- How can I be conscious of my learning during my experience?

Time
This session will take approximately 45 minutes.

Resource
PowerPoint for Session 1 (Appendix A)
One copy per student of Worksheet 1 (Appendix B)
One copy per student of Worksheet 2 (Appendix C)

Activity Plan

1. Lead a discussion on the topic of ‘What can I get out of study abroad’. Have the students reflect on what they discussed and learned in their networking sessions.
   You may want to write down some of the values expressed on the board for students to be able to reflect on throughout the session.
   Ask the student volunteers to provide an example of the value they received during study abroad. Coach the volunteers to choose examples that highlight some of the big picture values (e.g., increased independence).

5 minutes
2. Using worksheet 1, give the students 1-2 minutes to write down the first things that come to mind when asked why they want to participate in study abroad. After a minute, discuss the concept of a personal vision statement is (to provide clear and inspiring focus for one’s future). Ask the students to begin to picture themselves in the moment of living abroad. Posing questions to the students such as the ones below will help them create a vision:
- ‘Who do you want to be during study abroad?’
- ‘How do you want to feel during study abroad?’
- ‘How do you envision your daily life during study abroad?’
Ask students to begin to frame their answers into a one-sentence personal vision statement that encompasses their purpose and aspirations. Provide example from slide deck as a reference.

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3. Introduce the concept of community in relation to study abroad and the importance of connecting with other people before, during and after study abroad for support. Ask students to find their group members, introduce themselves by sharing where they will be going for their study abroad experience and their current vision statement.

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4. Discuss the concept of experiential learning with the class as a whole. Engage students by asking them to provide examples of when they have been involved in experiential learning previously. Using the experiential learning model, walk students through the model, linking each stage to the study abroad experience.

- Concrete Experience: the experience itself
- Reflective Observation: reflecting, observing, feeling, reviewing after the experience
- Abstract Conceptualization: processing the learning, thinking, concluding what happened
- Active Experimentation: try what you have learned again in a similar or different situation

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5. In groups, have students discuss learning opportunities they think may be possible during their study abroad experience. Their ideas can be recorded on worksheet 2. Have student volunteers join groups and share from their own experiences if groups need help. Examples of experiential learning opportunities are provided in the slide deck if students need help to begin brainstorming.

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6. Bring the class back together. Expand on the concept of reflection as a key piece in the experiential learning cycle. As a class, brainstorm factors that may influence reflection practices and strategies. Bringing attention to the factors that influence reflection should help the students develop a sense of what factors may be influencing them specifically to help them develop reflection exercises that fit their needs and environment with these influences in mind. | 5 minutes |

7. In the same groups as previously formed, have the group come up with two types of reflection exercises that may be appropriate for one of the learning opportunities they discussed. Be sure to consider the different factors that influence reflection when creating two unique reflection exercises and focus on exercises they are interested in. Record reflection exercises on worksheet 2. | 5 minutes |

8. Bring the class back together. Ask each group to share an example of a reflection exercise that they came up with to the whole class. | 5 minutes |
Session Outline 2: What’s My Attitude?

Goal
To build an awareness of current personal attitudes towards other cultures and to explore strategies that can challenge these attitudes and assumptions.

Objectives
- Students will critique their current attitude towards their host country
- Students will explore the assumptions they have about their host country and identify the assumption(s) they would like to challenge
- Students will discuss methods to self-monitor their attitude, behaviours, openness and respect of different cultures

Essential Questions
Student should keep considering the following questions throughout Session 2:
- What environment and strategies best support my learning?
- How can I reflect on my behaviours, attitudes, knowledge and/or skills?
- How can I be conscious of my learning during my experience?
- What is my understanding of my current attitudes, knowledge and/or skills in a cultural content?
- What is influencing my attitude and assumptions toward my host country?
- How can I change my attitude and assumptions?

Time
This session will take approximately 40 minutes.

Resource
PowerPoint for Session 2 (Appendix D)
One copy per student of Worksheet 3 (Appendix E)

Activity Plan

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<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Using worksheet 3, have the students write down their current attitude towards different cultures (any culture). Encourage the students to be honest with themselves; they do not need to share this with other students.</td>
<td>3 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>On the same worksheet, have students list their current cultural assumptions about their host country specifically. Ask a few students to share an assumption or attitude with the whole class.</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
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</table>
11. As a class discuss what factors may influence personal attitudes and assumptions. Breakdown the factors between external and internal influences so students can visualize which factors they may be able to control, and which they may not.  

12. Discuss how culture shock can also be an influencing factor on cultural attitude and can affect a student’s assumptions and perspective while studying abroad. Highlight how the culture shock graph can influence the same assumption, depending on where a person is in the cycle, and specifically aligning with the areas where cultural learning is indicated as being more likely. If possible, have a student volunteer describe a change in attitude during two different stages on the culture shock graph. Also bring attention to the feeling of isolation, that culture shock is common, and the importance of building community prior to living and while abroad to help assist through harder periods during the experience.  

13. In reference to the worksheet, students can begin to consider what attitudes and assumptions they have the ability to change, and the ones that they have the desire to change. Current attitudes and assumptions may be both positive and negative, so students may want to change an attitude, verify if it true, or develop it further. Students can check off their abilities and desires related to each assumption and attitude on worksheet 3. Students should commit to at least one assumption/attitude they want to change/challenge/develop.  

14. Students can form into their groups. Based on the assumption or attitude they want to change, discuss ways they can actively challenge themselves to change or develop. Reference experiential learning activities as an active way to challenge themselves. If there are attitudes and assumptions that they have the desire to change, but do not think they have the ability, have students also discuss this with their group to brainstorm ways they could gain ability.  

15. Bring the class back together. Ask each group to share an example of a way they will challenge their attitude/assumption. Conclude with importance of self-monitoring an attitude shift through reflection exercises.
Session Outline 3: Building My Skills

Goal
To identify skills that can be developed while studying abroad and establish realistic goals that encourage the development of these skills.

Objectives
- Students will identify transferrable skills that could be developed during study abroad
- Students will set SMART goals for study abroad in both a personal and professional context
- Students will explore intercultural competency development

Essential Questions
Student should keep considering the following questions throughout Session 3:
- What are transferrable skills?
- What skills will I need for my future career?
- How can I reflect on my behaviours, attitudes, knowledge and/or skills?
- How can I be conscious of my learning during my experience?
- How can I achieve realistic personal & professional goals?
- How do I develop my intercultural competencies?

Time
This session will take approximately 40 minutes.

Resource
PowerPoint for Session 3 (Appendix F)
One copy per student of Worksheet 4 (Appendix G)

Activity Plan

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<tr>
<td>16. Begin discussion around skill development, asking students to participate by highlighting the skills they think they could develop during study abroad.</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Next, discuss the term ‘intercultural competencies’. Ask students if they know what this term means, or have heard of other ways to describe this term. Connect Deardorff’s (2006) definition of intercultural competency to the content in the sessions (attitudes, knowledge &amp; skills). Have a volunteer share a story to describe one of their skills that they developed during study abroad and have since used in a personal or professional setting at home.</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
18. Review how to develop SMART goals. With their vision statement in mind, have students choose 2 skills they want to develop, one personal and one professional. Based on the development of these skills, have students create two SMART goals using worksheet 4.

| 18. Review how to develop SMART goals. With their vision statement in mind, have students choose 2 skills they want to develop, one personal and one professional. Based on the development of these skills, have students create two SMART goals using worksheet 4. | 10 minutes |

| 19. Based on their goals, students will create a bucket list of thing they want to do while on study abroad on to meet some of these goals. The bucket list items are their action items. Students form into their groups and share their bucket list items. Be creative! | 10 minutes |

| 20. Conclude session with feedback survey. | 5 minutes |
CHAPTER 4: STUDENT SURVEY

Summary of Results

After students attended the pre-departure session, they were asked to complete a self-assessment survey as feedback for the course. Of the official 389 students that attended the sessions, 121 students completed the survey, resulting in a 31% response rate. The survey was not mandatory, and the students were not required to answer every question in the survey. Table 1 indicates the students’ responses to the survey.

Goal Development

Of the 121 students that responded to questions regarding their goals for study abroad, 80% stated that they either Somewhat Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they could state their goals prior to the session. The number of respondents that Somewhat Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they could state their goals for study abroad after the sessions only increased slightly to 89%. However, in review of the survey results, the number of students that indicated that they Strongly Agreed that they could state their study abroad goals after the session, compared to the number of students that Strongly Agreed they knew their goals before the sessions rose by 17%. This indicates that although most students concluded they had set goals for study abroad regardless of participating in these sessions, that the sessions were still able to increase the overall total number of students that left the sessions with strong agreement that they had developed study abroad goals, and an increase in the overall number of students that can state their goals now.

In total, 15 students responded that they either Strongly or Somewhat Disagreed that they had study abroad goals set prior to the sessions. Of these 15 students, 12 confirmed that after the sessions they either Strongly Agreed or Somewhat Agreed that they could now state their goals for study abroad.
STUDY ABROAD COURSE DEVELOPMENT: PRE-DEPARTURE SESSIONS

Table 1

Student Self-Assessment Survey Response Post-Session Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Questions</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Missing Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior to today, I could state my goals for exchange.</td>
<td>40 (33(^1))</td>
<td>66 (56)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>11 (9)</td>
<td>4 (3)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After today's workshops, I can state my goals for exchange.</td>
<td>61 (50)</td>
<td>47 (39)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>6 (5)</td>
<td>7 (6)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think there is value in using reflection exercises during exchange.</td>
<td>26 (22)</td>
<td>43 (36)</td>
<td>24 (20)</td>
<td>14 (12)</td>
<td>13 (11)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will use at least one reflection exercise that was discussed today while I am on exchange.</td>
<td>32 (26)</td>
<td>45 (37)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>27 (22)</td>
<td>16 (13)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior to today, I was aware of experiential learning opportunities during exchange.</td>
<td>39 (32)</td>
<td>48 (40)</td>
<td>16 (13)</td>
<td>14 (12)</td>
<td>3 (3)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After today, I will be more likely to engage in experiential learning opportunities during exchange.</td>
<td>31 (26)</td>
<td>35 (29)</td>
<td>34 (28)</td>
<td>8 (7)</td>
<td>12 (10)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
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<td>After today's workshop, I am more aware of the overall value of exchange.</td>
<td>45 (37)</td>
<td>34 (28)</td>
<td>17 (14)</td>
<td>10 (8)</td>
<td>13 (11)</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After today's workshop, I feel more prepared for exchange.</td>
<td>27 (22)</td>
<td>49 (41)</td>
<td>20 (17)</td>
<td>13 (11)</td>
<td>10 (8)</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After today, I am more excited about going on exchange.</td>
<td>64 (53)</td>
<td>31 (26)</td>
<td>10 (8)</td>
<td>7 (6)</td>
<td>7 (6)</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
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\(^1\) Percentages might not add to 100 due to rounding.
STUDY ABROAD COURSE DEVELOPMENT: PRE-DEPARTURE SESSIONS

Experiential Learning

During the session, when asked to the group, the facilitators confirmed that most students indicated verbally that they had not heard of experiential learning before. However, in the survey 72% of students indicated that they either Strongly Agreed or Somewhat Agreed that they had heard of experiential learning possibilities in study abroad prior to the sessions. Only 14% either Strongly or Somewhat Disagreed that they had heard of it before, indicating that it was something that was generally understood even without attending these sessions. With positive results at 55%, the majority of students that responded to the questionnaire indicated that they either Strongly or Somewhat Agreed that they would be more likely to engage in experiential learning after participating in this course.

Further to feedback on experiential learning, students were asked to self-assess their interest and engagement with reflection. Only 36% of students responded that they Strongly Disagreed or Somewhat Disagreed that they would participate in a reflection exercise during study abroad, where 64% were responded that they Strongly Agreed or Somewhat Agreed that they would use at least one exercise that was discussed during the session.

Overall Impression

The majority of students responded that after the session that felt more prepared for study abroad, with 62% either stating they Strongly Agreed or Somewhat Agreed to the statement. Nineteen percent of students responded that they Strongly or Somewhat Disagreed that they felt more prepared. This is a notable percentage of students that need to be addressed by the International Centre to discuss how best to assist these students in feeling more prepared. Of the 10 students that Strongly Disagreed to feeling more prepared, eight of these students also did not feel more excited about study abroad after the session. Although this is not a large number
STUDY ABROAD COURSE DEVELOPMENT: PRE-DEPARTURE SESSIONS

overall, this is something for the Centre to be aware of when measuring the students that will withdraw from study abroad prior to departure.

Limitations

As the survey was not mandatory, not all students responded to it as is evident in a 31% response rate. It brings to question if the students that did not respond were less engaged in the session, and this is a target group we are interested in receiving feedback from to further understand their interest and level of engagement with study abroad. As well, in four of the classrooms the students left the session without being told about the survey and were sent a follow-up email with the survey, while in two classrooms the students were asked to complete the survey immediately, in class, at the end of the session. The delivery and timing for requesting the students to complete the survey may have affected the number of responses that were received, as well as the answers students may have provided. Not all students responded to the email request, but most respondents that were asked to complete the survey immediately after the session stayed in the classroom for a few additional minutes to complete it. Students’ impressions as indicated in the survey may have differed dependent on when they completed it, either immediately following the session or later in the week.
CHAPTER 5: REFLECTION

Reflection-on-Action of the Course – Post-Session Delivery

Course Development

In the development of the study abroad course, I found it important to continually check-in with the original intentions and established goals of the course, which was encouraged by using the backward design process (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). The humanistic approach was kept in mind throughout the development of the course and is reflected in the focus on independent learning, learning through social activities and building awareness of personal identity (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013). Where the humanistic approach was more difficult to implement was in encouraging student input into the course development. Although I did leave space for the students to create their own assessments that they could use while studying abroad, such as reflection exercises, goal setting and brainstorming experiential learning opportunities to reach those goals, there was no other involvement of the students in the development process. On reflection, having the students involved in the course development may be more appropriate for later stages of the study abroad process, for example in an additional session created for the period during study abroad when students have already gained the basic understanding of experiential learning through the pre-departure session and have the freedom to guide their own learning journey when putting the learning into practice. The students could build on the concepts covered in the pre-departure session as guidance for developing more personal goals, assessments and evaluations specifically related to the skills, knowledge and attitudes they want to develop during their time abroad.

Although not the direct learners of this course, student involvement in course development could be encouraged from students after they have returned from study abroad. It may even be interesting to have the students that participated in this training return and assist in
re-developing the course once they return to Bella Lake University in 2017/18 with a new and different perspective after study abroad is complete, to help future study abroad students benefit from this course.

**Course Delivery**

The sessions were delivered simultaneously by three different facilitators: myself and two other senior staff from the International Centre. I trained both facilitators on the material prior to delivery. Due to the large volume of students and the limited number of facilitators, the sessions were delivered to students in groups of 80. Within each group of 80, students were sectioned into groups of six or seven in order to allow for smaller group discussion. Delivery of the session and encouraging student discussion was difficult in a large theatre-style lecture hall as it set the tone for a lecture-style environment, which was not the intended environment for delivery of this course. I think this course would be better delivered to smaller groups in an environment where the students can easily engage with one another and the facilitator is not standing in front ‘teaching’ the session, but instead, in alignment with experiential learning methods, is facilitating an authentic experience for the students to engage in (Kolb et al., 2014).

The smaller breakout groups were pre-determined and designed to have a mix of students destined to study in different countries, interact with each other. The purpose for choosing this structure was to help the students discover that regardless of where a student may be studying, there would all be experiencing similar concerns, struggles and/or enthusiasm, and that these students can form their first community of practice (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). In delivery, most students wanted to work with their friends, or people they may see themselves connecting with again in the future. As suggested in verbal feedback from one of the students as they left the session, community building may be better received if students were placed in groups strictly
STUDY ABROAD COURSE DEVELOPMENT: PRE-DEPARTURE SESSIONS

with others that would be attending the same study abroad country as they were. This feedback holds merit as it may encourage more targeted and deeper conversations surrounding some topics covered, such as authentic conversations towards the assumptions and attitudes the students may have about a specific study abroad country and its culture. As Ornstein & Hunkins (2013) support, these deeper conversations have the potential for deeper learning. As well, the community of practice may also have a better likelihood of staying connected and its usefulness may be immediate to the students if all group members were attending the same country during the same school year.

As outlined in the curriculum foundations, the course needed to be free of assumptions, stereotypes and the influences of cultural capital. While the course itself did this, and attempted to help the students breakdown their own assumptions and influences, it was also important for the facilitators to remain neutral and unbiased throughout the delivery of the course. The challenge was for facilitators to provide feedback that did not contain cultural influences or biases and continue to encourage the students to push their social and cultural limits. I think we were successful in meeting this challenge during the session delivery; now the next step is to ensure the exchange coordinators continue the encouragement of this learning and do not let their own attitudes and assumptions influence future feedback provided to students while they are studying abroad. As exchange coordinators will be the main contact for the students through the rest of this experience, it is equally important that they see value in the pre-departure sessions and continue to encourage the students to engage in the activities we facilitated. With the proper training on the practices of facilitation in experiential learning and the values of international competence, we can set the exchange coordinators up for success in the role they can play in the
future as facilitators of the learning process from the beginning in pre-departure, and throughout the full study abroad experience.

For the timing of the delivery, I would recommend delivering the pre-departure sessions twice per year, instead of once per year. For this project, the course was delivered to all students that will be studying abroad in the 2016/17 academic year; however, this group of students consists of those departing for study abroad in both the fall or winter term. For students that participate in study abroad in winter 2017, the delivery of this course was too early. Timing is important to engage the students’ more immediate needs and interests and help them to relate the material to an experience that is becoming more real as it gets closer. As well, the material covered may be forgotten to students that are not going to put the concepts discussed into practice for another nine months. To resolve this issue, I would suggest holding pre-departure sessions twice per year, delivered to Fall and Winter term study abroad students separately, a few months prior to their departure.

Course Content

Each of the three facilitators had previous international experience both in a professional and personal capacity. The facilitators were encouraged to bring their own unique experiences to the sessions to engage the students in real-life stories touching upon areas such as experiential learning experiences, reflection exercises, communities of practice and goal setting. Bringing the personal stories forward not only helped the students gain another authentic perspective to the concepts and created a picture of some of the experiences they may go through, but it also helped the facilitators relate to the material and understand their own value in facilitating. As Kolb et al. (2014) noted, having a facilitator of experiential learning bring personal stories forward could be beneficial as a way to mirror that they too are active learners in the process of
self-development. Just as students, the facilitators also needed to be empowered to understand and take responsibility for their role in the learning process.

Further, student volunteers that had previously participated in study abroad worked with each facilitator to add experience and a student perspective to the material. The volunteers were trained before the delivery of the sessions and were asked to reflect on their own experiential learning opportunities and the learning cycle that they participated in, both spontaneously and pre-planned, during study abroad. The volunteers ended up being an extremely valuable addition to the session and helped the students make the connection between the material that was being presented, and the real-life value in it. As the volunteers were in their final year of the business program and looking for employment, they helped in making connections between the development of intercultural competence and the transfer of these skills, knowledge and attitudes to future opportunities and to employers’ expectations.

Although I believe the content did fit the needs of the student at this stage in the study abroad process, it is important to remember that these students are young and for many it will be their first experience abroad, first experience away from home, first experience living on their own and first experience being immersed in another culture. These factors alone can be overwhelming and consuming of a student’s focus when he or she thinks about their upcoming study abroad experience. Prior to these sessions, the students participated in a session where they had the opportunity to meet in small groups with business students that had attended their study abroad university in the previous year. These sessions allowed the students to ask any questions they wanted in order to gain a basic understanding of their study abroad school and country and learn about the details that they may be concerned about such as accommodations, transportation, visa application process, course selection process, etc. As suggested by Holmes
et al. (2015), we did this to help the students build comfort and familiarity with the city and school they were moving to, and to address the students’ needs for basic information before we progressed to discussing bigger concepts like intercultural competency development.

However, even with providing the opportunity to gather basic information and establish social relationships with other study abroad students first, there is still a need to generate more student buy-in for the content and participation in the pre-departure session itself. A large number of students are only interested in gathering the basic information needed to navigate study abroad successfully, such as where to live and how to get there, and leave for study abroad with the mindset that it is a term ‘off’ with the opportunity to travel and have a lighter academic load. This perception of study abroad has become ingrained in the culture at Bella Lake University and is passed down to each class, each year. In debriefing the course content after delivery with the two facilitators, we all agreed that this course has the potential to change the perception of study abroad and expose students, at the very least, to the opportunities and value that exist in participating in study abroad beyond travelling to a different city every weekend. Further, I believe it has the potential to reconnect study abroad with academic and professional purposes, important to the justification of the experience in a business school setting. There were students in each classroom that chose to fully engage in the sessions out of their own interest, and I observed these students connecting with the content by adding personal insights to the discussions and creating their own self-motivated goals by the end of the day. However, as the survey results indicated, 36% of students responded that they would not use a reflection exercise discussed during the session while they are studying abroad. As well, 19% of students disagreed, either strongly or somewhat, that they were more aware of the value of study abroad after attending the sessions. Motivating less engaged students that simply showed up to the
SESSIONS because it was mandatory certainly requires more attention and further exploration into creating buy-in generating activities and helping them see the value in engaging in the experience at a deeper level.

**Future Implications**

Through developing this course, I now recognize how crucial it is to execute a follow-up session that will guide the students through the cycle of experiential learning while they are studying abroad and support them through the development of intercultural competency. It is important to set students up for success during study abroad and provide them with an opportunity to use and further expand on the concepts introduced in the sessions to support consistency in expectations and purpose to the course. Without further course development for study abroad, this session in isolation may not fulfill its intent. Students can create goals and discuss experiential learning opportunities, but it is not until they experience these concepts and ideas first-hand that they can begin to relate, reflect and grow from them. After delivering the pre-departure sessions, I questioned whether students had learned anything from the sessions. Now, upon reflection, I realize that this course was more importantly an introduction to the concepts, for most completely new concepts, and an opportunity to create dialogue around these concepts with others about to participate in similar experiences. At a minimum, every student should have left the session with a consciousness of their upcoming experience and a foundation to increase the depth and breadth of their intercultural learning while studying abroad, should they choose to engage in the experience. With 55% of the students that responded to the survey indicating that they agreed either strongly or somewhat, that they would be more likely to engage in experiential learning activities after attending the session, I think the course is beginning to lay the foundation.
Reflection Summary

The challenge of bringing awareness to the opportunities and value that study abroad can bring to a student is not a new one. Studies such as the one conducted by Heffron & Maresco (2014) in which business students indicated they placed higher value on making friends during study abroad than on the value it held for future employment make it easy to place responsibility on the students for not digging deeper into the experience and into its value. In order for students to have more substantive learning experiences in study abroad programs, institutional approaches are needed that incorporate capacity building for students, as well as processes to assess and evaluate learning during and after the program. As an academic institution supporting the journey of learning for students, we are responsible for first building a foundation that sets students up for success, provides the appropriate tools and resources and generates an awareness of the learning opportunity that is study abroad. With awareness, students can then choose, and be accountable, for their own path and engagement in their learning.

All university-supported opportunities available to students through post-secondary education should encourage students to better understand who they are, to grow, take responsibility and to actively participate in their own learning. With the experiential learning as a model for framing the study abroad experience, the learning of intercultural competencies can be brought to life for students in a real and applied way. Encouraging students to reflect, critically analyze, engage in group discussion, participate in a new culture and be aware of the learning cycle can empower them to better understand and take ownership over their role in the study abroad experience. Developing a course such as this one that center the learning of intercultural competence towards the real needs and experiences of the students continues to add
STUDY ABROAD COURSE DEVELOPMENT: PRE-DEPARTURE SESSIONS

to the important conversation surrounding the value of study abroad as an educational means to develop active, engaged global citizens.
References


STUDY ABROAD COURSE DEVELOPMENT: PRE-DEPARTURE SESSIONS


Lutterman-Aguilar, A., & Gingerich, O. (2002). Experiential pedagogy for study abroad:
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Office website:

http://www.ryerson.ca/lt/resources/newsletters/best_practices/pasttopics/mar2013.html


Appendix A
PowerPoint for Session 1: Choosing My Adventures

Exchange Symposium 2016
Choose Your Own Adventure!

Today’s Goal
To explore and identify the attitudes, knowledge & skills you want to leverage in your unique exchange adventure.
What can I get out of exchange?

What do I know about exchange right now?

What value have other students expressed from going on exchange?

Why am I going on exchange?

What is my purpose for going on exchange?
What do I want to focus on?
What do I want to accomplish?
Who do I want to become?
What do I want to do with my exchange?
What is inspiring about exchange?
My Vision Statement

To become a member of the community in Navarra and make it my 'home' by making local friends, speaking Spanish and participating in events in the city.

Build a community

Community building starts today:
• Support before, during & after exchange
• Almost 500 students will be going through the same experience, you don't have to feel alone!

Meet your group members
• Share where you will be going on exchange and your vision statement
How do I make my vision become reality?

Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle

4 stages of the cycle
• Concrete Experience
• Reflective Observation
• Abstract Conceptualisation
• Active Experimentation (Passarelli & Kolb, 2012)

Experiential Learning Opportunities

• You join a few new local friends in going for tapas on Friday night

• You have to complete a group project and deliver a presentation and you are the only foreign student in the group

• You are alone and have missed the last bus home, all other public transportation has stopped for the night and you don’t speak the local language
Experiential Learning Opportunities

What do you think is possible during exchange?

Brainstorm experiential learning opportunities during exchange that may naturally occur, or may be planned.

What might you have the chance to learn in these opportunities?

Keep in mind the uniqueness of the environment you will each be going to.

Reflection

Factors that influence your capacity to reflect:

• Introvert/Extrovert
• Level of self-motivation
• Physical environment
• Learning style
• Availability of resources
• Friends/family/acquaintances
### Worksheet 1: My Vision for Study Abroad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why am I going on exchange?</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key words that describe myself and my environment on exchange:</th>
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### My Vision Statement


Worksheet 2: Experiential Learning Exercises

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiential learning opportunities on exchange:</th>
<th>What might you learn from this opportunity?</th>
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Reflection Exercise 1:

Reflection Exercise 2:
Exchange Symposium 2016
Choose Your Own Adventure!

Session 2
What’s My Attitude?

Attitude
What is your current attitude towards other cultures?

- How do you feel when you think about living in a different culture?
- How do you currently interact with people from a different culture in Canada?
- On a scale of 1-10, how excited are you about living in a different culture?
- Did you choose your exchange country because it would be similar/different to a culture you know?
Assumptions

What do you assume it will be like living in your exchange country?

What do you assume of the culture in your exchange country?

Influences

External factors influencing your assumptions:
- Where you grew up
- Family & friends
- Media
- Travel

Internal factors influencing your assumptions:
- Mood
- Open mindedness
- Personal interactions
- Level of knowledge
- Fear and/or curiosity
Culture Shock

What is culture shock?

How do you think culture shock can influence your attitude towards the culture you are living in?

Isolation

You can’t do this alone!

Building your community before you leave, and reach out to your new community when you arrive

- Buddy systems at your exchange university
- Community groups, athletic groups, clubs, language circles
- Exchange students from other countries
- Smith students that have gone on exchange
- Current exchange students at Smith
- CIM office
Challenge Yourself

How do I change or develop my attitudes and assumptions?

- What activity could I be involved in or organize?
- Who should I be interacting with?
- What can I do to be open-minded?
- How do I challenge my behaviours?

Think about experiential learning activities!

Attitude Shift?

How can I know if my attitude is changing?

Reflection exercises!
### Appendix E

**Worksheet 3: Assumptions & Attitudes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions &amp; Attitudes</th>
<th>Influences</th>
<th>Ability to change, challenge or develop</th>
<th>Desire to change, challenge or develop</th>
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Exchange Symposium 2016

Choose Your Own Adventure!

Session 3
Building My Skills

Skill Development

Personal Development
- Confidence
- Independence
- Adaptability
- Sensitivity
- Social (eg. ability to build relationships)
- Language

Professional Development
- Problem-solving
- Ability to work/live in a diverse environment
- Communication skills (eg. listening, observing, expressing opinions respectfully)
- Ability to work under pressure
Intercultural Competencies

Global citizenship

Cultural intelligence

Intercultural proficiency

Cross-cultural adaptation

Deardorff (2006) definition:

- 3 elements of intercultural competence
  - **Attitude** (respect, openness, motivation)
  - **Knowledge** (self-awareness, language, cultural knowledge)
  - **Skills** (ability to listen, ability to analyze)

Goal Setting

For your upcoming experience, create:

- One professional goal
- One personal goal

Remember to be S.M.A.R.T.

Specific
Measureable
Achievable
Realistic
Timely
Bucket List

What am I going to do to reach these goals?

Keep in mind:
• Who will be involved with the bucket list items; who is your community?
• What is unique about the environment you will be living in?
• Experiential opportunities!
### Appendix G

**Worksheet 4: Goal Setting**

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<th>Skill:</th>
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Bucket List for Exchange