“Along The Continuum” Exercise for Study Abroad Re-Entry
Questions Developed by Eowyn Greeno for use at Brandeis University

I allow 10-15 minutes for this activity – it could probably go on longer but I haven’t tried. I’ve done this with groups as small as 15 and as large as 60 and it’s worked great for several semesters now.

I typically introduce this activity by saying that while we really want to hear all of their stories and we hope they will come back to the office to tell us a lot more about their programs and their experiences, in this forum we won’t have time for the in depth discussion it takes to understand all of the very different experiences they have just had. So I explain that for now, I just want to get things rolling by getting a visual image of just how varied their experiences were.

Have students stand up and announce that you are going to give them a set of extremes – if they agree with, or are representative of, one extreme they should stand on the side of the room that you will indicate is representing that extreme, if they agree with, or are represented by, the opposite extreme they will stand against the opposite wall. If they fall someplace between the two extremes they should choose a place between the two walls that seems representative of their opinions or their experiences. Give any of the sets of “extremes” below (I normally only use 4-6 total in any given session). I always start with the first one on language because it’s fairly cut and dry and gets people moving right away without being self conscious. Once students have found their spot on the continuum (and you can get their attention again) ask for more in-depth info. about their experiences from a couple of people on each extreme and those in the middle. Ask those who volunteer (or those great students you know you can call on) to tell everyone where they were, etc.

As an example, for the language question I usually ask those that were in English speaking countries if they learned any great, local slang terms and then I ask those who were speaking only another language if they are having a hard time adjusting to hearing English all the time again, what words in the language they were learning just can’t be translated, etc. I will often throw in a “show of hands” type question to solicit more info. For example, for the group in the middle on the language question I’ll ask for a show of hands of those people who were studying the target language for the first time when they got to their host country. Then I’ll ask a few of those that do raise their hands what languages they were studying (a nice way to get some props for those that were studying Zulu or Nepali, etc.). I notice that after a couple of sets of extremes you have to prompt for feedback or comments less and you can simply ask for volunteers to “tell us a bit more”.

I unusually end the session by pointing out just how different all of their experiences are and that just like the experience abroad there is no one “typical” response to re-entry.

Studied, Spoke, Dreamed, etc. only English:
Studied, Spoke, Dreamed, etc. only in another Language

Lived with a home stay family:
Lived in dorms or apartments

Found it easy to meet local people:
Found it very difficult to meet local people

Had some significant ups and downs, difficulties adjusting, what may be described as “culture shock”:
Didn’t really experience “culture shock”
Learned just as much about my own country and culture while I was away as I did about the host country and culture:

Didn’t really think much about my home country or what it meant to be a citizen of my home country while I was away

Doesn’t seem that different or unsettling to be back in the US – just fit right back in:

It’s been weird/unsettling/challenging being back in the US

Everyone is dying to hear my stories from abroad and let me talk forever:

Everyone asks me “How was it?” and wants a one word answer

I’m the same person I was when I left campus last May/Dec (I’ve learned a lot but I’m still me):

I’m a completely different person (the experience has changed me in some significant ways)

Was constantly encountering stereotypes of Americans and having to explain how I did or didn’t fit those stereotypes:

Never encountered any stereotyping based on being an American

If I was talking politics, I spent a majority of that time talking about US politics/our new president/US foreign policy with locals I met:

When politics was the topic of conversation I spent a majority of time talking about local politics/issues

Super excited to be back at Deis:

Not very excited to be here yet