

A LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE REENTRY AND ADJUSTMENT EXPERIENCE OF  
COLLEGE STUDENTS RETURNING FROM SHORT-TERM INTERNATIONAL  
CHRISTIAN MISSION EXPERIENCES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS  
PROFESSIONALS

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## **Abstract**

With increased attention related to internationalization and intercultural learning within higher education, increasing numbers of college students are participating in international cross-cultural activities. Participants in short-term international Christian mission experiences are increasing dramatically. These students frequently participate in such activities during the course of their college career and subsequently experience reentry issues during their readjustment back into college life. This report reviews literature and student comments related to the reentry experiences of the growing college population of short-term international Christian mission participants. What follows is a review of various explanations of the reentry phenomenon related to socio-psychological, expectation, systems, identity formation, and grief theories. College adjustment and support literature, as it relates to student retention, is explored along with reentry services and practices associated with student affairs, international program offices, and collegiate Christian campus ministries or colleges. Student affairs professionals have a strategic role to play by intervening with students returning from short-term international experiences. By providing personal and programmatic support for students readjusting to American culture, we have the opportunity to assist students integrate what they have learned from their global experience into the development of individual identities, values, and behaviors. There are substantive educational, spiritual, social, and psychological reasons given from the literature to justify a level of intervention, unique and appropriate for each individual institution, from student life professionals directed towards supporting college students as they return from short-term international Christian mission experiences. This review highlights the need for more extensive in depth studies seeking to understand the relationship between interpersonal and programmatic support and the learning process of college students as they go through the reentry experience.

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## **Dedication**

To my gracious wife, Caryn

To my wonderful and beautiful children, Cedric, Amelia, Lawton and Josiah

Remember, you have been blessed to be a blessing!

Without your patience, support and sacrifice, this project would not have been possible.



# **CHAPTER 1 - Introduction and Significance**

## **Internationalization of Higher Education**

Internationalization and intercultural learning are strategic values in higher education today (Knight, 2007; McMurtrie & Wheeler, 2008; Schoorman, 2000; Scott, 2006). Whether it is increasing the recruitment and retention of international students to domestic campuses in the United States (McMurtrie, 2008) or the promotion and coordination of increasing numbers of American university students in international experiences (Blum, 2006; Brody, 2007; Farrell, 2007), universities are intentional about preparing students to live in, work in, and contribute to a diverse and changing world (Curran, 2007; DeFleur, 2008; Harris, 2008). Overseas experiences result in increased awareness of world issues and the role the United States plays in the world (Walling, Eriksson, Meese, Ciovica, Gorton, & Foy, 2006). In 2005, the federal Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program recommended a national effort to dramatically increase study abroad by U.S. students, with special attention to expanding opportunities in the developing world (Dessoff, 2006), and in March 2009 the United States Congress introduced the Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act. This Bill in Congress, if enacted into law, would in 10 years assist at least one million undergraduates annually to study abroad, encourage underrepresented students to study abroad, and expand non-traditional study abroad locations (Senators Durbin and Wicker Introduce Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act, 2009).

### **Traditional and Emerging Means of Growing Internationalization**

Study abroad experiences are one of the most recognizable forms of experiencing the world during the university years, even though less than one percent of American college students study abroad each year (Niesenbaum & Lewis, 2005). Increasingly, university students are participating in more than study abroad international experiences, and many are entering the university already having participated in international experiences. Voluntary experiences such as international service learning experiences (Niesenbaum & Lewis, 2005), humanitarian or advocacy trips, international exchanges through civic groups like Rotary (Rotary Scholarship Helps College Students Study Abroad, 2006), or religiously-motivated, short-term mission trips

(Green, 2008; Rice, 2006) are increasing student options for international experiences and intercultural learning outside of direct university programming.

Many of these alternate forms of international experiences bring students into closer proximity to host cultures and provide increased exposure to socio-economic and potentially traumatic issues, including extreme poverty and disease (Barbour, 2006; Eriksson, 1997; Jeffrey, 2001; Rice, 2006). Mission trips can provide forums that challenge college students' worldviews (Tuttle, 2000). "Culture shock" is described as the experience of tension and alienation that arises when students attempt to function within a different culture and its accompanying values and belief system during their international experience (Lester, 2000). Over time, the stress of culture shock subsides as the student becomes acclimated to the host culture. As the international experience draws to a close, there is an anticipated longing by the participant to return to the culture of origin or "home." This desire to return creates expectations in the participant of what the transition process into the home culture, called "reentry," will involve. Many students are not prepared for the reentry stress that is associated with adjusting back into home culture life (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). The reentry and adjustment experiences for college students can be abrupt without proper social support (Eriksson, 1997). Research on American students returning from study abroad indicates that length of stay is not related to the extent of reentry shock, indicating that it is possible for short-term international experiences to have substantive reentry shock (Walling et al., 2006). Gaw (1995, 2000) presented evidence that suggests there is a significant population of American college students that return from study abroad that experiences significant or severe characteristics of reentry stress. Gaw's research identified the following percentages of students reporting various reentry symptoms: loneliness by 30.3 percent; issues in adjustment to college by 27.3 percent; alienation from others by 24.2 percent; depression by 22.7 percent; trouble studying by 22.7 percent; academic performance stress by 15.2 percent. With an increasing number of institutional strategic plans calling for increases in the number of students participating in international experiences (Farrell, 2007), it stands to reason that student affairs will encounter an increase in students experiencing reentry issues upon return to their institutions of origin. With that reality, student affairs professionals can be uniquely positioned to address reentry issues and enable student success as they move towards graduation. It is this reentry phenomenon within the college student population that participates

in short-term Christian international mission experiences that is the subject of this literature review.

## **Description of the Problem**

What have student affairs units in general and international programs offices specifically done individually and programmatically to serve student needs as they go through reentry? There is considerable training and institutional time and resources given to preparing students for international experiences but there are both limited resources and programs available to help returnees manage their reentry adjustment and any accompanying emotional distress (Lester, 2000). Dr. Bruce La Brack cited idiosyncratic responses to international experiences as the primary reason for the lack of programming by international program offices targeting returning students (personal conversation, May 14, 2008). The prevalent assumption is that international experiences are experiences that yield largely positive results for the majority of participants. There is little general expectation that returnees should have problems being back in their home and little awareness that they do (Lester, 2000). But as expressed above, there is a potential for subsequent problems for college students returning to the university. With the potential increase in numbers of students participating in study abroad experiences, even with the percentages of students exhibiting problematic reentry and readjustment issues remaining the same, current student services will continue to be stretched. It is important that all student affairs professionals be aware of ways to assist students in their readjustment to the university after international experiences. An ounce of prevention may very well be worth a pound of cure.

## **Significance for This Project**

### **Volunteer Short-Term International Christian Mission Experiences**

For centuries, Christian missionaries have traveled around the world sharing the news of salvation through Jesus Christ and bringing humanitarian aid to millions of people (Walling et al., 2006). Tuttle (2000) described the term short-term missions as experiences lasting from two weeks to one year in length. Friesen (2004) defines the time period for short-term mission experiences as being anywhere between 2 to 12 weeks. One of the areas of greatest growth has been increased participation in short programs, usually consisting of eight weeks or less (Kehl, 2006). Short-term international Christian mission experiences for Christian students have

increased dramatically over the past 20 years due to increased technological advances in transportation and affordability (Walling et al., 2006). Researcher Margaret Lyman of Fuller Theological Seminary reported, “The short-term mission phenomenon has grown from approximately 250,000 to one million per year since 1992” (Lyman, 2004, p. 9). The sociologist Christian Smith (2005) reported after researching the data from the National Study of Youth and Religion that 29% of all 13 to 17 year-olds in the U.S. have gone on a religious missions team or service project, with 10% having gone on such trips three or more times. That is, his data indicate that far more than 2 million 13 to 17 year-olds go on such trips every year (Smith). The short-term trend continues as students grow older. Thousands of college students participate in Christian-based international mission trips annually (Rice, 2006; Walling et al.) A 2004 survey of 120 students involved in the Master of Divinity program at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School found that 62.5% had been on a mission trip outside the United States (Priest, 2005). They traveled outside the country at a rate 60 times the rate at which American undergraduates travel outside the country in the context of academic study. Furthermore, 97.5% of these same students expected to participate in similar trips in the future. American pastors and their congregations are among the overlooked globalizers of contemporary society (Priest). Priest noted that these high numbers were unrelated to any programming from the seminary. He described the phenomenon as activist, populist, and largely unrelated to formal theological education and formal missionary training.

Tuttle (2000) describes the benefits most commonly associated with Christian short-term mission experiences as promotion of a global worldview, hands-on mission experience, increased prayer, increased giving towards missions, recruitment for long-term missions, and personal spiritual growth. In many churches, short-term mission experiences have become viewed as prescriptions for spiritual growth (Tuttle, 2000). Even though anecdotal evidence would seem to support the thought that short-term mission experiences encourage spiritual growth and maturity of participants, little research has been conducted in the area of spiritual growth and maturity as it relates to college students (Tuttle).

Students who participate in short-term international mission experiences often travel to places in the world where there is significant need in order to build relationships and to serve. That service is not without its own stresses and challenges. Christian missionary life is filled with challenges and difficulty (Walling et al., 2006). "On the field, many cross cultural workers have

been exposed to poverty, direct violence, indirect violence, life-threatening illness, car accidents, crime, difficult living conditions, a heavy workload, estrangement from family and a number of other personal difficulties" (Walling et al., 2006, p. 154). International short-term missions are becoming an important aspect of Christian college education where thousands of students are required or sanctioned to participate. Students at many public and private universities voluntarily participate in similar international short-term mission experiences. Short-term mission projects can involve a variety of purposes and functions. Many professionals and some students are motivated to serve in missions related to specific skills such as dentistry, medical work, accounting, teaching English, and other professional services (Friesen, 2004; Tuttle, 2000). College students participate in missions that are centered on physical labor like building or cleaning projects, or sports, drama, music, or other performing arts opportunities in a foreign context (Friesen; Tuttle). Many mission opportunities weave within their service a focus on specific religious activities such as prayer, evangelism, church planting, and general exposure to the Christian mission field (Friesen; Tuttle). Many of these college students prefer to take these international experiences before graduation and during the summer breaks. "College students in particular have joined the short-term missions phenomenon... thousands of students find summers ideal for cross-cultural travel" (Aeschliman, 1992, p. 16 as cited in Friesen, 2004). Yet one of the most neglected components of training relates to teaching participants how to integrate what they have learned into their lives when they return home (Battle, 2000). Typically, these students are often returning to academic life within a couple weeks of their return to the United States. It is reasonable to anticipate that many students returning to the campus in the fall from these trips may be experiencing adjustment issues associated with the reentry process.

## **Statement of Project Focus**

### **Assisting Students Returning From Short-Term International Christian Mission Experiences Reintegrate Into College**

While there is research related to the experiences of study abroad (Christofi & Thompson 2007; Coschignano, 2000; Raschio, 1987), international students (Cox, 2006), Peace Corps (Bosustow, 2006; Hartzell, 1991), international aid workers (Chang, 2009), and missionaries and their children (Klemens, 2008), there is little known about the primary focus for this project: the experiences of students who participate in short-term international Christian mission experiences.

## **CHAPTER 2 - The Student Returns to College**

### **Introduction**

The subject of this literature review is to discuss relevant information characterizing the experience of reentry and adjustment of the traditional aged college student population that participates in short-term international Christian mission experiences. While there was little literature directly related to reentry issues of this specific population, there was related literature that provided a sufficient understanding of the general subject matter. What practices can student affairs professionals exercise in assisting students returning from short-term international Christian mission experiences through the reentry stage and enable a successful reintegration back into their collegiate experience? A four-step journey will be taken through the literature to explore all the aspects of this report.

The first step will involve an examination of the literature on college adjustment. Specifically, exploration into Tinto's adjustment phases and Astin's Involvement theory will provide a backdrop for further exploration into concepts of belonging, community, and self-regulated learning and how it relates to retention of college students. The second step will involve an examination of five different theories or modules related to understanding the reentry phenomenon. Social-psychological symptoms, the W-Curve theory, Expectations Theory, Systems Theory, Cultural Identity Theory, and finally the grieving theory or Global Reentry Adjustment Module will be examined. The third step will involve an examination of frequently-used practices in aiding students reentering the university from international experiences presently utilized in a selection of study abroad or other equivalent student affairs units. Study abroad literature was selected because it involved college students who traveled internationally over a similar time period as short-term mission participants. The fourth step will involve an examination of literature related to spirituality, Christian education, and religiously-motivated domestic urban service experiences such as urban immersion spring break service opportunities.

## **First Step: College Adjustment**

Attending university requires youth to face multiple transitions simultaneously, including changes in their living arrangements, academic environments, and friendship networks, while adapting to greater independence and responsibility in their personal and academic lives (Pittman & Richmond, 2008). Although many view the transition to college as an exciting time in their lives with some anxiety and apprehension being normative, others can experience more long term maladjustment and depression (Hammen, 1980; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). Concern for research on adjustment issues in the college experience is justified even though the majority of students may adapt to college without specific intervention. Recent adjustment research is expanding to focus on the specific adjustment issues of various student populations.

### ***Affecting Retention***

A student's ability to adjust to the school setting helps build his or her positive side of confidence in learning and school behavior (Glicksman & Hills, 1981). Almost half of students who enter college did not complete their degree program in U.S. four year colleges and universities (Tinto, 1993; Young, 1992). About 25% of those who drop out of school do so within the last two years of studies (Tinto, 1993). Therefore, it is worthwhile to consider the factors that lead to the promotion or impediment of school adjustment and consequently reduce students' drop out rate (Lee, Hamman, & Lee, 2007)

### ***Tinto - Stages***

Understanding the development of students who graduate is essential to those seeking to make a difference in student retention. Vincent Tinto (1993) outlined three stages students move through in order to be successful at the university: separation, transition, and incorporation. Students first go through a separation stage where they often move away from their primary social or home environment. Although this can be quite traumatic for students, most eventually move to the second stage called transition. During this stage, students are torn between their old environment and the new one; they may not feel as though they completely belong in their old environments but have yet to find their place of belonging in new environments. Finally, students move into the incorporation phase where they have achieved full membership in the social and academic communities of the institution (Bigger, 2005).



### ***Astin's Involvement Theory***

Astin's Involvement Theory (1985) emphasized that students learn and develop when they become active in the collegiate experience. Upcraft (1995) expanded on this theory when he concluded that the greater the quantity and quality of student involvement, the more successful the student will likely be in college (as cited in Bigger, 2005). This is especially important considering the potential that students returning from short-term international mission experiences may have in feeling confusion and value conflicts. These feelings can result in experiences of isolation and alienation among their peer group. Student affairs professionals can help students become active in campus community in a number of ways, such as involvement in campus clubs and organizations, participation in residence hall programming, or community service (Bigger, 2005).

### ***Summary***

In the past 30 years significant efforts have been made to improve the experiences of students transitioning to the campuses (Bigger, 2005). A variety of campus programs have been developed to meet the needs of unique student populations and most importantly, help them become successful students (Bigger). Student affairs professionals, in particular, by understanding the issues facing today's students, can uniquely assist them in making a smooth transition to the institution and become successful in their academic pursuits. These same skills will serve those same professionals as they aid students returning from short-term international Christian mission experiences into college life.

### ***Belonging***

Adjustment issues of students to college life are well documented (Cecen, 2008; Cushman, 2007; Davig & Spain, 2003; Johnson & Sandhu, 2007; Kariv & Heiman, 2005; Kelly, Kendrick, Newgent, & Lucas, 2007; Laanan, 2007; Skowron, Wester, & Azen, 2004). With all the changes that occur in students' lives during that first year in college, research has determined that belonging described as the initial social adjustment during the first weeks of college life has been linked to higher degree completion probability (Woosley, 2003). Factors such as institutional fit and integration are terms used to describe belonging that assist first-year students in achieving success (Thompson, Orr, Thompson, & Grover, 2007). School belonging has been determined to affect perceptions of social acceptance, classroom participation, academic self-

efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and task value (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007). Student affairs professionals are encouraged to increase their assistance to community college transfer students into the large research institution as they determine how they fit or belong in the larger campus climate (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). International students strive to find a place of belonging in the university context. With this campus population, English language proficiency and the contributions of universities to assist students in the successful acquisition of those skills were significant factors contributing to the positive adjustment of international students studying at universities in the United States (Poyrazli, Arbona, Bullington, & Pisecco, 2001; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006). Students from racial /ethnic groups who are a part of an inclusive and supportive residence hall environment reported a greater sense of belonging to the institution (Johnson, D., Soldner, M., Leonard, J., Alvarez, P., Inkelas, K., Rowan-Kenyon, H., et al., 2007). Whether it is academic preparedness, campus climate, or managing stress, research has produced many helpful intervention strategies to aid students in their adjustment process.

### ***Significance and Appreciation***

Upcraft (1995) noted another common student development theory attributed to Scholssberg, Lynch, and Chickering (as cited in Bigger, 2003). This theory concentrates on students' needs to feel they matter and are appreciated. College personnel must realize that students need support from peers, faculty, staff, and family if they are to succeed (Bigger, 2003).

### ***Family Closeness***

Family closeness has been related to positive adjustment in college (Lee, Hamman, & Lee, 2007). The quality of secure attachment is positively related to a student's academic learning (Kenny, Gallagher, Alvarez-Salvat, & Silsby, 2002), lower levels of psychological distress (Bradford & Lyddon, 1993), and better psychological adjustment (Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991). Late adolescents, whose parents are more supportive and use a more authoritarian parenting style, have higher levels of positive academic adjustment to college (Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline, & Russel, 1994; Hickman, Bartholomae, & McKenry, 2000; Hoffman & Weiss, 1987; Rice, Cole, & Lapsley, 1990). Student affairs professionals should strive to provide support and a reasonable secure attachment to students as they return from short-term mission international experiences.

### ***School Belonging***

Some researchers suggest that attachment to college, defined as the degree of affiliation the student feels towards the university, is linked to better social adjustment (Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2000). Similar to university attachment but rarely studied in college students is a sense of school belonging, sometimes referred to as connectedness to one's school or perceived school membership (Pittman & Richmond, 2008). School belonging goes beyond just identifying with one's school, but includes the individual's perception of fitting in and belonging with others at the same institution (Anderman & Freeman, 2004; Osterman, 2000). University belonging is more than the sum total of individual relationships and it measures the sense of belonging to the larger group (Pittman & Richmond, 2008). Others factor in belonging included a sense of commitment to the institution, an individual commitment to work in a specific setting, and a sense of one's abilities being recognized by others (Hagborg, 1994; Smerdon, 2002). The sense of belonging is linked but exceeds the quality of specific relationships with friends (Chipuer, 2001). It reaches farther to a larger global sense of belonging and feeling connected to a larger community (Pittman & Richmond, 2008). When researchers included both school connectedness and attachment to best friends in the same analysis, only school connectedness was related to student reports of global loneliness (Chipuer, 2001). According to the belongingness hypothesis (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), even though attachment to parents and peers are important to an individual's adjustment, if that individual does not have a sense of connection to a large group or community, they are more likely to experience increased stress and emotional distress. A greater sense of belonging at the university has been linked to perceived professor caring (Anderman & Freeman, 2004), greater involvement in campus organizations, and lower levels of depression and loneliness (Mounts, 2004). University belonging benefits disadvantaged students more so than other student populations (Pittman & Richmond, 2008). By being concerned for the individual growth and connectedness of students following a significant international experience, student affairs professionals can aid students in feeling supported and connected as they make sense of their own identity, meaning, and purpose in response to the global perspective that they have recently experienced.

## *Community*

In his work, Campus Life: In Search of Community, Boyer (1990) identified six characteristics that should define colleges and universities. "Every college and university should strive to become an educationally purposeful community, an open community, a just community, a disciplined community, a caring community, and a celebrative community" (pp. 7-8). Cheng explains how Boyer's definition greatly expanded the meaning of community to include the components reflecting today's higher education environment.

Cheng (2004) examined 26 items concerning student life on a private campus in New York City and discovered at least three aspects of a student's college life directly associated with his or her sense of community. First, students' feelings of being cared about, treated in a caring way, valued as an individual, and accepted as a part of community contribute directly to their sense of belonging. Second, the most negative influence on a student's sense of community comes from his or her feeling of loneliness on campus and deprived feelings of care, respect, and individual value. Third, quality social life on campus enhances a student's sense of community. Social life is not exclusively a small circle of friends who share personal interests, but it also involves effective programming and organized social opportunities (Cheng).

Cheng (2004) reports that student residential experiences continue to be critical components in influencing their sense of campus community, positively or negatively. Even in a campus that is surrounded by all types of cultural activities available from the city of New York, students still called for a residential environment that was conducive to cultural, intellectual, and social interactions with their peers.

Lastly, Cheng (2004) discovered that rituals and traditions related to institutional history and heritage play a powerful role in shaping students' sense of campus community. He concluded that as the student body becomes more diverse and inclusive, colleges and universities should not only celebrate its history and heritage, but also find ways to create new rituals and expand traditions that connect its diverse population.

## *Self-Regulated Learning*

Self-regulated learning involves the learner directing her/his own thoughts, feelings, and action towards the attainment of goals (Schnuck & Zimmerman, 1994; 1998) Academic self-regulation is framed around nine characteristics that are grouped into six key learning processes

(Schunk, 2000; Zimmerman 1994, 1998, 2002). They are (1) self-efficacy and self-goals; (2) strategy use; (3) time management; (4) self-observation, self-judgment, self-reaction; (5) environmental structuring; (6) help seeking (Zimmerman, 1994, 1998, 2002). Self-efficacy refers to a learner's belief that they are able to learn and expect outcomes related to personal consequences of learning (Bandura, 1997). Self-goals refer to setting desired or specific proximity goals for the learning activities (Zimmerman 2002). Strategy use refers to learners planning to use specific strategies for various subjects, while time management refers to the learner's scheduling of their study time constructively (Zimmerman). Self-evaluation is considered similar to self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reaction; therefore, it refers to the ability of the learners to evaluate their study method. Environmental structuring involves restructuring one's physical environment for the efficient use of studying in order to be consistent with one's goals (Zimmerman, 2000, 2002). Finally, help seeking involves choosing models to help learners with the learning task (Zimmerman, 2000). There is significant correlation between family closeness and the six key components of self-regulated learning (Lee, Hamman, & Lee, 2007). Student affairs professionals could strive to aid students returning from short-term international mission experiences to become self-regulated learners over the course of their reentry back into collegiate life by providing significant support.

## **Second Step: Reentry**

For the purposes of the reentry dimension of the literature review, a listing of social-psychological symptoms commonly associated with reentry will precede the discussion of five theories that describe the phenomenon of reentry. Following this presentation there will be discussion of its implications for students returning from short-term international mission experiences.

### ***Definition***

Reentry is described as a disoriented feeling towards the home culture and self as a student traveler returns from another culture excited to share about their experience and encounters repeated indifference to their experiences (Friesen, 2004). The enthusiasm for the international experiences is dulled by the lack of interest displayed by others (Friesen). Critical attitudes towards the home culture and general emotional withdrawal from interpersonal relationships can arise. Martin and Harrell (1996) suggested that psychological readjustment

issues need to be addressed and that reentry is an ongoing process that can last from many months to a lifetime.

### ***Socio-Psychological Symptoms of Reentry***

There are six general areas identified as social-psychological symptoms of reentry (Marsh, 1975, pp. 3-4):

1. Cultural Adjustments (*identity problems, adjustments to daily and personal work routines*)
2. Social Adjustments (*feelings of social alienation, superiority, frustration, as a result of conflicting attitudes*)
3. Linguistic Adjustments (*adoption of speech mannerisms that may be misinterpreted by people at home*)
4. National/Political Adjustments (*changes in political conditions, adoption of new political views*)
5. Educational Adjustments (*absence of professional education programs and support groups, relevance of American education*)
6. Professional Adjustments (*inability to communicate what was learned, resistance to change by colleagues, high expectations*)

Continuing research into the social-psychological symptoms of reentry yielded more categories. In 1994, Harrell added financial concerns as a seventh symptom (as cite by Martin & Harrell, 1996). Together, these seven general areas of symptoms describe the present understanding of reentry characteristics from social-psychological theory.

The social-psychological literature contributes to the understanding of reentry by significantly emphasizing the ongoing process of the intercultural experience (Martin & Harrell, 1996). The identification of variables that affect reentry and additional problems experienced by returnees, along with the emphasis upon both the personal and professional reintegration, brings greater clarity to understanding reentry and the potential issues facing college students as they reintegrate into college academic and social life (Martin & Harrell, 1996).

### ***Social-psychological Theory: The W Curve***

According to Martin and Harrell (1996), the early literature on reentry focused on the social-psychological symptoms that accompanied the returnees feelings of comfort and satisfaction experienced over time with the home culture. Martin and Harrell (1994) stated,

The most important social-psychological theory is the W-Curve theory: The feeling of well-being and satisfaction is posited to change over time. According to this theory, the psychological journey of the sojourner's overseas experience occurs in a predictable U shaped fashion. The sojourner feels a euphoria immediately upon entry into the foreign context, but that euphoria changes into culture shock and discomfort and then finally to a gradual feeling of comfort and fit. (p. 310)

This U shaped pattern of adjustment repeats itself upon reentry. The entire process is therefore referred to as the W curve of adaptation and re-adaptation (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). Reentry can be as intense and sometime more challenging than the overseas adjustment (Adler, 1981; Brown, 1998; Sussman, 2000). Not anticipating this intense experience, the returnee is often not prepared for the extent to which they experience confusion and disorientation upon their return to their home culture and environment (Martin & Harrell, 1996). Understanding reentry as a time-specific event was a significant finding by socio-psychological research. Subsequent research continued to look at traits and discovered that individual background, host environment, and reentry environment variables influenced the intensity and severity of an individual's reentry experience (Harrell, 1994; Martin & Harrell, 1996).

### ***Background Variables***

The following background variables have been identified as significant variables in understanding the reentry process: nationality, age, gender, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, previous intercultural experience, and personality (Martin & Harrell, 1996). The reentry experience can be strongly influenced by an individual or a combination of factors. Younger returnees are concerned how their absence affected the dynamics of their personal relationships upon returning (Martin, 1986a, 1986b), whereas Gama and Pedersen (1977) and Harrell (1994) identified older individuals, like post-university adults and career professionals as being more concerned with professional reintegration (as cited by Martin, 1996). Religion and previous intercultural experiences influence reentry adaptation, but few studies have investigated

these variables. Personality characteristics of the returnee (e.g. openness, flexibility) appear to facilitate transitions in general (Bennett, 1977; Kim, 1988). Two factors almost completely neglected in reentry research have been ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Martin & Harrell, 1996). Individual characteristics can give indication to the potential issues a returnee will experience in reentry.

### ***Host Environment Variables***

The host environment significantly influences a student's reentry experience. Multiple studies indicated that those who are more integrated into the host country report more difficult reentry on return (Harris and Moran, 1991; Sussman, 2000). Adler (1981) found the converse was true for corporate employees; those who resisted contact with the host culture overseas were rated most effective by their colleagues when they returned (as cited in Martin & Harrell, 1996). The amount of interpersonal contact the returnee maintained with friends and family during their international experience affects reentry. Those that maintain regular contact reported an easier time readapting (Brabant, Palmer, & Gramling, 1990; Harrell, 1994; Martin, 1986b). Contact with friends and family over the course of the international experience is helpful to reentry because it allows the returnee to be aware of changes and events at home and therefore causes fewer surprises upon return. Finally, the degree of difference between the host and home environment influences the experience of reentry. The more different the host culture is from the home culture, the more difficult the reentry will be (Martin & Harrell).

### ***Reentry Environment Variable***

Support systems available to the returnee are key variables in reentry. While there is a great deal of literature identifying the importance of social support in the overseas experience (Adelman, Furnham & Bocher, 1986; Kim 1988), only a few studies have systematically investigated this variable upon reentry. Returning students report that their relationships with family and sometimes with friends often provide them with emotional support during reentry (Martin, 1985; 1986a; 1986b; Wilson, 1985); however, colleges and universities often do not provide them with a supportive environment. In regards to study abroad, Kauffman, Martin, and Weaver (1992) revealed that students reported perceptions that their institution was penalizing them by not showing flexibility in transfer of credit, financial aid, and registration deadlines (as cited in Martin, 1996).



### *Expectation Theories*

Expectations play a crucial role in a student traveler's adaptation to new environment and their subsequent return home. The reentry phenomenon is explained by applying the expectancy value theory (Feather, 1982) to a returning student's adaptation process. Furnham (1988) described how the student has expectations about the upcoming reentry experience that are either fulfilled or unfulfilled. Fulfilled expectations result in positive evaluations of the reentry experience and ultimately good adjustment, whereas unfulfilled expectations result in negative evaluations of reentry and a poorer adjustment. Weissman and Furnham (1987) provided this model with empirical support (as cited in Martin & Harrell, 1996).

Expectancy violation theory (Burgoon, 1983, 1992), used originally to investigate nonverbal behavior, further clarifies the role expectations play in shaping the reentry experience. Unlike what would be asserted in expectancy value theory, Burgoon and Walther (1990) describe how unfulfilled expectations do not universally result in negative evaluations and poor adjustment. The basic assertion describes how unfulfilled expectations can be violated negatively or positively. Therefore, Burgoon and Walther assert that expectations that turn out worse than anticipated do lead to negative evaluations, but expectations that turn out better than expected lead to positive reactions and better adjustment (as cited in Martin & Harrell, 1996).

Expectation theory emphasized how the thoughts of the returnee played a critical role before and during reentry. This perspective emphasized the importance of over preparing students for reentry by starting training early on during the beginning phases of the actual international experience (Martin & Harrell, 1996). By addressing reentry issues at the beginning of an international experience, student expectations can be built up and influenced. Martin and Harrell describe how “students are encouraged to explore in depth their personal and professional expectations for their return. They are also presented with first hand accounts of reentry from those who have experienced it (p. 315). The positive outcome in such training is that the student may actually experience a better reentry experience than expected and therefore be positively benefited from unmet expectations.

Topics such as stereotyping, cultural patterns of values and communication, identity and culture shock are explored prior to and on return from overseas experiences in on campus training sessions (Martin & Harrell, 1996). By informing and shaping the expectations of the student throughout the international experience, reentry becomes part of the holistic and ongoing

process of the international experience and not simply a separate event or time period after the returning home.

### ***Reentry Systems Model***

Reentry is part of Kim's (1988) stress-adaptation-growth cycle (as cited by Martin & Harrell, 1996). According to General Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1968), participants experience stress in the reentry environment and learn to adapt through communication with others. This adaptation process then produces personal and intellectual growth. While this approach utilizes much of the same social-psychological variables, the difference is found in the emphasis upon the role of communication, growth in the adaptation process, and the comprehensive nature of reentry (Martin & Harrell, 1996).

According to Martin and Harrell (1996), research has discovered certain characteristics influence the reentry experience:

1. Participant characteristics such as cultural background, personality attributes and preparedness for change
2. Home environment characteristics, such as receptivity and conformity pressure
3. Communication of the returnee, such as communication competence, interpersonal communication with members of home culture, mass communication consumption in home culture, interpersonal communication with other returnees, and mass communications consumption of media from the former host culture
4. Readaptation outcomes and expectations, such as levels of psychological health (free of severe stress, feeling comfortable at home), functional fitness (social skills needed to negotiate daily social life, professional reintegration, utilize skills and experiences in functional ways), and intercultural identity (changes in how one views and portrays their identity, many tend to live with a heightened sense of cultural identity). (p. 315)

Martin and Harrell (1996) stated:

Reentry systems theory emphasizes the importance of communication in reentry and conceptualizes reentry as a complex experience. This perspective incorporates the psychological adjustment notions but is particularly valuable in stressing the role of behavioral fitness and intercultural identity development in the reentry experience. ( p. 317)

### ***Cultural Identity Theory***

The reentry phase describes the tension caused when personal cultural identity is forced to change due to a cultural transition back into the home culture. Cultural identity is the mental framework through which individuals understand their way of being, interpret social cues, choose their behaviors, respond to their surroundings, and evaluate the actions of other people (Sussman, 2000). Culture is defined as a part of an individual's internal framework, reference point for self-definition, and way of ordering social expectations and relationships (Sussman).

Cultural transitions have been found to influence identity formation (Sussman, 2000, 2002). College students reported the experience of personal conflict when they became aware of the changes in themselves and when they compared their home culture to the culture they visited (Raschio, 1987). Because of the unique identity formation and developmental stage that young adult college students find themselves in, it is reasonable to anticipate that international experiences have tremendous impact upon a student's sense of cultural identity (Walling et al., 2006).

The changes students experience while abroad are contrasted with the norms of the home cultures, causing returned travelers to feel that they do not belong, yet awareness of shifts in cultural identity may contribute to the overall growth and functioning of the student (Walling et al., 2006). When people enter into a new culture, their cultural identity changes in ways that go undetected until the student returns home and experiences the negative disconnect and isolation (Sussman, 2000). While identity shifts might be advantageous for a professional relocating to another culture, it may not be advantageous for short-term visitors due to the identity issues related to returning (Sussman).

### ***Grief: Global Reentry Adjustment Module***

This model emphasizes the concepts of self-identity, the role of loss, enfranchising the returnee, and resolution of mourning in order to successfully deal with reentry adjustment issues. Central to Lester's (2000) understanding of reentry is the often overlooked factor of culture loss and associated disenfranchised grief. Disenfranchised grief is described as the absence of recognition of a loss and the absence of support from the social environment to allow public permission to grieve (Meagher, 1989; Rando, 1993). Meagher (1989) additionally states disenfranchised grief as “the absence of others with whom to share any feelings of loss and thus

validate the grief” (as cited in Lester p. 64). A loss of culture is an intense personal loss and when this loss is not acknowledged by society and not supported by one's social group, the returnee would be in a situation of what Rando (1993) described as disenfranchised grief (as cited in Lester). A returnee's experiences of a lack of social support and understanding, a disinterest by others in listening to the returnee, and the assumption by the social group that there is no problem for the returnee meet the criteria for disenfranchised grief (Lester).

Lester (2000) described reentry experiences characterized by feelings of sadness, frustration at not being able to talk about their feelings because no one wanted to hear, restlessness, and a yearning for the host culture. Other feelings included impatience, regret, alienation, ambivalence, boredom, being critical of and feeling irritated by others, feeling detached from family, friends and others who did not have the same experience of being abroad. Returnees emphasized how isolated they felt; the isolation is both from others and from their own feelings which they suppress. This sense of loss tends to remain and increase (Lester).

LaBrack (1985) describes most returnees using language for "home" that describes an idealistic place of love, acceptance, warmth, family, and friends. But this ideal of home does not leave much room for ambiguity and negativity. The inference from many in the home culture is that any problems are due to the returnee, a classic example of blaming the victim. LaBrack (1985) describes how blaming the returnee for any problems they experience upon returning home is culturally more acceptable than viewing the home culture as less than ideal (as cited in Lester, 2000). Lester (2000) cited examples in her research of youth from around the world who had similar non-receptive reactions upon returning with family and friends.

Brocklehurst (1998) and Grabbe (1996) identify other returnees as the one group of people with whom returnees do feel comfortable enough to talk about their feelings (as cited in Lester, 2000). There seems to be an immediate tie, a mutual understanding of shared mixed feelings, and an unspoken permission to break the silence of the suppressed thoughts and emotions when they meet. It is not unusual for returnees to maintain contact with each other over long distances for many years after returning home. This shared experience between returnees illustrates the intrinsic bond between those who have experienced life abroad and know the loneliness of reentry. This situation parallels the experience of many grievers (Lester).

With an understanding of how grief impacts the returning student, Lester created a module to serve returning students and business professionals in their reentry into the home

culture. The three phases that are central to understanding Lester's (2000) Global Reentry Adjustment Module are as follows:

***Phase One: Acknowledgement***

This first phase focuses on the recognition of loss and its associated need to grieve. Recognition is doubly important for returnees because they are disenfranchised grievers. Lester (2000) believes this concept is an important factor in reentry adjustment. Lester continues, In order to enfranchise returnees, one must increase a general awareness of the importance of the returnees' experiences abroad for the returnees and the general public, family and friends. Returnees need to be aware of that part of their identity and cultural values which have changed and developed while abroad, and the possibility of cultural and secondary loss and grief upon return. (pp. 69-70)

Instead of a negative atmosphere which denies the importance of their experiences abroad, which most returnees frequently find, enfranchised returnees would benefit from positive atmospheres in their home cultures and primary social groups.

***Phase Two: Impact of Reentry***

Rando (1993) identifies the second phase as including the process of reacting, recollecting, re-experiencing and relinquishing (as cited in Lester, 2000). Lester explained, Phase Two is called the impact of reentry since the emphasis during this phase is upon returnees sharing their experiences on being abroad and their feelings about being home with their social groups: family, friends, colleagues, peers, etc. Returnees need to react to the separation of their life abroad and identify their psychological responses to that loss. This would be the time when the returnees' feelings, questions and concerns would be expressed, ideally with the permission and enfranchisement of an understanding society. It would be a time when returnees' responses would be accepted as a part of reentry, a time when returnees could express their distress at secondary losses without fear of negative reaction by others. (p. 70)

Participants review their lives abroad in a realistic way and re-experience the feelings and emotions again. Lester (2000) describes re-experiencing as exploring the emotional aspects of associations and relationships developed while abroad. Reexamining can include memories of the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and texture of their international experience. Returnees are

invited to relinquish a part of them; the identity associated with their life abroad, and to accept that this reality no longer exists. Critical to the overall process, Lester describes how returnees need to explore how they experienced themselves while abroad and how this may be different than their sense of self after returning home. As a result, it is expected that returnees would realize they have had myriad cultural losses. Lester continued,

These responses will be very individual and influenced by previous losses and how well those have been resolved. This reacting, recollecting, and re-experiencing are accepted as necessary for mourners in order to relinquish attachments to that which is now lost: those parts of themselves which were their life abroad. (p. 71)

### ***Phase Three: Transformation***

Readjustment and reinvesting characterize the third phase called transformation (Lester, 2000):

Readjusting to life in the home culture can occur when the returnee decides on which ties to the world abroad are reasonable to keep as part of their lives back home. During this process returnees separate reality from fantasy and desires. The returnees would reflect on their sense of self, adopt new ways of relating to their home culture, and accept their present identities that allow them to live adaptively at home without forgetting their old lives abroad. The process of reinvesting their emotional energies in their new lives completes this phase. (p. 72)

Facilitators are encouraged by Lester (2000) to guide group discussion, enfranchise returnees' feelings, recognize the importance of acknowledging all feelings both positive and negative, help create a safe atmosphere for disclosure and discussion, support the returnees' exploration of feelings, and summarize for the group. This process can provide a means for returnees to integrate their intellectual processes with a search for the meaning of their experiences abroad, an integration necessary, according to Rando (1993), for successful resolution of mourning (as cited in Lester). Finally, the length of time needed for returnees to complete the psychological process described in this module will vary individually.

### *Sample Course with College Students*

Relating the module to specific populations, Lester (2000) described examples of how the Global Reentry Adjustment Module could be administered to college students and business professionals. Phase One as it is described with college students follows.

Acknowledgement and increased awareness of issues and the range of feelings associated with reentry would begin before students left for their international experience. This information is presently included in many departure orientations for study abroad, service learning, and short-term mission experiences. By validating feelings, the recognition helps normalize the reentry process for the returnee and family and friends. During the acknowledgement phase, student affairs units, in conjunction with study abroad offices or campus ministries, could plan for students to meet as groups to discuss their experiences. Collaborating with the counseling center may provide valuable insight into a functional setting and provide a skilled facilitator for the meeting. The group meeting could recognize their experiences abroad and returning home. It would also increase their abilities to identify the changes in their value systems and their present needs. There are many creative ways that students can gain skills and increase their own personal awareness. Students could speak in panels about their experiences or speak to potential study abroad or other short-term mission participants. They could be a student mentor or write about their experience in contests or the college newspaper. Students could be asked to share their experiences in related academic settings so they could integrate their knowledge into generalized instruction. But these same students have experienced and can share on art, architecture, languages, music, climates, style of dress, mannerisms, values, international viewpoints, economic and governmental systems, religions, and other cultural characteristics that they experienced firsthand. Students could share with community, religious, or educational groups about their experiences. (pp. 76-78)

The impact of reentry stage, or Phase two, moves students from the public phase of sharing experiences to the individual reflection phase that explores feelings, identifies changes in values, acknowledges feelings of loss, identifying secondary losses, and increasing their abilities to accept themselves and their home culture as changed (Lester, 2000). Continuing the group work model could facilitate this learning process.

The transformation phase, or Phase Three, is the resolution of the process of mourning. The returning student would reach this goal by successfully developing skills from previous phases, resolving the sense of loss, and by reinvesting emotional energies in their lives back home (Lester, 2000). A ritual could be devised by the college that could be a form of a recognition ceremony that could enfranchise the student returning from their international experiences (Lester).

### **Third Step: Common Practices Aiding Returning Students**

This section will list the common practices from existing study abroad, campus ministry, or other equivalent areas related to reentry. A key question that underscores the frequent programmatic practices of study abroad offices related to student reentry is: (Vande Berg, Bosely, Cates, & Quinn, 2009) Do students learn effectively when left to their own devices, or when educators intervene in their learning?

#### ***Research on Need for Reentry Support***

Chappell, Inaldo, White and Pirani (2008) assert that providing post-study abroad support is easier than people think. Their research of returning study abroad participants discovered that 80% of respondents encountered adjustment difficulties and 50% recorded it as one of the hardest things they have ever done. Over 80 % said they were aware of reentry support activities but the vast majority of returnees did not participate in any of those activities. The majority of respondents who did not attend activities said the two primary reasons they did not attend was because they were too busy at the time the events were offered and the type of support was not interesting. Yet 54% of respondents said they sought other avenues for reentry support (Chappell et al.).

Over 60% of respondents to Chappell et al.'s (2008) research indicated their desire for the following ideas one month upon returning: a welcome back session and gathering with friends who are also returning, a suggested reading list, an exit interview with a study abroad counselor, an online or on campus reentry course, and alumni contact information to begin setting up mentoring opportunities. Three months later, a majority of students were open to presenting their experiences publicly, mentoring underclassmen thinking about studying abroad, and working study abroad fairs for recruitment purposes (Chappell et al.).



### *University Reentry Programs*

A semester long reentry course was created at Baldwin-Wallace College as a result of student comments, literature in the field, institutional strategic planning, and a successful pilot program. Activities included a welcome back weekend two days before the start of classes to discuss reentry and adjusting to life back on campus, brown bag lunch lecture series where students could share with the campus community about their experiences, a study abroad photo exhibit, presentations to freshmen about college life and study abroad, and a finals week pizza party (Brooks-Terry, 2001). Successes were listed as engagement with the campus and community, with recruitment of future study abroad students, and the photo exhibits while shortcomings were listed as overall participation (the highest participation was when 20 out of 73 study abroad participants attended the first reentry weekend event), the pizza party and brown bag lunches (Brooks-Terry).

At North Carolina State University, an orientation program for international students was combined with reentry programming for returning study abroad students that involved social/cultural activities in two separate North Carolina communities. The objectives of the program were to facilitate peer groups with international and returning study abroad students, to introduce international students to Raleigh and North Carolina history and culture, and involve the returning students in international activities as quickly as possible to facilitate a successful reentry process (Haber Kern, 1997). The results of the Rediscover North Carolina program revealed a lack of participation from returning students and therefore did not successfully meet the reentry objectives for returning students.

Recruitment and volunteering with international students, international or academic clubs, or the study abroad office were recommended activities at Kansas State University (2009) and Iowa State University (2009) to enable a student to stay connected and supported during reentry from international experiences. Formal programming was not found to be offered at Iowa State for returning students whereas Kansas State offered a one-time reentry workshop.

Common to many institutions are photo, poetry, art, or essay contests that allow returnees to contribute something from their experience for the benefit of the greater institution. Kalamazoo College (2009), College of St. Benedict St John's University (2009), and Willamette University (2009) are three institutions that utilize Bruce LaBreck's "What's Up with Culture?" web site, located at <http://www.pacific.edu/sis/culture/welcome.htm>, as an online cultural

training resource for US-American study abroad students. This online course resulted from Bruce LaBrack's (1993) experience providing a long-term reentry training program at the University of Pacific.

### ***Reentry Conferences***

In a common trend for universities that are geographically close to one another, regional study abroad reentry conferences attempt to aid students in the integration of their experiences into tangible next steps as they begin their job searches (North Central College, 2009; Point Loma Nazarene University, 2009; Towson University, 2009). One of the earliest reported one day reentry conference was hosted by the University of Pennsylvania in 1987 (Martin & McBride, 1987).

### ***Academic Integration***

In recent years, study abroad professionals and faculty have discussed more and more about the need for better academic integration of returnees from study abroad. Macey (2005) described how the educational process needs to integrate the learning from study abroad into the student's whole life perspective - their family, hometown, school, college, and country. For instance, Middlebury College established a series of team-taught, interdisciplinary, and senior seminars that brought International Studies majors from a variety of backgrounds together and guided them in a process of applying their different experiences abroad towards a common topic of study. Macey asserted that relatively few academic integration programs exist that involve re-entry programs or a "for credit" re-entry courses that took direct advantage of the students' time abroad and encouraged the processing of that experience through research. Tuttle (2000) asked students to write one essay related to their faith journey over the summer and a second essay related to how the summer experience was currently affecting their lives as an example of how the reentry experience can be used for academic and faith integration.

### ***International Service Learning***

Illustrating Cox's (2001) assertion that communication technology is changing cultural reentry adjustment, Kansas State University's international service learning teams set up multiple online blogs where team members could post pictures and write about experiences while abroad (C. Lee, personal communication, May 5, 2008). It also allowed a central hub for comments

from family and friends in the United States who were supporting them. Family members were able to leave comments on journal entries and also inform students of happenings back in the United States. This activity helped students maintain communication with their support group during the trip, which allowed for a greater degree of ease in reentry. In addition, they were sharing about the experience while it happened, and those supportive peers and family members were able to share those experiences with them while it happened. This same group organized a reception where they were able to give presentations about their international service trips to their support networks and the larger campus community (C. Lee).

### ***Christian Campus Ministries Reentry Programs***

Several campus ministries at Kansas State University provided opportunities for students participating in short-term international mission experiences to share publicly during one of their weekly meetings during the fall semester (J. Schwartz, personal communication, March 15, 2009). In addition, there were two student gatherings scheduled, one with a local church and another with a local campus ministry, to allow returning summer short-term Christian mission participants to share with each other to offer encouragement and prayer (D. Aumick, personal communication, January 5, 2009).

In both cases mentioned above, there was no programmatic system of reentry guidance for students. Students informally continued to meet and support other returnees after these events sponsored by campus ministries with limited interaction with professional campus ministry staff (D. Aumick, personal communication, January 5, 2009). Regarding the international service learning teams, the final group presentation was the last requirement after the teams had returned home and the only formal event during the students' reentry experience (C. Lee, personal communication, May 5, 2008).

### ***Christian College Reentry Programs***

Institutions with a religious mission also provide a variety of programming options for their students that participate in school sponsored international short-term mission experiences. Priest (2005) commented about the reentry programming at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Monthly meetings with our groups after returning to the United States, newsletters about the progress and needs of the people we visited, and Bible studies on the country or theme of our trip are just a few of the ideas that can translate a one-week experience into

life-lasting changes in prayer, giving, and lifestyle. Sadly, very few short-term mission experiences are currently emphasizing this sort of follow up. This is where I believe we should begin experimenting and seeing how short-term mission participants are changed. (as cited in Fanning, 2009)

Friesen (2004) described how reentry programming can be purposeful, proactive, and intentional by providing opportunities where participants share their experiences, reflect on the application of lessons learned to their home community, and give verbal report to a local youth group and church. Friesen described the longer term follow-up program that includes a mission reading program, weekly discipleship groups focused on reaching out, regular exposure to visiting missionaries, prayer for the people they got to know on their mission assignments, and a reunion six months after returning to further reflect and share how their lives have changed since returning (as cited in Fanning).

### ***No Intervention Needed***

Waller (1999) recognized that reentry programming is sparsely attended by the students it is intended to serve. She contends that students may not attend because they may be exercising their own coping mechanisms and sense of responsibility. While reentry can be a time of disillusionment and disorientation, it is also an opportunity for growth. Students who are exercising their own abilities to manage their lives may inherently be repelled by programming options that imply that they need help. She advocates activities and programming that allow students to showcase their strengths and experiences rather than highlighting their need for intervention. She concludes that many students are already planning their next steps in their career paths and are looking to integrate their experiences and prepare for life after college. One of the most tangible areas for interaction with returning students is around the career exploration and searching process. This is the rationale given for the above mentioned reentry conferences. Regardless of the activities, each student's path will take different turns and require a great deal of one-to-one contact (Waller).

### ***Intervention Needed***

The other side of the study abroad debate about intervention centers on the question of learning. This perspective believes that acting before, during, and after the study abroad experience in an intentional and focused way can improve student learning. Vande Berg et al.

(2009) described how Bellermino University implemented a combination of pre-departure workshops, online intercultural coursework during the study abroad experience, a research paper conducted while abroad, and post-immersion sessions. All these activities are academically weighted and contribute to a student's final grade for the study abroad course and have been shown statistically to increase student intercultural learning scores.

Vande Berg et al. (2009) articulated why there was a need for intervention:

We're finding that Nevitt Sanford's theory of Challenge and Support in education (1966) is especially crucial in Study Abroad. What we found was that students who didn't have enough challenge didn't progress, either interculturally or linguistically. On the other hand students who spent the great majority of their time immersed in local culture tended to regress interculturally – essentially, they were burning out. So what we found we needed to do was to provide a space where the latter group can spend some time reflecting on what they are experiencing with a like-minded group, and where the former (the “bubble” students) will be out of their comfort zone. And when both groups can be equipped with cognitive frames and behavioral skills, they will be more successful. (presenter's notes, slide 42).

The Council on International Exchange offers study abroad programs for students. Vande Berg et al. (2009) articulated that the emphasis in their programming is upon increasing intercultural learning. As a result, observation and reflection are woven throughout their curriculum. Vande Berg et al. (2009) explained,

The core of the class does require a number of writing pieces, the most important of which is a three-part critical incident analysis – this is an incident that happened to them while on the program, which they must analyze using the vocabulary, concepts, and skills that they have learned in the course. (presenter's notes, slide 44).

Vande Berg et al. (2009) described how they start the course with experiential activities, followed by reflection and discussion. They are purposeful in appealing to various learning styles and communication styles. There are some spontaneous and some structured conversation points and various classroom dynamics so that over the course of the class period students will be working individually, in pairs or small groups and as the whole class at different points. Towards the end of the international experience, the program becomes more student directed and led. Lastly, this course offering purposes to grow students in their own understanding of self and

identity, knowledge of culture, and bridging skills that will help in adapting to the new culture. Vande Berg et al. (2009) commented that the Council on International Exchange would likely take a look in the near future at what can be done for students once they return through reentry orientations. The reason this course experience is included in current practices in reentry is because the author feels that the teaching methodologies and overall goals of this program for returning study abroad students can be helpful to student affairs professionals considering how to aid returning short-term international Christian mission students through the reentry process.

#### **Fourth Step: Spirituality, Christian Education, and Domestic Urban Missions**

The following section identified literature that specifically addresses short-term missions, reentry, and religiously motivated service opportunities from religious and spirituality perspectives. Understanding that college students are in the midst of identity development, the effects of a shifting cultural identity should be carefully attended to (Walling et al., 2006).

Johnstone (2006) asserts:

While the impact may be varied for those at the receiving end of a short-term mission/service [or even study] trip, the impact is potentially enormous for the student who is traveling and volunteering. This fact alone is worth the journey. The educational significance of these experiences is vast. The challenges to their world view, their heightened cultural sensitivity, and increased self-awareness brought about by these trips cannot be easily replicated by other experiences. (p.525 as cited in Fanning, 2009).

#### ***Religion and Service***

Long before the contemporary community service movement began, religious organizations on college campuses saw service as both an expression of faith and as a means of overcoming potentially divisive beliefs (Crocker, 2009). Burns (1990) described how cross cultural experiences combined with service help participants leave their own problems behind and begin to develop a broader perspective and worldview (as cited in Friesen, 2004). Crocker (2009) described an example of a compromise between participants of spring break service projects from both secular and religious motivations, the Dartmouth service programs offered opportunity for “reflection.” Not surprising or overly innovative, this agreement works because

almost all service-learning proponents everywhere see reflection as essential and was therefore easy to agree upon (Crocker).

### ***Religious Pilgrimage Similarities***

Howell and Door (2007) illustrated how the language surrounding people's short-term mission experience is like a spiritual pilgrimage. Priest (2006) describes the phenomenon as a Christian rite of passage.

They are like rituals of intensification, where one temporarily leaves the ordinary, compulsory, workaday life at home and experiences an extraordinary, voluntary, sacred experience away from home in a liminal space where sacred goals are pursued, physical and spiritual tests are faced, normal structures are dissolved, *communitas* is experienced, and personal transformation occurs. This transformation ideally produces new selves to be reintegrated back into everyday life at home, new selves which in turn spiritually rejuvenate the churches they come from, and inspire new mission vision at home. But unlike other forms of pilgrimages, these short-term mission trips explicitly intend to serve and help others in distant places. They aim not just for self-transformation, but for change in the places to which they go. (pp. 434-435)

As this quote illustrates, the motivation for students attending short-term mission experiences are not exclusively for self-enrichment or educational purposes, but many volunteer out of a sincere belief that their efforts can help make a difference in the world.

### ***Short-Term International Mission Responses***

Students interviewed by Walling et al. (2006) described how their international mission experience influenced their view of their home culture. Many commented how they viewed their home culture more critically and with anger and guilt (Walling et al.). Negative reactions to the home culture were the most frequently and extensively discussed theme in the research. For example, some students would try and disconnect themselves from common aspects of the home culture or distance themselves from their American identity (Walling et al.). Evidence supports the theory that the cultural disconnect between the experience abroad and identification with the home culture can create a strong affective response during reentry (Raschio, 1987; Sussman, 2002, 2000). The causation is not proven, but when a student experiences a negative view of

one's home culture in the context of a foreign cultures there is a negative affect during reentry to the home culture (Walling et al., 2006).

It is important to note that while short-term mission participants expressed negative reactions returning to their home culture, all of the student participants rated the overall experience as 5 or better on a 7-point rating scale ranging from extremely bad (1) to extremely good (7) (Walling et al., 2006). Participants reported personal growth, increased cultural awareness and understanding of diversity, and increased appreciation of other cultures while fewer participants reported an appreciation for their own culture and the benefits of being American (Walling et al.). Tuttle (2000) discovered that those participating in short-term mission experiences reported higher spiritual growth compared to a control group of college students who did not travel on a short-term mission experience. Students described how they grew spiritually in their reliance upon God in difficult or unpredictable situations. Students also expressed a deeper sense of gratitude and contentment with their lives after the short-term mission experience (Tuttle).

### *Homestay*

From his own review of cross-cultural literature and research, Friesen (2004) determined that one of the most significant factors influencing the resulting satisfaction of a student's cross-cultural experience was the host-guest relationships. Friesen indicated that two variables, whether the student participated in a homestay and the quality of that homestay, directly influenced the student's evaluation of the quality and satisfaction of their study abroad experience.

### *Identity Change*

Short-term mission trip participants experienced a change in cultural identity upon returning due to their experience of facing the realization that that they and those they love were a part of a culture that they felt negatively about (Walling et al., 2006). Short-term mission experiences change people's lives by acquainting them with urgent needs of real people and seeing extreme poverty promoted the formation of new commitments and convictions (Tuttle 2000).



### ***Purpose***

Interestingly, one of the most extensive sub themes from the Walling et al. (2006) research was purpose in the home culture. Students were not entirely disillusioned by their new perspective of their home culture but felt a renewed purpose to increase passion and concern for influencing change among negative aspects of American culture (Walling et al.). John Holzmann (1988), Director of Mobilization Media Department for the Caleb Project and former editor of Mission Frontiers, wrote, “Beyond the strategic service they can provide, short-terms have long been recognized as great vehicles for the personal growth of those who participate.” (para. 5). Holzmann described how short-term mission experiences reshape the participant’s life by opening their eyes to a bigger world than they ever imagined, exposing them to the deep needs of that world, and helping them see their mono-cultural concept of life and reality as being much too narrow. These experiences gave students new perspectives about personal purpose, belonging, calling, and a sense of empowerment and a better understanding of how they fit into God's Kingdom (Tuttle, 2000).

### ***Training and Debriefing***

Interestingly, the most significant difference in how students rated what they experienced and learned as a result of their short-term mission experience was between between student returnees who reported having quality training and debriefing and those that did not report having quality training and debriefing (Tuttle, 2000). Those who reported a higher quality of training and briefing had significantly higher scores on six items related to perception of relationship with God and perception of love and service towards others (Tuttle). Friesen (2004) asserts the need for someone to aid students in their reentry experience:

Short-term mission participants require a new understanding of the challenges they face following their return from missions. They need a new awareness of the dangers of re-entry culture stress, temptation and loss of spiritual vitality. They need to be prepared for a new level of isolation and lack of accountability once they return home. They need to see the benefits of a life coach who can help them navigate some of the potential re-entry minefields. (p. 262 as cited in Fanning, 2009)

Students who participated in an immediate team debriefing where they reflected on what they learned, shared their experiences with other returnees, and reported a youth group and church experienced a less stressful reentry. But those who also participated in longer term follow

up programs like weekly small groups that focused on outreach, prayer and mission reading programs and a reunion six months after returning were better able to reflect and share how their lives have changed since their return (Friesen, 2004). Johnstone (2006) affirmed how learning is influenced by reflection, which is often incorporated in formal programs like debriefing workshops during a student's reentry experience:

While good preparation is essential, for a trip of this nature to have lasting impact, there must be an opportunity for the student to reflect and internalize the situations they have encountered. This reflection must be intentional and facilitated for it to have any enduring significance. (p. 524 as cited in Fanning, 2009)

Underscoring the importance of effective training and debriefing, students who indicated that they received good or excellent training reported a significant increase in their willingness to help others with spiritual struggles and questions, accept people from different religious backgrounds, promote international harmony, go out of their way to show love to others, and be committed to Christ (Tuttle, 2000). Effective debriefing influenced a greater personal spiritual commitment, a more helping posture towards others, and a more accepting attitude towards the differences of others.

Priest (2006) revealed that studies show that short-term missions tend to produce temporary changes only in ethnocentrism, except when sort term missions were "accompanied by cultural orientation and field-based culture learning exercises, there was a marked drop in rates of ethnocentrism" (p. 444 as cited by Fanning, 2009). Some of these training topics included the culture they will be working with and God's perspective on race (Fanning). Simply the exposure to another culture may or may not change the ethnocentrism of an individual, but as Priest (2006) asserts when the "immersion experience is connected with the right sorts of orientation and coaching, significant change is possible" (p. 444 as cited by Fanning, 2009).

### ***Summary***

Johnstone (2006) concludes, "For college students, short-term cross-cultural experiences have the potential for being one of the most formative and 'worldview shaping' pedagogical experiences of their college career" (p. 528 as cited in Fanning, 2009). Considering the psychological vulnerability of this population, it is important for student affairs professionals to be aware of students who are exposed to the stresses of cultural transitions with the potential

feelings of isolation and anger and be a significant part in providing of multiple levels of support (Walling et al., 2006).

### *Domestic Urban Short-Term Christian Mission Experiences*

Domestic urban short-term Christian mission experiences offer comparable insight into the subject of this literature review. Presently, campus ministry organizations mobilize and recruit college students to serve in impoverished parts of urban centers (Richardson, 2008). For instance, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship sent 2469 undergraduates on urban short-term projects in 2006, or 9% of the total number of students involved in InterVarsity nationally, and many of these students represented the most influential leaders in their campus groups. Christian colleges are also sending evangelical students on urban ministry projects. Many churches are also encouraging engagement with urban ministry contexts in substantial numbers, though often for shorter time periods. Even with all this activity, there has been very little solid research on the impact of urban immersion projects on participants.

These urban experiences lead students into encounters with relative poverty and wealth, racial diversity, cultural differences, and justice and diversity oriented theology. Some of the resulting effects of urban short-term mission experiences are similar to international experiences in the fact that group relationships quickly and deeply form and stereotypes towards people they interact with are altered and trust was formed. Richardson (2008) found in his qualitative study of InterVarsity students who participated in the Chicago Urban Project that student stereotypes changed positively in regard to children, the homeless, drug addicts, black males, and urban communities. Not all interactions with the local community during these projects were universally positive. Students who interacted significantly with local populations saw changes in stereotypes but those that did not have meaningful contact through their service did not express changes in stereotypes (Richardson). Interestingly, while students claimed that their lives were changed after these experiences, their relational behavior upon returning to campus did not change, but rather students returned to the same self-segregating patterns of socialized behavior they exhibited before the short-term urban mission. Apparently, students who claimed changed lives were talking about changed perceptions, attitudes, and feelings and not behaviors (Richardson).

As a result of their participation in a short-term urban mission experience, students changed their stereotypes of racial and economic others, leading to higher levels of trust with those same others (Richardson, 2008). They also gained in social bonding with other students and saw an increase in fostering identity-bridging relationships. On the other hand, in the absence of strong follow up structures that supported specific changes in social connectedness, students tended to rejoin self-segregated structures in their university context. Richardson (2008) concludes that orientation and projects can influence people's attitudes and perspectives, but follow up structures are necessary for producing persistent and productive levels of identity and status bridging relationships.

In follow up, Richardson (2008) suggests the focus needs to be on changed behavior and changed patterns of relating. If there are no follow-up structures, research suggests that there will be no behavior change. Developing follow up structures is difficult and takes time, resources, and leadership. Goals need to be manageable, specific, and institutionally supported.

### **CHAPTER 3 - Student Discussions**

The actual words of students who have returned from short-term international mission experiences reveal many of the differing experiences they have had upon return to their home culture and college, even though many family and friends consider it unthinkable that there would be any difficulty coming home. The prevailing attitudes returnees experienced was that of "You are home again, so what is the problem" (Lester, 2000)?

Informal conversations were conducted with seven students from a large Midwestern public university who had participated in a short-term mission over the summer over one of the past two years. Three men and four women participated in discussions using open ended questions in which I asked about their experience participating in a short-term mission experience and their subsequent reentry experience. Geographically, four students traveled to Africa while the other three students interviewed traveled to Asia. The original student names have been changed to retain privacy.

## *What Did You Experience on Mission?*

### *External Differences*

Pam, Tammy, Frank and Lou described being a part of an African Christian religious experience that was much more dynamic and communal than any religious experience she/he had ever before experienced. They also had exposure to Muslim and tribal religious expressions. "I was humbled at seeing Christian people daily who displayed a deeper faith than I had ever seen," recalled Pam (personal communication, April 6, 2009). Chad, Bridget, and Roxy experienced to varying degrees being a part of Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and Christian communities while in Asia.

All student participants commented about the lower socioeconomic status that they encountered while on their short-term mission. Roxy experienced serving in an urban slum community (personal communication, April 4, 2009). All students commented on the experience of being a minority for the first time. Chad, Bridget, and Roxy had limited access to proficient English speakers over the course of their experience. Pam, Tammy, Frank, and Lou had the most contact with proficient English speakers. Pam noted that educated Africans in this part of the world knew English which allowed relational bonds to grow quickly (personal communication, April 6, 2009). Roxy described how it seemed everyone in the village wanted to meet the Americans (personal communication, April 4, 2009). Chad experienced sickness and the hospitality of strangers during his experience in an Asian country (personal communication, April 6, 2009). Students described how these experiences deepened their awareness of the differences between the host culture and themselves..

### *Internal Differences*

All student participants mentioned a lack of control and understanding in their international contexts that pressed them to rely upon their faith more than they had previously in their home culture. Pam described the role her faith played in her experience as comforting her in the midst of tremendous uncertainty (personal communication, April 6, 2009).

Tammy described the paradox of her experience of seeing on one hand, a broken and corrupt society that abused and took advantage of people in the name of religion while on the other hand she witnessed the kindness, faith and generosity of people really striving to make a difference. It was these positive connections of working with native children and community

members that gave her a tremendous sense of purpose and belonging even in the midst of strife (personal communication, April 6, 2009). Roxy described the process of seeing the purpose in her experience. "Once I was able to slow down and not be so consumed with the doing, I knew God had a purpose for me going and being there" (personal communication, April 4, 2009). Internally, students were challenged by the differences experienced in their faith, their own understanding of their personal identity, and the intrinsic value of their everyday work while on mission.

### *Describe Your Reentry*

#### *Challenges from Host and Home Support*

The amount of support from the host and home support network played a significant role in the ability of returning students to adjust positively when experiencing reentry issues. Pam stated that the first few weeks she did not receive a lot of support from friends or family. She involved herself with lots of writing and journaling trying to process all the things that she had experienced on her own.

There were so many changes in my attitudes and how I related to American culture that it was distressing at times. She did not feel supported in those first weeks back. People would listen, but they could not understand. I alienated a couple good friends in the reentry process and honestly wasn't a very nice person for a while that first semester. (personal communication, April 6, 2009).

Being the only Christian in her family, Roxy did not receive support from her family in deciding to go on the short-term international mission experience before the trip and did not express interest in understanding the experience after her return. Roxy recalled that it was only after her return to college that she was able to share about her experience with peers involved in Christian campus ministry (personal communication, April 4, 2009). Chad recalled having few people who would take time to listen. He remembered the turnaround time between RA training and his return into the country was less than two weeks. He remembered the first day of training he chose to wear a t-shirt with the name of the country where he spent the summer prominently displayed in order to start conversations with his peers. He wanted to share, but found himself struggling to figure out how to appropriately share something meaningful and yet accommodating his peers' shorter conversational style (personal communication, April 6, 2009).

Two women described their contrasting their past and current experiences with the host cultures. Tammy described her reentry experience as traumatic due to the experience of being physically stranded away from the host country's airport literally the day that she was trying to leave to return home to the United States. She was very relieved to be home and very glad to leave her host country (personal communication, April 6, 2009). As a result, Tammy's reentry started rocky and left her unwilling to open up to others. Pam interacted with students who were proficient in English and was a part of a mission team. As a result, the issues she faced in reentry were very different. She was open to seeking out others for help in reentry. She mentioned one of the most helpful events was debriefing the summer experiences with other students who were on summer mission experiences after the school year started. She was able to share common frustrations and not feel alienated. Together they were able to redirect their energies in productive ways. She recalled how she continues to keep in contact electronically with the students she met in Africa and she has built friendships with African international students on campus. She admitted that the harder issues were not spiritual but cultural (personal communication, April 6, 2009).

Gifts that are ready to be given to the home support system from the returning student are not always well received or understood. For example, upon returning, Chad recalled how he prepared an authentic meal from one of the countries that he visited for his family. He was so excited to share this part of my journey with them. But the meal was not received with the same level of excitement. The family commented that it was interesting, but that they would probably never eat it again. This comment deflated Chad and discouraged his future attempts to share his experiences in depth with his family (personal communication, April 6, 2009).

For many students campus Christian ministry organizations provide a strong social and spiritual support network for returning students. Pam described how a local campus ministry has served in her own reentry once school started:

The campus ministry has been a very supportive community for me by allowing me to share in small and large settings. They committed up front to work with us and give us as much time as we needed to work through things individually. This community has been a supportive and discerning community as I have contemplated career changes as a result of this experience. (personal communication, April 6, 2009).

Roxy mentioned how there was interest in sharing within the ministries but as people discovered that not all the mission trips were experienced positively, there was awkwardness in the organization as to how to treat those who did not have "good experiences" (personal communication, April 4, 2009).

### ***Negative Experiences with Home Culture***

Student experiences influence the ongoing experienced of students as they encounter the once familiar elements of college life. For instance, upon returning, Tammy described how work and school were very unfulfilling or not worthwhile compared to where she had been. She described herself as very apathetic towards much of life (personal communication, April 6, 2009). Tammy was not willing to talk about the experience to anyone. She completely shut down any feelings and bottled up her experiences. She described herself as mad and angry. She could not and would not pray and she found herself very judgmental towards religious authorities and the church because of her negative experiences with religious authorities internationally (personal communication).

### ***Physical and Cognitive Experiences***

Students described a sense of fatigue that set over each of them as they entered into the school year. While many initially attributed it to the rapid pace of the first months of school, only later did they equate. Roxy described how she did not equate the extreme mental and physical fatigue she experienced during the first month of school with the summer until much later in the semester (personal communication, April 4, 2009).

Expectations of what will be experienced during the reentry phase also influence student perceptions of themselves and the support systems around them. Chad recalls the sending agency leading him through the reentry sessions, but he assumed that the issues would be easy to handle and grossly underestimated the reentry difficulties he would experience. Chad said, "I really did not take the preparations to heart" (personal communication, April 6, 2009). Coming into school, the experience over the summer was so significant and life changing to Chad but as he experienced the lack of time and consideration from friends and support staff about his experience, he began to question the significance of the event overall. Chad felt an emotional distance growing between him and peers that wanted him to continue on with life. He was not ready to "move on" during those first weeks of school. He was still wrestling with how to act in



response to the cognitive dissonance that resulted from recognizing that his identity had changed after this experience and that how he viewed the familiar things of his world had changed as well. (personal communication, April 6, 2009). In contrast, once school started, Tammy busied herself in academics in order to avoid dealing with the emotional, spiritual, and relational issues that arose after the trip (personal communication, April 6, 2009).

### ***Learning Experiences***

The reentry process was described by students as being a time of great change that produced opportunities for significant learning. For instance, Pam shared about her shifting priorities since returning to campus.

While I did not have any academic problems, school definitely was not as important as being with people after this summer. This summer actually propelled me to be more engaged with other students this year because of the closeness I felt on the team this summer. (personal communication, April 6, 2009).

Chad mentioned that connecting his summer experiences with his classes/studies and campus life was very important. "Was it worth it?" seemed to pop up everywhere as he described those first weeks back on campus. What had he learned? How did it influence his perspectives and approach to college life?

I am in the ESL program and was immediately able to connect my cross-cultural experiences with what I was learning in Linguistics. Connections are very important for me. How can I connect what I learned in a seven week trip to my college experience? (personal communication, April 6, 2009).

Chad described how changes were taking place in attitudes and behaviors towards family, materialism, transportation, availability of medicine, education, religion, and economics all were challenged and being reformed (personal communication).

The international and reentry experience influenced students' career aspirations. For example, Tammy saw how the trip did change her career goals to work with children and justice issues and instilled within her a confidence to lead others and contribute what she possesses to the betterment of others (personal communication, April 6, 2009). Roxy participated in the mission experience in order to test out if missions relief work was a career path that she wanted to pursue. Her experience did not compel her to pursue this career any further (personal

communication, April 4, 2009). Pam and Chad described how their experience has influenced them positively to consider career missionary work (personal communication, April 6, 2009).

### ***What Helped You in Reentry?***

#### ***Expectations***

Student expectations played a significant role in determining the stress associated with the reentry experience. After having positive team and host culture experience, Lou recalled how expectations played a critical role in his reentry:

I went over to Africa with the idea of being completely changed because of the idea that these people were so different from me and the situations they lived in were so extreme that it would change me forever. What I found out is that we are all the same. Not identical, due to cultural differences and such. But I realized that just because they live in Africa does not make them a completely different breed of a human. We all connected well because we all have the same ideas, we all have activities, we all have friends, etc. I did not have difficulty readjusting because I went to another part of the world and found it as easy to connect with the people there as I would anyone in America. (personal communication, April 5, 2009)

Frank shared a similar comment about expectations after his positive experience:

I have found that the more aware I am of the differences between two completely different cultures, the easier the transition has been. The burdens of my friends in Africa are lessened by the understanding of our differences. This has helped by making the transition back to my own life focus less on the amount of stuff that we have over others in the world and much more on the focus of the lifestyle of two different people groups. This realization made it much easier not to be completely overwhelmed by the American infatuation with material and superficial things. (personal communication, April 4, 2009)

#### ***Reflection***

Recalling and remembering the international experience while experiencing reentry can enable a better transition experience for students. Chad mentioned his benefit from reflection and integration exercises:

Reflect and connect – Taking the time to consider all that one learns during the trip is important, but it is also important to continue to reflect once one has returned. There is so much going on during the reentry process that it is impossible to simply mentally process everything without some sort of outlet. It is also vital to begin to connect what has been learned to the newfound reality. How is all that has been learned influencing classes and campus life? Overseas opportunities are not just freak/weird/disconnected time periods in life, but important points along the connected narrative thread of one's life. (personal communication, April 6, 2009)

### *Learning with Returnees*

Students described the help that peers and support systems provided them by learning with them, as they struggled with identity, cultural, or spiritual issues. For example, Tammy mentioned that her mother modeled to her helpful behavior during her reentry by being interested in learning with her, seeking to understand, and being patient when she was not ready to process things. Tammy found that it was hard to concentrate on school at times because some days would just be spent processing though the events of the summer whether she planned it or not" (personal communication, April 6, 2009).

Bridget recalled how her friends were better able to grow with her after attending a campus ministry meeting where Bridget and her teammates were able to share about their experiences:

All of us that went on a trip overseas this past summer had a night to share our experiences with others in the campus ministry. That event helped my friends and especially my roommate understand what I was going through trying to get back into the culture here in America. Understanding the countries and the conditions that we were surrounded by was hard to explain without them experiencing it firsthand. I think hearing from more than just myself, helped my friends, that have never been on short-term mission trips, understand the things I was trying to readjust to especially during the first 6 months. (personal communication, April 6, 2009)

Frank described the role of community that helped his own learning during reentry:

I am a firm believer that community is the best way to adjust. Good people around who support you. People that most importantly allow you room to struggle. I believe that the more we tell our experience, the more familiar we become with who we really are. The

more we speak it the more we live it, and the more real it becomes, not only for us but for those around us. (personal communication, April 4, 2009)

The ability to be physically present was seen as essential to students, but the ability of that same support system to learn with the students was something even more significant.

### ***Mentors and Peers***

Frank stated "I have spent a lot of individual time with mentors and close friends. I am constantly processing through the events of the summer. Along with that, I have created a community of peers that have had similar experiences" (personal communication, April 4, 2009).

Roxy recalled how university staff members in student services and in her residence hall who had been on an overseas mission were helpful in asking her questions and letting her talk about the summer experience (personal communication, April 4, 2009).

Chad mentioned the valuable contributions that people who had similar experiences made to his reentry:

There were some who were willing to sit down, listen, and help me continue to process through all that I had learned and was continuing to learn—often times, these people had experienced similar things and understood the need to continue to process and share. I found that providing people the opportunity to share and process all that has been learned is incredibly important. One great outlet is to get people together who have had similar experience. There tends to be more patience and understanding from people like that. (personal communication, April 6, 2009)

Pam recalled the helpful intervention that she received from a friend.

I kept asking myself, 'How do I live here in light of how I lived there?' After about two months this fall, a friend of mine confronted me about my moodiness and told me I couldn't be grumpy all the time. From that point on, I realized that I could not go back to Africa and I needed to move on. These same friends were really cool to let me process, talk, and they helped me live my life again instead of living stuck in between. (personal communication, April 6, 2009)

Bridget mentioned the importance of peers getting together to support one another. "As I came back to campus I think meeting with the others that I knew that went overseas this summer was very beneficial because I could relate to them as I re-entered the culture" (personal communication, April 6, 2009).

### ***Sharing with Others***

Chad suggested that students explore opportunities to share insights with peers and faculty in classroom settings:

The university publicizes international opportunities in many freshmen courses and makes it a point to be a known commodity on campus. Many students who then take advantage of those opportunities return with new insights and understanding, but without any venue to share or process them. I have only experienced one class period in my time in college where a student had a chance to share in class about his trip. Especially in major-specific courses, students have the opportunity to engage and enrich a class with their experiences. (personal communication, April 6, 2009)

Chad also recalled the opportunity to “mobilize/promote” missions/overseas trips and give others the opportunity to share was especially enriching for his reentry:

A good friend was passing through Manhattan while raising funds for her three year term with the OneStory project (a Christian International Mission). I had the chance to organize an evening that gave several friends who traveled to several respective countries during the summer the chance to share with people interested about the gospel of Jesus Christ continuing to move throughout the nations. The invites simply went to people I had relationship with. My friend then shared about the OneStory project and her work with them. (personal communication, April 6, 2009)

### ***Reentry Recommendations***

While experiencing reentry themselves, each student was very willing to share advice to future mission participants on how they can successfully navigate and learn from the reentry experience. Pam suggested that students should not fear struggling because there is a lot that can be learned through struggling:

Be patient with yourself and other people. Get involved in a community that supports you. Friends that did not expect me to be the same person when I returned home were a great help to my adjustment. They gave me time and space for me to personally get to know "the new me" and they were interested as well in befriending my new identity, (personal communication, April 6, 2009)

Chad advised future travelers returning home, "Be prepared for something of a new culture when returning home – Change occurs as one spends time in a different culture and reentry is, in some

ways, another entry into a new culture—it requires the same cultural sensitivity" (personal communication, April 6, 2009).

### ***Summary of Observations***

Students revealed through their comments how they experienced significant differences externally and internally while on mission. The individual experiences of students while on mission was described as having substantive influence on a given student's reentry experience. To the degree that students were able to share elements of their experience with social support networks, the more positive the reentry experience became. These social support systems that involved family, peer, workplace, and educational environments produced either benefits or hindrances to the returning student. Student comments revealed that negative home culture experiences encouraged a greater isolation and emotional distance in students. Students that had positive home culture experiences worked through the same fatigue and challenging cultural clashes common to returning students, but they were more persistent in integrating what they experienced into their personal priorities, values and career aspirations while they transitioned back into collegiate life. Student expectations before, during, and after the mission experience influenced the self-described quality of the experience. Individual, mentor and peer-to-peer reflection exercises and opportunities to share within the context of supportive relationships with upon a student's return was described as a help to the learning and integration process of making individual meaning of the international experience. Students described how valuable support systems and dialogue are in the reentry process and affirmed the role student affairs professionals can have in intervening and supporting them.

## **CHAPTER 4 - Conclusions and Recommendations**

After reviewing the four step journey through the literature and student comments regarding the reentry experience after short-term international Christian mission experiences, many conclusions can be drawn. The first step involved the student adjustment literature. Student comments about their experiences trying to share about their mission trip with others appears to be similar to the general excitement and anxiety that Pittman and Richmond (2008) identified with the multiple transitions that accompany the start of the college experience. Tammy

described it was hard to focus and adjust to the college setting because work and school were so unfulfilling and not worthwhile compared to the experience she returned from. Glickman and Hills (1981) asserted that a student's ability to adjust to the school setting has direct implications for confidence in learning and completion of their degree program. Student comments appear to be congruent with Tinto's (1993) stages of student success. The first stage, called separation, was described as the experience of distance between the returning student and their support systems. The second stage, called transition, was described as events and networks of friends who aided in the reentry process. The third stage, called incorporation, was described as integrating what was experienced into the attitudes and behaviors towards family, materialism, economics, religion, and education. Students described how belonging and community served a vital role in their reentry process by providing peer and emotional support. In order for students to have a sense of campus community, student affairs administrators should strive to build a community that (a) has an open environment where free expressions are encouraged and individuality is accepted and respected, (b) engages faculty and students in teaching and learning, (c) provides an active social and learning environment in residence halls, (d) fosters positive relationships among ethnic and cultural groups through programs and student activities, (e) celebrates traditions and heritage of the institution, and (f) provides assistance to students when they feel lonely or depressed (Cheng, 2004). Being involved in campus life provides opportunities for students to network, share about, and be appreciated for their mission experience with others. Lastly, student comments about their reentry process illustrated the six learning processes necessary for self-regulated learning.

The second step involved the five theories discussed in the reentry literature. Student comments appeared congruent with the socio-psychological symptoms of reentry. Comments revealed an intensity of the reentry experience at the beginning that eventually lessened in intensity, just as the W-curve predicted. The quality of the host environment afforded a positive reentry experience for Frank and Lou while it provided a negative reentry experience for Roxy and Tammy. Chad's comments appear to support the expectation theories when he recalled how the sending agency led him through the reentry sessions, but he expected the issues would be easy to handle and grossly underestimated the reentry difficulties he would experience. Frank mentioned the fact that he has been communicating with many mentors and friends during the time of reentry and illustrates how communication is a key variable in the adaptation process according to general systems theory. Chad's description of the meal prepared for his family

described the internal personal conflict that arose, as identity theory explains, as his new cultural identity encountered home cultural values. Comments from Pam, Roxy, and Chad identified practices (e.g. spending time together, being patient in listening, asking questions, acknowledging the trouble adjusting back) that are helpful to students going through the grief process were illustrate by their peers and mentors who had previously participated in mission experiences. Student responses did illustrate characteristics of disenfranchised grief due to the lack of permission they sometimes received from others related to feeling sad or remorseful about losing what they had experienced during the mission. Most people suffering from loss do not need psychotherapy according to Piper, McCallum, and Azim (1992), but the concepts of individual and group therapy can be utilized in reentry adjustment programs (as cited in Lester, 2000). McKay and Paleg (1992) describe individuals returning from various international experiences as sharing similar experiences upon their return that could legitimize a group setting for skill development and educational functions (as cited in Lester). Lester highlights the fact that groups are also time and cost-effective while providing empathy and support. Formation of a group could confer immediate recognition of a shared status with other returnees. The groups could become a means for enfranchising the returnees who feel a sense of loss and disenfranchised grief. Group cohesiveness could be very supportive of individual returnees as they comfort their losses and redefine themselves (Lester).

The third step involved the investigation of frequently used practices recently or currently in use to aid college students through their reentry experience. Various tools are being utilized to facilitate student learning following an international experience and during the student's reentry process. Some student comments expressed a desire for greater intervention during the reentry process from others while other comments described how students were functioning and processing through reentry well on their own. The investigation of frequently used practices revealed a similar tension between facilitating students through the reentry process or equipping students to manage their own reentry experiences. Student affairs professionals have a unique role in promoting and facilitating learning at the university. They seek to challenge and support students holistically during their collegiate experience. The opportunities for learning through challenge and support with students are sometimes planned for and other times spontaneous.

The fourth step involved the examination of literature related to spirituality, Christian education and domestic urban mission experiences. Students described hardships while on



mission and during reentry but all expressed an overall satisfaction with the mission experience that echoed the literature describing the negative and positive effects of short-term missions. Student comments described how a greater sense of purpose and yielding to God's provision resulted from their short-term experience that also impacted they applied their faith to their reentry experience. Comments also were very congruent with the descriptions of religious pilgrimages. From their comments, similar to the problem of urban missions without follow up, students did not describe significant behavioral changes as a result of their short-term experience. For students, college is a time of tremendous transition from borrowed parental values and faith to personally owned values and faith (Tuttle, 2000). The value of seeing and doing for one's self and making one's own cognitive, behavioral, and attitudinal choices about the issues of life may be especially powerful and enduring at this stage of life (Tuttle). The short-term mission experience involves a mixture of autonomy, humility, sacrifice, risk and reward, along with visual images and relational experiences that may last a lifetime (Tuttle).

Discussions with students revealed three strong recommendations for student affairs professional working with returning students. Students commented about the benefits of a supportive environment in helping them through their reentry experience. First, students affirmed the creation of space for sharing with peers and potential mentors. Student affairs professionals can help create welcoming and supportive spaces on the campus where students can freely share and learn from others who have also traveled abroad. Secondly, student commented about the encouragement they received from others when their international experience was validated and recognized as valuable. By having a student publically validated for having a significant cross-cultural experience can encourage greater student disclosure across multiple support settings. This disclosure can result in learning opportunities for students to integrate their experience into their personal, spiritual, collegiate, and professional lives. Thirdly, by creating space and purposing to intervene, there is an increased opportunity to mentor students returning through the reentry process. Students did not express a need for crisis intervention, but all affirmed the presence of people in their life that fulfilled the mentor role. Students who were mentored by professionals, or college seniors who had participated in short-term missions previously, expressed a positively reentry experience with those mentors. Those who did not have access to experienced professionals or older peers, commented about how their friends or family did not always know what to say or questions to ask. Space, validation, and support from mentors were

recommendations from student conversations about how a social support network can positively aid students returning from short-term international Christian mission experiences.

### ***Recommendations for Practice***

Chappell et al. (2008) contend that reentry support is not just about assisting students through culture shock but also providing support for their psycho-emotional adjustments, academic reintegration, professional development, and opportunities for continued social action and civic engagement. Student affairs professionals have multiple opportunities to engage returning students in individual and programmatic ways.

#### ***Individual***

Student affairs professionals can serve college students returning from short-term international Christian mission experiences by understanding that the reentry process can bring substantive socio-psychological stress to students. This stress can impact a student's emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal functioning. It is appropriate to be mindful of mourning and the concept of disenfranchised grief as described by Lester (2000) when interacting with students returning from any type of international experience because of how quickly students will stop sharing about their grief related feelings when they perceive that it is not received or validated, as Chad illustrated in his comments about how people wanted him to move on but he was not ready to do that. With the tremendous activity on the college campus at the start of the fall semester, it would be very easy to neglect this population of students as they return to campus.

Student affairs professionals should be aware of changes that happen over the summer because of the potential it has to change the outlook of a student's priorities, education, and career aspirations. By working with students in reentry, there is a learning opportunity to help students see and define themselves and how they see and define the world around them.

#### ***Programs***

The following recommendations can be applied to programmatic elements that could welcome back student missionaries as well as other student international travelers (Walling et al., 2006, p. 162):

1. Educate student missionaries about stresses that may accompany cultural transitions and prepare students for the possibility of shifts in cultural identity.

2. Inform students that reentry is part of the cross-cultural experience and let them know that the experiences of social isolation and negative feelings about their home culture may be a normal part of their experience when they return.
3. Strive to help students achieve an integrated cultural identity, one that encompasses negative and positive components of both home and host cultures.
4. Provide support during reentry to ease possible feelings of isolation and allow students to discuss their experiences.
5. Frame the short-term mission experiences within a large context that continues to explore the student's experiences purpose, belonging, and calling and give students opportunities to utilize personal growth and knowledge acquired on the trip.

As Chappell et al. (2009) illustrated, the type and timing of reentry activities influences the perceptions students have towards the helpfulness of planned activities. Like other areas of student affairs programming, it is important to know what is relevant and impacting to the target audience.

In Brown's (1998) research with returning students, she pointed out the students' desire for more reentry support services. Some students viewed the return to campus as a setback in their personal development and were not looking for assistance. In order to assist students in viewing their return to campus as an opportunity for continued growth, more effort could go a long way for students. They expressed a desire for more than a one time get together dinner or reception. They did not perceive the need for more extensive support or discussion groups but rather assistance in facilitating networking among returning students so that they might provide social support to one another whenever the transition back to campus became particularly challenging. A reentry mentor or buddy system might provide the extra support students want without further taxing the resources of student affairs professionals (Brown).

Welcoming back returning students into university life through the public acknowledgement of their travels and experiences can aid in the validation of individual student experiences and help create a supportive atmosphere. While the motives for study abroad, international service learning, and short-term international Christian mission experiences may be different, there is a shared cross-cultural component that can build relational intimacy with returnees and aid in their reentry by providing greater peer support. Residence Halls, academic clubs, campus ministries, and international offices could all host a "Bringing the World back to

Campus" event of student networking and sharing stories. A comedian or a world traveler could be invited to attract students to a reentry event and talk about the adjustment back to campus in an engaging way. The emphasis is to be upon networking returning students with other returning student travelers and potential mentors. Workshops can be offered periodically, but they have to be relevant and packaged in ways that students will receive it. Using technology or other social media to highlight or bring up issues should be explored to determine its value in aiding students in reentry. Students want to share their stories of international experiences and for the sake of personal growth and community growth, student affairs professionals can aid in the creation of new forums or lead in the integration of existing resources, like social networking tools, where students can share about the world that they experienced while on mission experiences. While at religious clubs or other religious settings, students returning from mission experiences can articulate more specifically about the relationship between their faith and their travels. While in the greater university setting, students should feel free to articulate the reasons and motivations for their mission experience as would any other student would share about their reasons and motivations for serving or studying abroad and invite subsequent discussion.

When considering the role of student affairs professionals in addressing the spiritual dynamics of returning short-term mission participants, it is important to remember that giving space for and asking open-ended questions of students to talk about life purpose and the relationship between their religious beliefs and the experiences they encountered during their mission or while back in school is merely helping the student clarify what meaning is being attached to the experiences. There is a similar parallel to encouraging students to integrate their international experience into their academic pursuits. While student affairs professionals do not give direct classroom instruction to most of the students they serve, they do collaborate with faculty when appropriate to better aid students in integrating life and academic issues. In a similar way, student affairs professionals can collaborate with religious life or campus ministry staff to best provide support and resources to students asking religious questions.

When struggles confront a student while they are at the university, the primary responsibility of student affairs is to support and work with them through that moment. Rarely do student affairs professionals draw a line separating their support of a student exclusively in the academic area of their life. Learning often involves struggle and the primary question is how student affairs professionals can aid the learning of students returning from short-term

international Christian mission experiences by providing support during the reentry experience and reintegration into collegiate life.

There are substantive educational, spiritual, social, and psychological reasons given as demonstrated in the literature and in student responses to justify a level of intervention, unique and appropriate for each individual institution, from student life professionals directed towards supporting college students as they return from short-term international Christian mission experiences. The opportunities for learning and the continued identity and skill development of students are not to be overlooked.

### ***Recommendations for Further Study***

Continuing research is needed into the adjustment issues of various student populations returning from international experiences during their college career. Although earlier studies on reentry have lamented the lack of rigorous quantitative studies, Martin and Harrell (1996) suggest that perhaps it is time for more qualitative, in depth studies that describe specific problems encountered by a variety of returnee groups. This literature review has tried to substantiate the justification for continuing to research the reentry of college students who participate in short-term international Christian mission experiences.

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