

Resources for Gilman Scholars who returned to the U.S. early due to the impacts COVID-19

Returning to your home country after living overseas can be challenging in and of itself. Unexpectedly returning early can be even more difficult because you haven't had the opportunity to prepare yourself. When you combine an unexpected early return with stressors like uncertainty in housing and the global health situation, these challenges can seem overwhelming. In this packet, we've compiled resources to help you reflect on your experience overseas (however brief it may have been), cope with stress and anxiety, and articulate what you learned from your program and early return.



We also recommend reviewing [this webpage](#) and the Gilman Scholarship Program's and a comprehensive resource developed with input of many Gilman Scholars, [Returning From Abroad Resource Packet](#) for ideas on coping with reverse culture shock, highlighting your overseas experience in your career search, and staying engaged with Gilman.



Exercises for Reflection

Reflection Questions

Consider the following questions as they relate to your experience abroad and your early return. If you kept a journal or blog while abroad, we recommend that you continue to write updates for at least a month after returning home. This can help you process the emotions you're dealing with during the re-entry process.

1. What was the most impactful experience of your study or intern abroad program?
2. What opportunities that you had abroad are you most thankful for?
3. Most people adjust to another culture [on a curve](#), with high points and low points. Where were you in the cultural adjustment process (ex. honeymoon phase, culture shock, adjustment, adaptation) when you found out you had to return to the U.S.? How might this impact the way that lens through which you'll view your experience in the future?
4. What were the most meaningful relationships that you developed abroad? How do you plan to maintain those relationships? For tips on staying connected, watch [this brief video](#).
5. How are you planning to extend your exchange experience now that you are back in the U.S.? Examples could include conducting research virtually, completing language courses, maintaining connections with classmates and friends, or scheduling weekly check-in calls with your host family.

How do I feel?

On the graph below, draw how you've been feeling since you first found out that you'd be returning early to the U.S. Your line will likely include several highs and lows. For example, how did you react when you had to say goodbye to your friends from abroad? How did you feel when you first saw your family back home? How are you feeling now as you are settling into a new routine?



What did I accomplish?

If your program ended early in a way that you were not expecting, it can be easy to dwell on everything that you were planning to do and forget all that you were able to do and see while abroad. Use the table below to brainstorm what you accomplished during your time overseas and what was cut short.

What I accomplished	What I wasn't able to do on my program
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ex. Perform independent research, cook dinner for my host family, intern at an international company, improve foreign language skills, make international connections, visit the Louvre Museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ex. See the Great Wall of China, become fluent in a foreign language, publish results of independent research project, complete international service learning hours

Help for an Unexpected and Early Re-entry

Dr. Cate Brubaker of Small Planet Studio has developed a free reflection toolkit and private Facebook group for students who had to unexpectedly return to the U.S. during spring 2020. To access these resources, visit [this page](#).

Staying Connected to Your Host Culture

One way to maintain a connection with your host culture is to stay up-to-date on how your host community is combating the ongoing health situation. Find local news outlets or radio stations online that are reporting on the crisis from the perspective of your host country. What is similar to the American response? What is different? What are some examples of positivity or hope in your host community? This is also a great way to keep up with or improve your language skills!

During the crisis, many museums around the world have made their exhibits available online. If there were activities that you were particularly excited for, research if they might be available virtually.

Watching television or movies from your host culture or in your host language is another way to keep busy and stay engaged. Try scheduling a Skype or FaceTime date with a friend from abroad to watch together!

Connect with Gilman Scholars

Returning unexpectedly or evacuating from overseas is a challenging experience that most people have never experienced. In this uncertain time, it can be helpful to connect with others who are familiar with the challenges you're dealing with. We recommend connecting with other Gilman Scholars to share coping strategies. You can connect with Gilman Scholars and Alumni and in these closed [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) groups. Keep an eye out for future networking opportunities coming soon!

Follow-On Service Project

Your Follow-on Service Project can be another way to cope with the challenges of re-entry to the U.S. You have a unique perspective to share with students who are considering studying or interning abroad after a pandemic. What did you learn from your experience? Next time you travel abroad, what might you do differently? What advice would you share with a first-time international traveler? If you need to revise your original project proposal to better suit your readjustment process, you can find instructions for doing so in your [Gilman portal](#).

Craft Your Own Narrative

Evacuating from overseas with little to no notice is a stressful and emotional experience. However, it

is also one that requires adaptability, resilience, and problem-solving skills. Keeping a level head and being able to make decisions in the face of a crisis is an important skill and one that can be desirable to employers. Reflect on the following questions to evaluate what you learned from your unique experience. For more information about leveraging your overseas experience in your career search, including sample resume bullet points, cover letters, and interview questions, reference the [Returning From Abroad Resource Packet](#).

What skills did you learn from having to suddenly leave your host country?

Check all that apply.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to function with a high level of ambiguity | <input type="checkbox"/> Flexibility |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to function outside of comfort zone | <input type="checkbox"/> Independence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to handle difficult situations diplomatically | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adaptability | <input type="checkbox"/> Perseverance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communication (oral and written) | <input type="checkbox"/> Problem-solving |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communication despite language barriers | <input type="checkbox"/> Quick-thinking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crisis management | <input type="checkbox"/> Resilience |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Resourcefulness |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-reliance |

If you had to do the whole situation again, what would you do differently?

How do you feel you handled this crisis? In the case of a high-pressure situation in a future workplace, what did you learn that may be applicable?

Coping with Stress and Anxiety

Early return or evacuation from your host country is stressful and emotional. If you are struggling with processing all the emotions that come with this uncertain time, please contact a mental health professional for support.

General Tips

Exercise

Getting your body moving can help you deal with the post-abroad blues and get your mind off your stressors. Many gyms and exercise classes are offering free or discounted rates for virtual memberships. Explore what local businesses in your area are doing to support patrons in staying healthy and active. Alternatively, you can search for follow-along exercise classes on YouTube, Instagram Live, or Facebook Live. Even stepping outside for a run or a walk can help take your mind off everything else that may be going on in your life.

Practice mindfulness

Mindfulness refers to accepting where you are in the present, without worrying about where you should be or what's coming next. Remember to care for not just your physical health, but your mental health as well. Calm, 10% Happier, The Mindfulness App, and Headspace are just a few examples of apps that offer guided meditation at no cost or with a free trial. Many yoga studios are also offering free or discounted virtual classes, so be sure to check out what studios in your area are offering.

Stay in touch with friends and family

Just because you're social distancing doesn't mean you need to be lonely! Catch up with friends and family over virtual hangouts. Set up a group call with your family, FaceTime with a relative you haven't seen in a long time, or arrange a virtual happy hour with your friend group from abroad.

Keep your mind active

Use your new free time to your advantage! Try out a new hobby or explore a new subject in an online class. DuoLingo, Babbel, and Rosetta Stone are all offering free or discounted rates for online language learning courses.

Disconnect

While it is important to stay updated on the global situation and necessary precautions, be careful of a media overload. Set aside some time every day to disconnect – put your phone away, close your

laptop, and turn off the news. Switch gears by reading a book, cooking, playing a musical instrument, or working on a craft or home improvement project.

Additional Resources

Please explore the resources below for additional perspectives on returning to the U.S. during this global crisis. This list is by no means exhaustive, and we recommend contacting a mental health professional for additional support that may be relevant to your unique situation.

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