



# \* Making Meaning and Developing Emotional Resilience

**Ideas for US Study Abroad programmes**

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As part of a panel presentation with Janice Abarbanel,  
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From the 2012 Spring Survey of the American College Health Association (surveying 74,000 students)

At least one time in the past year:

- \* 30% of students felt so depressed it was hard to function
- \* 45% reported feeling hopeless
- \* 51% experienced overwhelming anxiety
- \* 86% felt overwhelmed by all they had to do

**\*Some statistics**

- \* In the context of brain development research, combined with increasing numbers of students with diagnosed mental health conditions on campus (and studying abroad)
- \* We need to plan to support these students
- \* Is basic emotional resilience missing for many children of the 'millennial generation?'
- \* Teaching students strategies to manage stressful emotions related to cultural transition **supports their successful classroom/experiential learning outcomes**

**\* Is this really our job?**

- \* Study Abroad/Away mirrors the life challenges of this period of growth in an almost **super-charged** way, which is why it is so powerful
- \* It can be an **intense** experience which is both **exhilarating** and potentially **overwhelming**
- \* **Structured staff support** is more effective than a 'sink or swim' approach
- \* Managing emotions and learning to deal with significant change are important **life skills**
- \* Ultimately, these **skills** underpin **successful engagement with the academic programme**, which is our main task

\* **A shift in perspective**

- \* 'It's not always brilliant all of the time'
- \* 'Normalise' reflection on feelings and discussing personal aspects of adapting to a new culture
- \* Use orientation, check-in meetings, newsletters, dinners/socials, re-entry sessions, etc and a variety of activities and messages
- \* Utilise online learning platforms where possible
- \* It's not all/only about counselling...

# \* Mental Health & Wellness Strategies

- \* IES Abroad has developed the CORE programme
- \* Other schools/organisations also have similar integrated programmes
- \* Cohort groups (no more than 20) meet once per month, led by a trained staff or faculty member
- \* Discussion can be about
  - \* setting personal goals
  - \* cultural observations and ‘pet peeves’
  - \* sharing strategies to adapt, providing context for their experiences
  - \* as well as discussing re-entry

\* **An integrated  
approach**

- \* It does require some staff training and resources to successfully run a programme like CORE
- \* Training staff to *facilitate effective group discussion* in an informal setting is important
- \* Making staff feel comfortable with the idea of talking about feelings can be a challenge in itself - putting it in the context of brain development and learning helps
- \* Students that participate really do enjoy the opportunity to discuss and reflect and evaluate the program positively

\* **Staff training and  
resources**

- \* John Lucas “Overstressed, overwhelmed and over here” *Frontiers* journal
- \* Engage Abroad blog & book
  - \* <http://engageabroad.com/>
  - \* Carol Madison Graham “Coping with Anti-Americanism: A Guide to getting the most out of study abroad”
- \* University of the Pacific website: “What’s Up With Culture?”
  - \* <http://www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/>
- \* CARLA (University of Minnesota) *Maximising Study Abroad* project and resources
  - \* <http://www.carla.umn.edu/maxsa/index.html>
- \* Any many more...

\* **Further resources**



- \* Does your institution have a similar integrated programme?
- \* How do you utilise orientation to address wellness resources?
- \* What works well? What challenges have you had, where you've made changes?
- \* How do students evaluate it?
- \* How do we measure success?

\* Questions for  
discussion