



# Bryant University

HONORS THESIS

## **Is the end just the beginning?**

The study of the effect of reverse culture shock on American students when they return home from a semester long study abroad experience.

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**ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study explores symptoms of reverse culture shock experienced by U.S college students upon returning home from a study abroad program. This qualitative study explores the relationship between the timing of when American students returned home from their study abroad program and reverse culture shock. Participants in this study include American students who participated in a semester-long study abroad program outside of the country. These students share their study abroad experience through a semi-structured survey or an interview process. This study specifically examines the time element of when these students returned home from their study abroad experience. Did the students return home at the intended end date, did they return home early or did they extend their trip past the intended end date? This study will examine the relationship between reverse culture shock and the timing of return to the United States. The study found that there was no relationship between the timing of when students returned home and reverse culture shock. The study did conclude that individuals who experience culture shock were more likely to experience symptoms of reverse culture shock. Lastly, the study found that on average students reported that their symptoms of culture shock lasted 1-2 weeks and their symptoms of reverse culture shock lasted 3-4 weeks.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Studying abroad has become the new normal for students in the United States. Every year the number of students in the U.S who participate in a semester-long study abroad program increases (USA Study Abroad). As of today, 1 in 10 undergraduate students in the United States spend a semester studying in a foreign country (USA Study Abroad). This experience allows students the opportunity to live in a new country and spend a semester studying at a local university. While studying in a foreign country, students get the opportunity to travel and the ability to immerse themselves in different cultures. Researchers have studied the effects that culture shock and the changing environment of living in a foreign country has on these students. Living in a foreign country can be extremely difficult for a student and researchers want to examine how students adapt under these circumstances. Recently, researchers have started to examine the effects of reverse culture shock on students when they return home. There is a common perception that when students return home from the study abroad experience, they are easily able to adapt back to their lives before they left.

Researchers are studying how this is not always the case.

Spending a semester studying abroad has many benefits for a student. They can learn about new cultures, experience a different system of education, find new interests, create lifelong friendships, see the world from a new perspective, etc. Mulvaney and Klein (2013), researched how to maximize the short-term study abroad experience. The authors reviewed the potential advantages and limitations specifically, regarding academics, preparation, and logistics of the study abroad experience. Advantages that the authors found were that the study abroad experience is accommodating to many different populations of students, facilitates an international experience for students who have not traveled much before this

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opportunity, and eases students into an international situation. A few limitations to the study abroad experience that the researchers found are that there is a limited amount of time associated with students experiencing multiple cultures, as well as the cost of airfare being high. Additionally, the opportunity to meet other students and natives can be hard in a foreign country, especially during a short period. Furthermore, the temptation for students to cram their study abroad experience could potentially sacrifice the quality of their experience. Despite these limitations, the authors concluded that a short-term study abroad experience has many valuable experiences. The authors suggest that in order to maximize the study abroad program students should be prepared academically and culturally for their study abroad adventure.

A study by Cubillos and Ileveto (2012), studied the impact that the study abroad experience had on student's self-efficacy perceptions. The researchers measured self-efficacy in terms of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The researchers administered a 20-item questionnaire to 39 American college students before they left for their study abroad program in Spain or France and additionally when they returned home from their program. The findings of the self-efficacy study found that participation in study abroad programs, despite the length or destination of the journey, had a significant impact on the students' subskills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Another study conducted by Cisneros-Donahue (2012), found similar benefits regarding academics as a result of participating in the study abroad experience. The researcher investigated what students believed they learned as a result of participating in the study abroad experience. The researcher tested students on functional knowledge, world geography, global independence, interpersonal accommodation, and

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cultural sensitivity. The students who studied abroad reported greater knowledge in all 5 measures than they did pre-departure. These studies show the effect that study abroad has on the value of improving students' perceptions and learning.

Despite the study abroad experience showing positive impacts on students, many educators are struggling with how to assess the study abroad experience. Twombly, et al. (2012) came up with recommendations to show how study abroad in the twenty-first century has a true purpose. The recommendations that the authors made were to reconceptualize study abroad as an integrated part of their educational sequence instead of making it look like an independent entity. Secondly, he recommended that institutions should reframe the way they assess the educational impact of study abroad. Lastly, the researchers said that institutions should change the question by which they judge student participation rates to “which ones” instead of “how many”. The study abroad program has shown that there are many advantages academically and culturally despite the potential limitations. In order for rates of American students spending a period of time overseas to increase, educators have to understand the benefits these programs have on their students. By understanding these benefits, educators would be able to offer more opportunities for students to participate in various global studies.

The study abroad experience is the new American craze among college students. Existing literature shows that the study abroad program has many advantages to the college students. Additionally, literature shows that this experience can also be extremely challenging for college students. Attending a new university as well as living in a new country can be extremely difficult. Students often experience culture shock as the result of living in a new country. An aspect of the study abroad experience that is not widely studied is the return

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experience. Returning home after living in a host country for a semester can also result in a shock to individuals. This shock is known as reverse culture shock. Potential symptoms of reverse culture shock that individuals may experience include depression, boredom, rejection, confusion, frustration, and restlessness. This thesis is going to explore the return home experience for American students based on the timing of when they returned home and if they experienced symptoms of reverse culture shock.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Previous studies have shown that students who participate in a study abroad program have experienced symptoms of culture shock and reverse culture shock. However, there is little scholarship analyzing if reverse culture shock is correlated to the timing of when students return home from their study abroad programs.

Study abroad programs are becoming increasingly popular yet leaving home to live in a foreign country can be a very stressful thing for a student. A study done by Yang, et al. (2018) examined how levels of self-determined motivation to participate in a study abroad program can lower levels of culture shock once in-country. First, the study measured students' motivation to study abroad through the comprehensive relative autonomy index. This index is able to measure self-determination and is designed to be applicable to measure self-determination within any life domain. Secondly, the researchers measured levels of culture shock through a questionnaire. Lastly, the student's subjective well-being was measured by testing the students life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect after they arrived to their host country by using various scales. Life satisfaction was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale and positive and negative affect was measured using the Positive

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and Negative Affect Schedule. The results of this study concluded that self-determined motivation was positively correlated with two of the basic psychological need variables; life satisfaction, and positive affect, but negatively correlated with cultural shock and negative affect.

Not only do students have to adapt to a change in culture, depending on where they study, they may also have to adapt to other changes including language, currency, safety, etc. A study done by Mulvaney and Klein (2013), studied how students could overcome potential obstacles while studying abroad. The focus of the study was to examine the proposed concern of a language barrier that students might face and see if there was any way to minimize the effect this might play in their experience. To the researchers' surprise they discovered that students experienced other obstacles that were of greater concern than language. The researchers found that from highest concern to lowest concern students listed; financial concerns, safety concerns, language barriers, curricular demands, then relationship status. This study found that a language barrier was still a concern to students, but that the main concern students experienced was financial concerns.

A study by Presbitero (2016), studied the effects of culture shock and how cultural intelligence plays a role in student's adapting to their new host country. The purpose of this study was to examine the factor that cultural intelligence (CQ) plays in examining both culture shock and reverse culture shock. The study uses cultural intelligence as an intercultural capability that moderates the relationship between culture shock and two forms of adaptation: psychological and sociocultural. Reverse culture shock was also measured based on these two forms of adaptation. Psychological adaptation was measured by using a



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10-item questionnaire and sociocultural adaptation was measured using a different 10-item questionnaire. The researchers conducted two separate studies. The first study was taken by students who recently arrived in their host country and the second study was taken by students who recently arrived home after their study abroad experience. The researchers found that both culture shock and reverse culture shock were both significantly but negatively related to psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Additionally, they found that cultural intelligence served as a moderator in lessening the impact of culture shock and reverse culture shock.

Often the process of students returning home from their study abroad experience is overlooked. Many believe that the students come home and are immediately able to adjust back to what their life was like before they left. This is not always the case. Many students experience the effects of reverse culture shock when they return home. Kartoshkina (2015), studied the reentry process home after the study abroad experience. The purpose of this study was to examine the pros and cons associated with the return home experience. The motivation for this study was to understand the reentry experience of US college students and to provide possible explanations for why the students experience certain emotions when they return home. The researchers developed two research questions that they wanted to answer: What did college students experience when they returned home from studying abroad? How did these students explain their reentry experiences? The students shared their experiences through a semi-structured interview and an online survey. The findings of this study discovered that the students shared a wide range of experiences. The researchers noted that many of the participants described the reentry experience as “bittersweet”. Students explained that they experienced mixed emotions being back in their home country. They enjoyed

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everything they missed but they found it hard to fully re-immense themselves in the American culture.

A study by Hadis (2005) studied various elements that could potentially affect a student re-immersing themselves back in their culture in the United States. This study examined global mindedness, independence, reverse culture shock, and academic focus. The findings of this study concluded that independence and open-mindedness had the largest impact on a students' academic focus when they returned home. Additionally, independence was also correlated with global-mindedness and reverse culture shock. Extremely independent students felt the transition coming home to a structured way of life was difficult. A study done by Carruthers (2017) examined one student's returning home experience after studying abroad. This student claimed that she was worried about feeling homesick, experiencing culture shock, or having trouble with the language barrier while she was gone but instead said that returning home ended up being the hardest part of the journey. While abroad she was able to gain independence and participate in new experiences on her own. When she came home, she had to adjust back to living with her parents and felt like she was taking steps backwards in her personal growth. When she was gone, she said she idolized home in her head and when she came home it was different. When you leave to study abroad, you immerse yourself in a new culture and quickly change your way of life. She thought that everything was going to be the same when she came home which proved not to be true. She described her experience as waking up from a strange dream and one she had a lot of trouble overcoming.

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This feeling is common among students who return home from the study abroad experience. A study done by Gaw (2000) studied if reverse culture shock influenced students' self-reported problems, students' willingness to see a counselor and student support service usage. This study was important because it examined the mental health effects that students experience while abroad and after returning from studying abroad. The study examined problems that students faced while studying abroad and their willingness to get help for these problems when they returned home. The study found that students that returned who were experiencing high levels of reverse culture shock were more likely to report more of a personal adjustment than students who returned with a low level of reverse culture shock. However, they discovered that their willingness to see a counselor was not related to their symptoms of reverse culture shock. Lastly, they discovered that there was a negative correlation between reverse culture shock and service usage.

In conclusion, there are many factors associated with the study abroad experience. Students can immerse themselves in different cultures as well as create lifelong memories. The study abroad experience is a hard experience for many students. Being away from your family and friends in an environment you do not know is extremely difficult for college-aged individuals. A study conducted by Miller-Perrin (2014) examined the internal and external changes associated with the study abroad experience. Oftentimes students who study abroad experience many changes associated with their new way of life and the purpose of this study was to dive deeper into understanding the change associated with this. This study examined these external and internal outcomes by examining old literature and old studies conducted on this topic. This study found that the study abroad experience represents an exciting change in

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a student's academic journey. By allowing college campuses to stretch across the globe, students are given the opportunity to transform internally and externally. These changes can potentially last a lifetime for a college student. Despite challenge's students might face, this study concluded that experiencing these challenges will allow a student to grow and impact their life in the long term. This study concluded that institutions should encourage students to leave their comfort zone to experience this powerful internal and external change associated with studying abroad.

**RESEARCH QUESTION**

The hypothesis being tested in this study:

- 1. Is there a relationship between the timing of when American students return home from their study abroad program and reverse culture shock?*

The goal of this study is to examine reverse culture shock on students returning home from their study abroad experience during three specified time periods. This can be found in Appendix A. The experience of culture shock in the host country will act as a control or independent variable in my analysis. The existing research on reverse culture shock does not examine this timing element. Additionally, this study will investigate why the students returned at the time they did.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to determine if there is a relationship between the timing of when American students return home from their study abroad program and reverse culture shock.

The timing of when the student returned home from studying abroad will be broken up into 3 separate groups.

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1. Did the student return to America **at** their program's intended end date.
2. Did the student return home to America **before** their intended end date.
3. Did the student return home to America **later** than their intended end date.

Additional

y, this study will examine if there was a relationship between culture shock and reverse culture shock. For example, if students experienced culture shock in their host country, were they more or less likely to experience reverse culture shock when returning home.

Data Source and Sample

The data for this study was gathered through a survey and a semi-structured interview format. The survey yielded 115 responses and 15 interviews were conducted. The survey consists of a variety of questions ranging from questions about their experience, how they adapted when they first got there, their experience returning home, demographics, etc. Additionally, the interviews conducted contain the same questions that were sent out in the survey. Interviews do not restrict the participants from answering in a specific way which allows the participants to share their experience in their own words with no restrictions. Participants in this study were not limited to Bryant University students. The reason for this is that most students at Bryant participate in a study abroad program in the fall rather than the spring. Therefore, this would not be representative of the whole student body of students who participate in study abroad programs.

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My study specifically examines American students who study abroad in another country and not students who study abroad in America. This study will be sent out to college students who have participated in a semester-long study abroad program in the last four years. Participants had to participate in a study abroad program in fall 2015, spring 2016, fall 2016, spring 2017, fall 2017, spring 2018, fall 2018, spring 2019, fall 2019 or spring 2020. I will only examine within the last four years because their study abroad experience is the most recent.

Survey Questions

The purpose of this survey is to generalize the study abroad experience while also asking participants to elaborate on some of their own experiences. This survey consists of multiple choice and open response questions.

1. What college/university do you attend in the United States? (Open Response)
2. What year did you study abroad?
  - a. Fall 2015
  - b. Spring 2016
  - c. Fall 2016
  - d. Spring 2017
  - e. Fall 2017
  - f. Spring 2018
  - g. Fall 2018
  - h. Fall 2019
  - i. Spring 2020
3. What was your housing style like while living in your host country?
  - a. Homestay
  - b. Apartment
  - c. Dorm
  - d. With a Family or Friend
  - e. Hotel
  - f. Other
4. When you initially arrived in your host country did you experience symptoms of culture shock?

Culture shock is defined as the feeling of disorientation experienced by someone who is suddenly subjected to an unfamiliar culture, way of life, or set of attitudes.

  - a. Yes
  - b. No

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5. If you answered yes to the question above, what symptoms of culture shock did you experience? (Open Response)
6. Roughly how long did this culture shock last?
  - a. 1 Day
  - b. 2-3 Days
  - c. 3-5 Days
  - d. 1 Week
  - e. 2 Weeks
  - f. 3+ Weeks
7. If you experienced culture shock, did you experience it for the first time after already being in your host country for more than a month?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
8. If you answered yes to the question above, what symptoms of culture shock did you experience? (Open Response)
9. Roughly how long did this culture shock last?
  - a. 1 Day
  - b. 2-3 Days
  - c. 3-5 Days
  - d. 1 Week
  - e. 2 Weeks
  - f. 3+ Weeks
10. Did you travel to other countries outside of your host country when you were abroad?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
11. Did you experience symptoms of culture shock in any of these other countries?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
12. If you answered yes to the question above, what symptoms of culture shock did you experience? (Open Response)
13. What was your program's intended end date? (Month Day year)
14. Did you leave right after your program ended (intended end date)?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
15. If you answered no to the question above, was it before or after the intended end date?
  - a. Before
  - b. After
16. Depending on your response above why was it before or after the intended end date? (Open Response)
17. When you initially arrived back to America did you experience symptoms of reverse culture shock?

Reverse culture shock is defined as the emotional and psychological distress suffered by some people when they return home after an extended period of time overseas.

  - a. Yes
  - b. No

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18. If you answered yes to the question above, what symptoms of reverse culture shock did you experience? (Open Response)
19. Roughly how long did this reverse culture shock last?
  - a. 1 Day
  - b. 2-3 Days
  - c. 3-5 Days
  - d. 1 Week
  - e. 2 Weeks
  - f. 3+ Weeks
20. If you experienced reverse culture shock, did you experience it for the first time after already being home for more than a month?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
21. If you answered yes to the question above, what symptoms of reverse culture shock did you experience? (Open Response)
22. Roughly how long did this reverse culture shock last?
  - a. 1 Day
  - b. 2-3 Days
  - c. 3-5 Days
  - d. 1 Week
  - e. 2 Weeks
  - f. 3+ Weeks
23. How old are you?
24. What is your gender?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Prefer not to answer
  - d. Other
25. What is your race?
  - a. White
  - b. Black or African American
  - c. American Indian or Alaska Native
  - d. Asian
  - e. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
  - f. Other
26. What is your ethnicity?
  - a. Hispanic or Latino
  - b. Not Hispanic or Latino



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The purpose of the interview is to allow participants to open up about their personal experience. Participants have free-range of how they want to answer the questions instead of being restricted to a multiple-choice answer.

Interview Questions

The purpose of the interview is to allow participants to open up about their personal experience. Participants have free-range of how they want to answer the questions instead of being restricted to a multiple-choice answer.

1. What college/university do you attend in the United States?
2. What year did you study abroad?
3. What was your housing style like while living in your host country?
4. When you initially arrived in your host country did you experience symptoms of culture shock?

Culture shock is defined as the feeling of disorientation experienced by someone who is suddenly subjected to an unfamiliar culture, way of life, or set of attitudes.

5. If you answered yes to the question above, what symptoms of culture shock did you experience?
6. Roughly how long did this culture shock last?
7. If you experienced culture shock, did you experience it for the first time after already being in your host country for more than a month?
8. If you answered yes to the question above, what symptoms of culture shock did you experience?
9. Roughly how long did this culture shock last?
10. Did you travel to other countries outside of your host country when you were abroad?
11. Did you experience symptoms of culture shock in any of these other countries?
12. If you answered yes to the question above, what symptoms of culture shock did you experience?
13. What was your program's intended end date? (Month Day year)
14. Did you leave right after your program ended (intended end date)?
15. If you answered no to the question above, was it before or after the intended end date?
16. Depending on your response above why was it before or after the intended end date?
17. When you initially arrived back to America did you experience symptoms of reverse culture shock?

Reverse culture shock is defined as the emotional and psychological distress suffered by some people when they return home after an extended period of time overseas.

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18. If you answered yes to the question above, what symptoms of reverse culture shock did you experience?
19. Roughly how long did this reverse culture shock last?
20. If you experienced reverse culture shock, did you experience it for the first time after already being home for more than a month?
21. If you answered yes to the question above, what symptoms of reverse culture shock did you experience?
22. Roughly how long did this reverse culture shock last?
23. How old are you?
24. What is your gender?
25. What is your race?
26. What is your ethnicity?

**POTENTIAL RESEARCH ISSUES & ETHICAL CONCERNS**

Potential ethical concerns that could arise in my thesis project would be found only in my survey or the interview process. For my survey, confidentiality and informed consent are the most important ethical concerns. Participants had to complete a consent form before starting the survey and were advised that they could end their participation at any time during the survey. All participants were above the age of 18 so parental consent was not necessary. Additionally, the survey was anonymous which protects the confidentiality of participants.

During the interview process, the interviewees were allowed to read the questions beforehand. This allowed participants to feel comfortable talking openly about their experiences. Additionally, interviewees were told they could stop the process at any time if they did not feel comfortable sharing their story. will allow for participants to make sure they are confident and feel comfortable talking openly about their experiences. Discussing life events that were unpleasant can be a form of psychological trauma that I did not want any interviewee to experience while participating in my interview. Another ethical concern can be the

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confidentiality and privacy of the interviewee. The interviewees name will not be disclosed after the interview.

IRB Application can be found in Appendix B and interview consent form can be found in Appendix C.

**RESULTS**

The results were broken down first by observing and understanding the demographics of the study and then by analyzing students experience with culture shock and reverse culture shock.

Demographics –

The survey was taken by 145 participants and there were 15 participants in the interview portion. This population was not limited to Bryant University students. The age range of the participants was 20-25 years old. After cleaning the data for incomplete responses, there were 115 useable survey responses. Useable data meaning there was enough data shared in each response to analyze their study abroad experience.

69% of the survey responses came from females while 31% came from males. Additionally, 66% of the interview participants were females while 33% were males. This breakdown can be found in the chart in Appendix D. This was not an even split and could be a potential limitation to the study.

Survey

The survey data was analyzed for potential trends among the data. The results found that out of the 115 people who participated in the survey, 58% of the students initially experienced culture shock when they first arrived in their host country, 5% of the students experienced

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culture shock after being in their host country for more than a month, and 7% of the students never experienced symptoms of culture shock. This data is found in Appendix E. Of the students who initially experienced culture shock in their host country, 3% of the students said the culture shock lasted for 1 day, 15% of the students said it lasted for 2-3 days, 13% of the students said it lasted 3-5 days, 33% of the students said on average it lasted 1 week, 28% of the students said that it lasted 2 weeks, and 7% of the students said it lasted 3+ weeks. This data is shown in appendix F. Out of the 6 students who said they did not experience symptoms of culture shock until after being in their host country for more than a month, 17% said it lasted 1 day, 33% said it lasted 1 week, 33% said it lasted 2 weeks, and 17% said it lasted 3+ weeks. This data is found in Appendix G.

To understand better what kind of emotions the students who experienced culture shock were feeling, the data was analyzed for keywords among the responses. These keywords were taken from student's open response answers about what symptoms of culture shock they experienced. As seen in the pie chart in Appendix H, 45% of the students included language in their responses, 16% included culture, 7% included disorientation, and 7% included confusion. Living in a foreign country can come with a new language and culture. Students have to adapt to this initial new shock of a new language and culture. Additionally, this can make students feel disoriented and confused.

A large aspect of participating in a study abroad program is traveling to different countries. The survey found that 91% of students traveled to another country outside of their host country and 9% of students did not travel and only stayed in their host country. This can be

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found in Appendix I. Out of the 105 students who traveled to a different country 46% of students experienced culture shock while 54% did not. This can be found in Appendix J.

To better understand the emotions experienced by students in these countries, the student's open response questions were analyzed for keywords. As seen in the pie chart in Appendix K, 58% of the students included language in their responses, 26% included currency/money, 10% included food, and 6% included cultural differences. Similar, to living in a new country visiting a new country different from your home country and host country can present a new language. Additionally, different countries have different currencies as well as different foods. This can come as a shock to students resulting in students experiencing culture shock.

The survey also studied if students experienced symptoms of reverse culture shock. The results showed that 58% of students experienced reverse culture shock initially when they returned home to their host country, 2% of students experienced symptoms of reverse culture shock after already being home for a year, and 40% of students never experienced reverse culture shock. This can be found in Appendix L. Of the students who initially experienced reverse culture shock when they returned home 9% said the culture shock lasted for 1 day, 7% said it lasted for 2-3 days, 9% said it lasted 3-5 days, 21% said on average it lasted 1 week, 26% it lasted 2 weeks, and 28% it lasted 3+ weeks. This data is shown in Appendix M. Out of the 2 students who said they didn't experience symptoms of reverse culture shock until after being in their host country for more than a month, 1 said it lasted 3-5 days and 1 said it lasted 2 weeks.

Similar to culture shock, student's open response answers about symptoms of reverse culture shock were analyzed for keywords. As seen in the pie chart in Appendix N, 26% of students

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said they missed/wanted to go back to their host country, 14% said driving, 13% said depressed, and 12% said sadness. Missed, driving, depressed, and sadness were the most common keywords found. Upon returning home, the initial shock of not being in their host country anymore can come as a big shock to students. Students said they initially missed their country because they were so used to being there. Additionally, students said driving came as a shock because for most students they did not drive during their study abroad experience. The sudden freedom to be able to get in a car and drive anywhere was an adjustment back for students. Lastly, students said they were depressed and lonely.

The results of the timing element found that 68% (79/115) students left at the intended end date, 20% (24/115) left before their intended end date, 12% (14/115) left after their intended end date. Additionally, 23 out of the 24 students who left before their intended end date left because of COVID-19. 1 student left early because they finished their program early. The 14 students who left after their intended end date left later because they either stayed longer to travel by themselves or met up with friends and family to travel. This can be found in Appendix O.

Lastly, the survey found that out of the 14 students who left after their intended end date, 10 of them experienced symptoms of reverse culture shock. Out of the 77 students who left at their intended end date, 56 of them experienced symptoms of reverse culture shock. Out of the 24 students who left before their end date, 8 of them experienced symptoms of reverse culture shock. This can be found in Appendix P.

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Interview

The results from the interview that out of the 15 people who participated in the interview, 66% of the students initially experienced culture shock, 13% experienced culture shock for the first time after being in their host country for more than a month, and 20% of the students never experienced symptoms of culture shock. This can be found in Appendix P. On average the interviewees reported that their symptoms of culture shock regardless of if they initially experienced symptoms or if they experienced symptoms after a month, lasted between 1 week a few weeks.

Like the survey, interviewees were asked if they had traveled to other countries during their study abroad experience. All 15 participants had traveled to at least another country outside of their host country. Out of the 15 students who traveled to a different country 27% of students experienced culture shock while 73% did not. This can be found in Appendix Q.

The interviews also opened up about their experience with reverse culture shock. The results were that 27% of students experienced reverse culture shock initially when they returned home to their host country, 20% of students experienced symptoms of reverse culture shock after already being home for a month, and 53% of students never experienced reverse culture shock. This can be found in Appendix R. On average the interviewees reported that their symptoms of reverse culture shock regardless of if they initially experienced symptoms or if they experienced symptoms after a month, lasted between 1 month to 3 months.

The results of the timing element found that 80% (12/15) of students left at the intended end date, 13% (2/15) left before their intended end date, 7% (1/15) left after their intended end date. This is seen in Appendix S. Additionally, both students who left early from their

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program left because of COVID-19. The 1 student who left after their intended end date left because they were traveling with family.

Since the interviewees were able to open up and talk about their experiences the data was not analyzed for keywords. The responses that participants shared will be documented in the conclusion.

Lastly, the survey found that out of the 2 students who left after their intended end date, 2 of them experienced symptoms of reverse culture shock. Out of the 12 students who left at their intended end date, 7 of them experienced symptoms of reverse culture shock. Out of the 1 student who left before their end date, 0 of them experienced symptoms of reverse culture shock. This can be found in Appendix U.

**LIMITATIONS**

There were a few limitations in this study to address. The first limitation was the sample size. Since there were only 115 usable surveys and 15 interviews conducted, this is not reflective of the entire study abroad population in the United States. Secondly, the male to female ratio was not split evenly. Most of the participants were female which could skew the data and not be reflective of the male population. Lastly, the survey was self-reported, and did not measure for causality. This study specifically compared the reverse culture shock and the timing of when students returned home, but almost all the data was self-reported which may be influenced by emotion bias. Additionally, the study was not measuring causality, so the findings show relationships, but not in any particular direction.



## **CONCLUSION**

After analyzing the results, the study concluded that students who left at their intended end date or after their intended end date were more likely to experience symptoms of reverse culture shock. Students who left before their intended end date were less likely to experience reverse culture shock. This could be a result of not being in the country for an extended period of time so the student didn't have time to fully immerse themselves in their host country. As opposed students who left at their intended end date or after their intended end date spent a full semester or more in their host country which allowed them to fully immerse. Therefore, when they got home the transition back could have been extremely hard because they had to re-immense into their home country.

The study did conclude that individuals who experience culture shock were more likely to experience symptoms of reverse culture shock. Out of the 72 students who experienced symptoms of culture shock in their host country, 76% (55 students) of those students experienced reverse culture shock. Out of the 48 students who experienced symptoms of culture shock in other countries, 83% (40 students) of them experienced culture shock in their host country and 73% (35 students) of them experienced reverse culture shock when they returned home. This could be because students had to spend time adjusting once they arrived in their host country that they became accustomed to their new way of life so when they returned home they had to re-adjust all over again. Additionally, out of all the data only 1 student experienced reverse culture shock who did not experience culture shock.

Additionally, on average most students reported that their culture shock lasted for approximately 1-2 weeks and on average most students reported that their reverse culture

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shock lasted 3 weeks to 1 month. This could be because students knew their experience wasn't long-term so they had an easier time overcoming their culture shock. As opposed, when the students returned home, they knew that living back in the United States was long-term so it took longer and was harder from them to overcome reverse culture shock. One interviewee noted that, "I was so used to traveling every weekend and I had nothing to look forward to when I came home". Additionally, many students noted that they had a hard time adjusting back to the fast-paced way of life and the heavier course-loads.

**APPENDICES**

Appendix A – Time Period

Time Period 1: Did the student return to America **at** their program's intended end date.

Time Period 2: Did the student return home to America **before** their intended end date.

Time Period 3: Did the student return home to America **later** than their intended end date.

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Appendix B – IRB Application

**Proposal to IRB for Research: Involving Human Subjects**

Name(s) of Investigators     **Madi Mastrianni, Ed Drozda**    

Title of Research Project: Is the end just the beginning? The study of the effect of reverse culture shock on American students when they return home from a semester long study abroad experience.

Anticipated Start and End Dates of Experiments     **10/12/20-02/12/21**    

**Basic Level Review**

To be considered at the **Basic Level**, the study must not involve children or adults unable to give consent, must not place subjects at more than minimal risk, and must fit one of the following categories (check all that apply). See Section V for description of each category.

- Normal educational practices
- Educational testing
- Survey/interview procedures
- Observation of behavior without intervention
- Use of archival data
- Evaluation of Federal research and programs
- Consumer acceptance studies

*Risk Assessment*

Indicate with a check if any of the following risks are involved:

	Deception as part of the experimental procedure? If yes, the proposal must include a description of the deception and the method of “debriefing” after the experiment.
X	Any probing of information which a subject might consider to be personal or sensitive?
	The presentation to the subject of any materials they might find to be offensive, threatening, or degrading?
	Possible compromise of privacy of participant or family, including use of personal information and records?
	The administration of physical stimuli other than auditory or visual stimuli associated with normal activities?
	Deprivation of physiological requirements such as nutrition or sleep?
	Manipulation of psychological and/or social variables such as sensory deprivation, social isolation, psychological stress?
	Physical exertion beyond a level that is moderate for the participant?
	Exposure to drugs, chemicals, or hazardous agents?

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Explain the need for any risks for the participants, that is, how they are required for successful completion of the study:

In this study a survey and interviews will be conducted. The questions between the interviews and the survey will remain the same. The reason for this is the opportunity to connect with some individuals on a more personal experience about their journey rather than through the survey. Individuals who partake in the interview will NOT fill out the survey. This is because I do not want to duplicate the data I collect.

Individuals will be asked questions about their study abroad experience in both the survey and the interview. There will be a disclaimer section in both the consent form before the survey and the consent form before the interview that will state, “this study may uncover difficult topics related to your study abroad, if you feel your experience was traumatic and you don’t want to relive it, you may remove yourself from the study at any time”. If participants had a traumatic experience, I do not want to have them relive it. Participants of the survey will be able to stop doing the survey at any time and interviewees will be allowed to see the questions before so they can decide if they want to participate or not.

**Project Description**

Clearly state the purpose of the study and the area of knowledge it contributes to (or attach document):

The purpose of this study is to analyze if the timing of when a student returned home from studying abroad has a correlation to levels of reverse culture shock. The timing of when the student returned home from studying abroad will be broken up into three separate groups. The first group will be the group that returned home back to America right when their program ended. This can also be viewed as the expected return home date. The second group will be the group of students who returned home early from their study abroad experience. This could be potentially due to homesickness, a pandemic, etc. The third group will be the group of students who extended their study abroad trip. This means that they pushed back the original return date so that they could stay longer. Additionally, this study will also examine if there was a correlation between levels of culture shock and levels of reverse culture shock among students. For example, if students experienced culture shock in their host country were, they more or less likely to experience levels of reverse culture shock when returning home.

Briefly explain the nature of the experimental procedures and the information to be obtained (or attach document). If students are performing the research, indicate that and describe their activities.

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The questions pertain to the demographics of the person (gender, age, ethnicity, race etc.), their experience with culture shock (did they experience it, when did they experience, what symptoms did they experience, etc.), their experience with reverse culture shock (did they experience it, when did they experience, what symptoms did they experience, etc ), and when they returned home from their study abroad experience (at the intended end date, before the intended end date, after the intended end date).

See attached Qualtrics links for specific questions.

Explain measures taken to assure anonymity and confidentiality of the information:

All answers will stay anonymous- the survey does not ask anyone to disclose their name and Qualtrics does not allow us to link the answers to the participants' email accounts. When interviewing the participants, their names will not be recorded with their answers, everything will be completely anonymous.

**Participant Description**

Describe the approximate number and range of ages of participants in this study:

- 50 -100 Undergrads (Juniors and Seniors, approx. age 19-22)
- 50-200 Alumni from the last 3 years (approximately age 22-25)

Describe the criteria for selecting participants:

The survey will be distributed via email to current students who have participated in a semester long study abroad program through the study abroad office. The alumni version will be distributed through email and Facebook study abroad program pages.

Describe any inducements for subjects to participate (check all that apply):

<input type="checkbox"/>	Extra credit in a course
<input type="checkbox"/>	Money. If yes, give approximate value:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Raffle or other type of contest.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify):

## **Consent Form**

### **1. Statement of purpose**

You are invited to participate in a study on the effects of reverse culture shock and culture shock experienced by students when they participated in a semester long study abroad program. We hope to learn if there is a relationship between the levels of culture shock and reverse culture shock experienced by a student and if there is a relationship between levels of reverse culture shock experienced based on when the student arrived home from their study abroad program. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you participated in a semester long study abroad program.

### **2. Description, Including Risks and Benefits**

If you decide to participate, we will conduct an experiment involving the following procedures: An interview consisting of questions pertaining to your personal experience with study abroad will be administered. It will take about five minutes to complete and all responses are kept anonymous.

### **3. Confidentiality**

Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will not be disclosed to the general public in a way that can be traced to you. In any written reports or publications, no participant other than the researchers will be identified, and only anonymous data will be presented.

This consent form, with your signature, will be stored separately and independently from the data collected so that your responses will not be identifiable.

### **4. Statement that Participation Is Voluntary**

This study may uncover difficult topics related to your study abroad, if you feel your experience was traumatic and you don't want to relive it, you may remove yourself from the study at any time.

Your participation is totally voluntary, and your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Bryant University or its employees in any way. If you decide to participate, you are also free to discontinue participation at any time without affecting such relationships. However, it is requested that you notify the investigator of this.

### **5. Persons to Contact**

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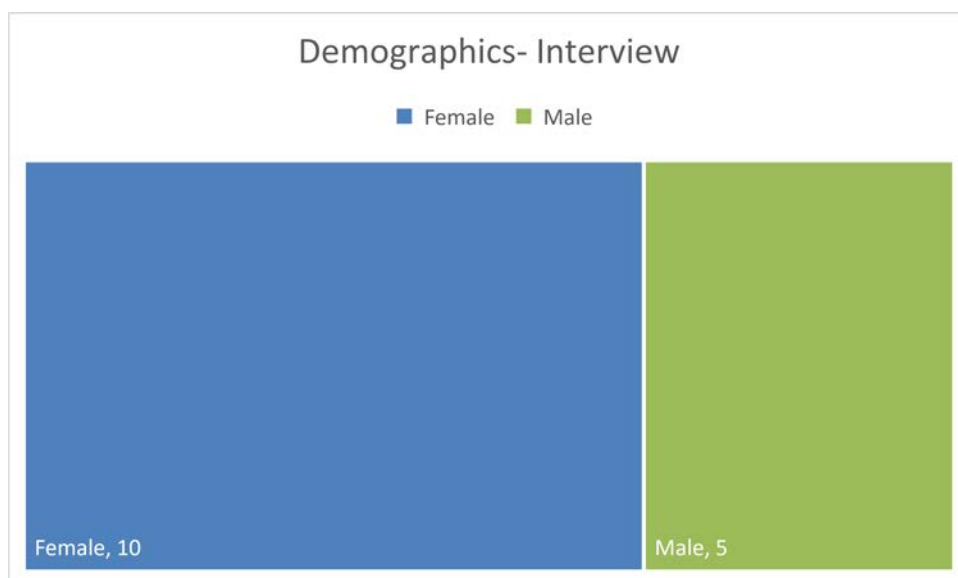
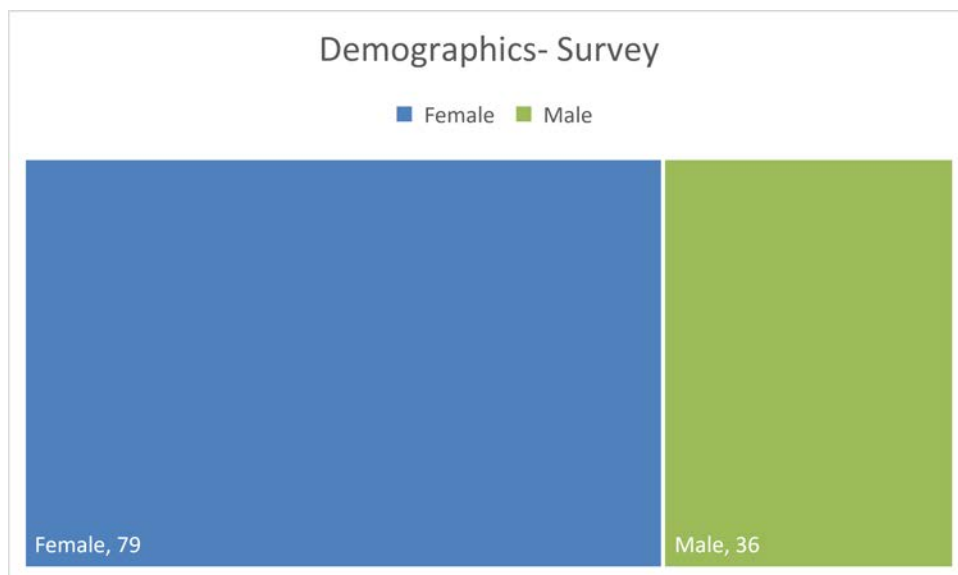
If you have any questions, please contact me, Madeline Mastrianni ([mmastrianni@bryant.edu](mailto:mmastrianni@bryant.edu)) or my thesis advisor, Ed Drozda ([edrozda@bryant.edu](mailto:edrozda@bryant.edu)). If you have any additional questions later, we will be happy to answer them. You can have a copy of this form to keep.

**6. Signature Indicating Informed Consent**

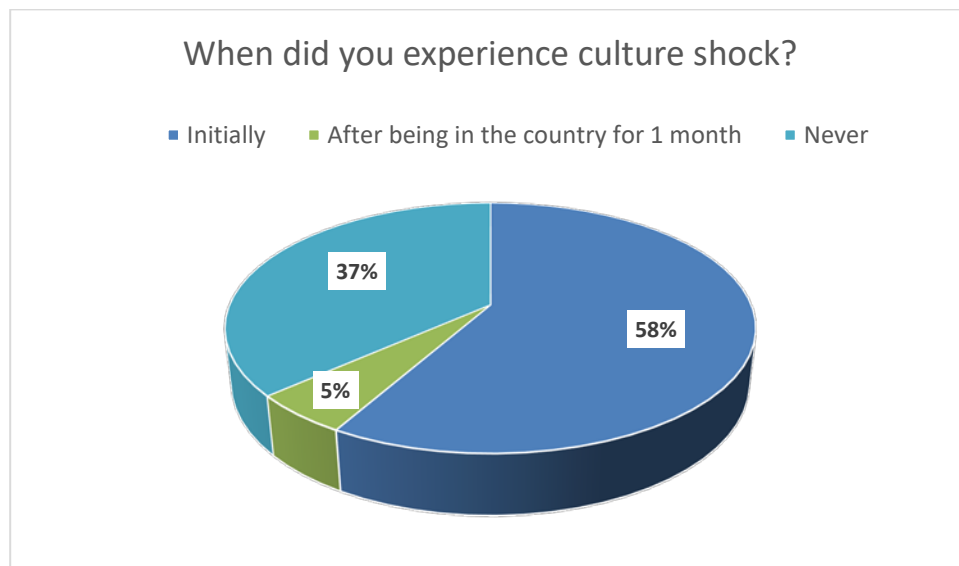
Please sign below if you have decided to participate. Your signature indicates only that you are at least 18 years of age and have read the information provided above. Your signature does not obligate you to participate, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.



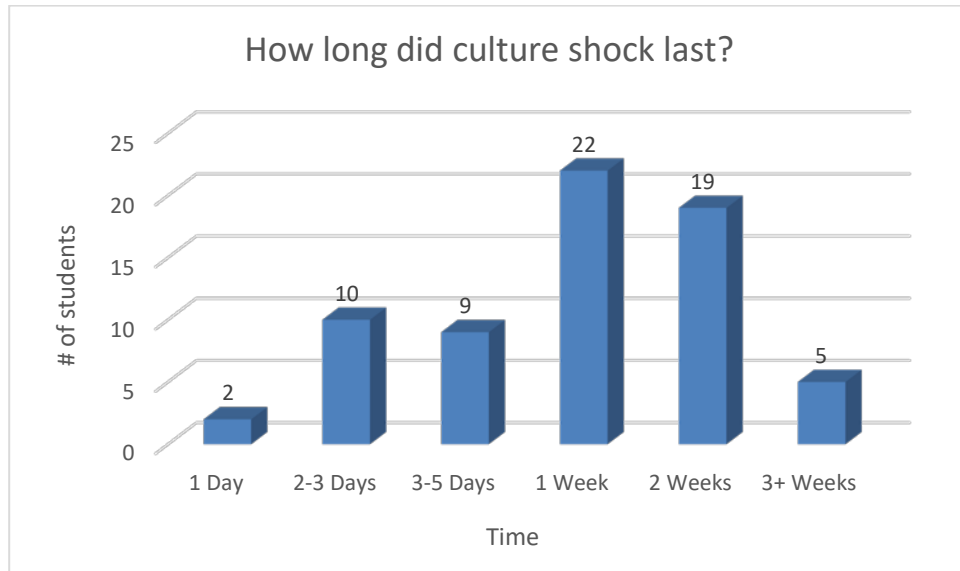
Appendix D – Demographics



Appendix E – Culture Shock Breakdown



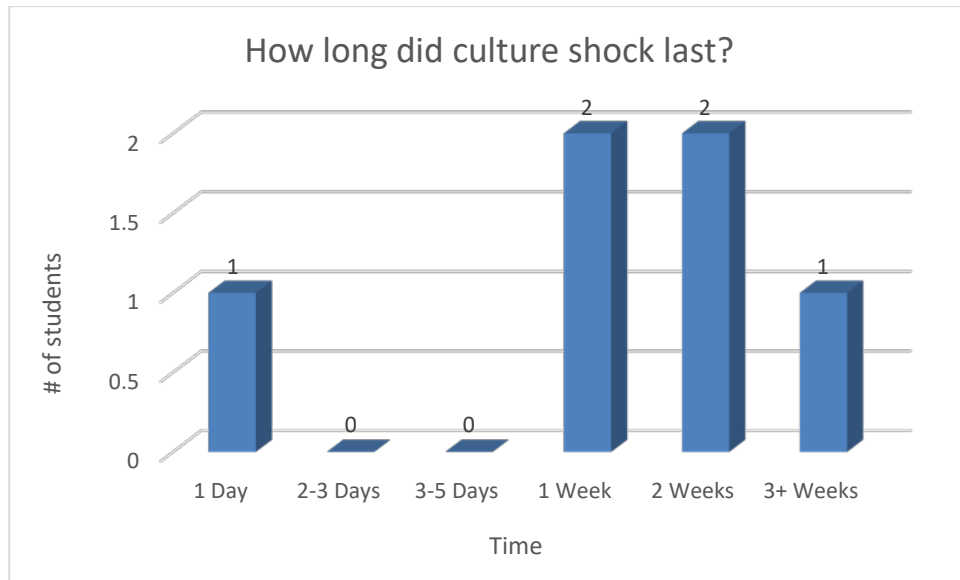
Appendix F – Length that Initial Culture Shock Lasted



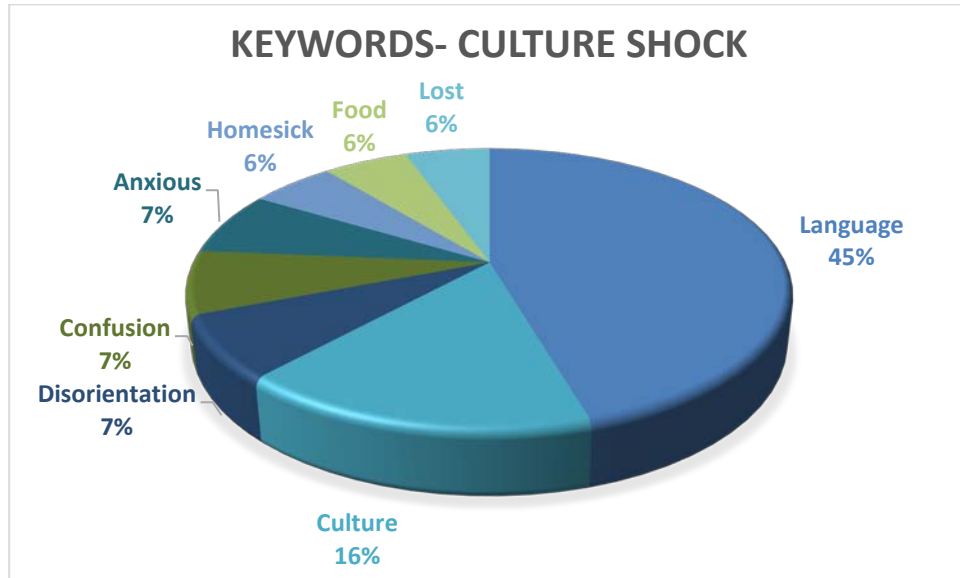
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Appendix G – Length that Culture Shock after being there for 1 Month Lasted



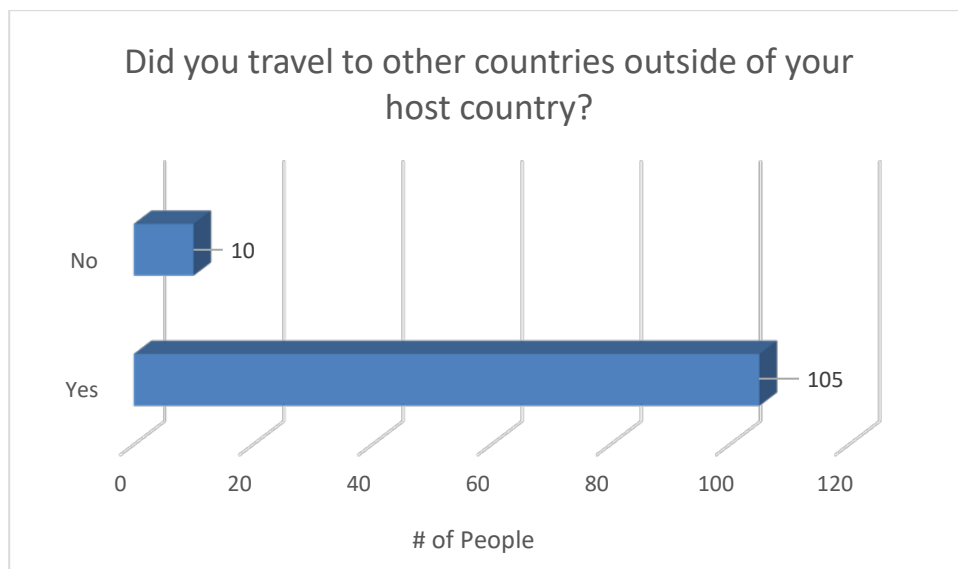
Appendix H – Culture Shock Keywords



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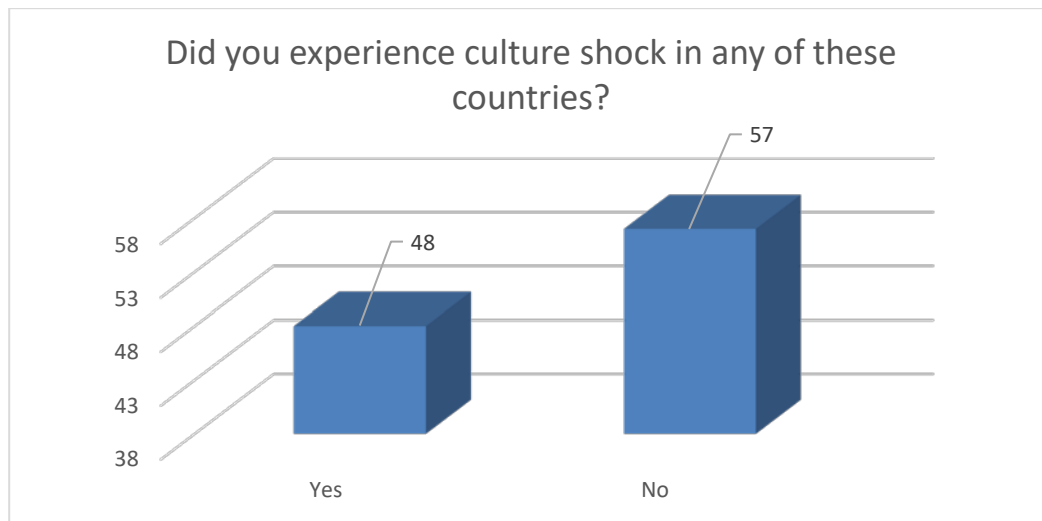
Appendix I – Travel



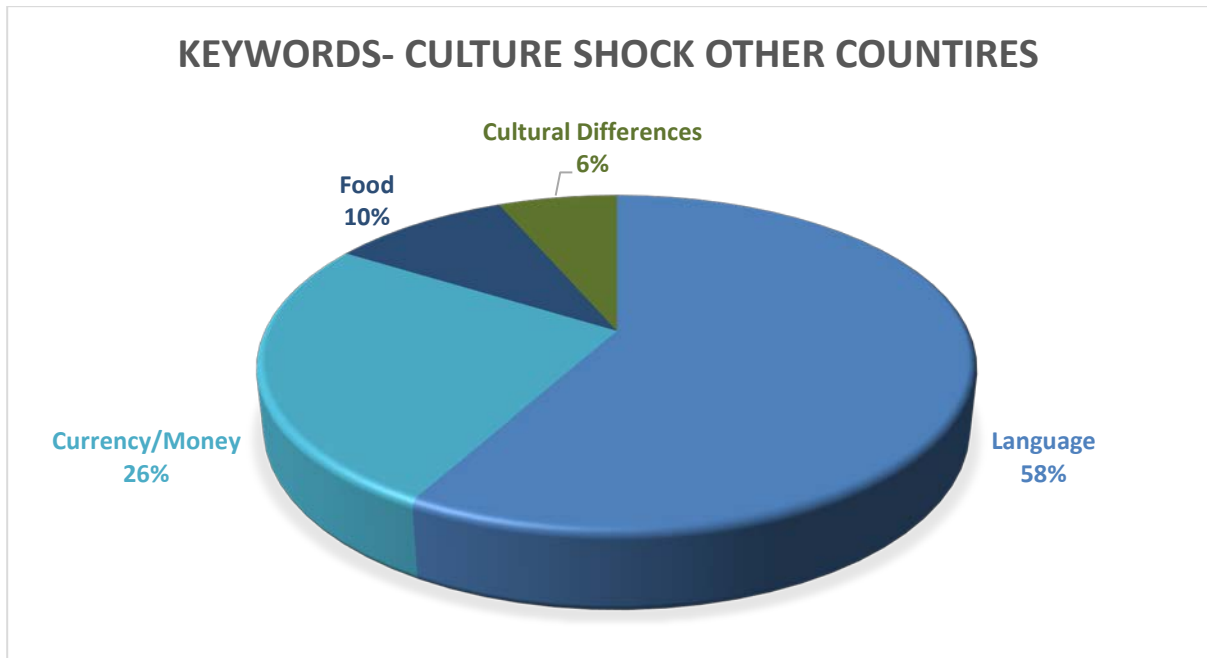
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Appendix J – Culture Shock in other Countries



Appendix K – Culture Shock in other Countries Keywords

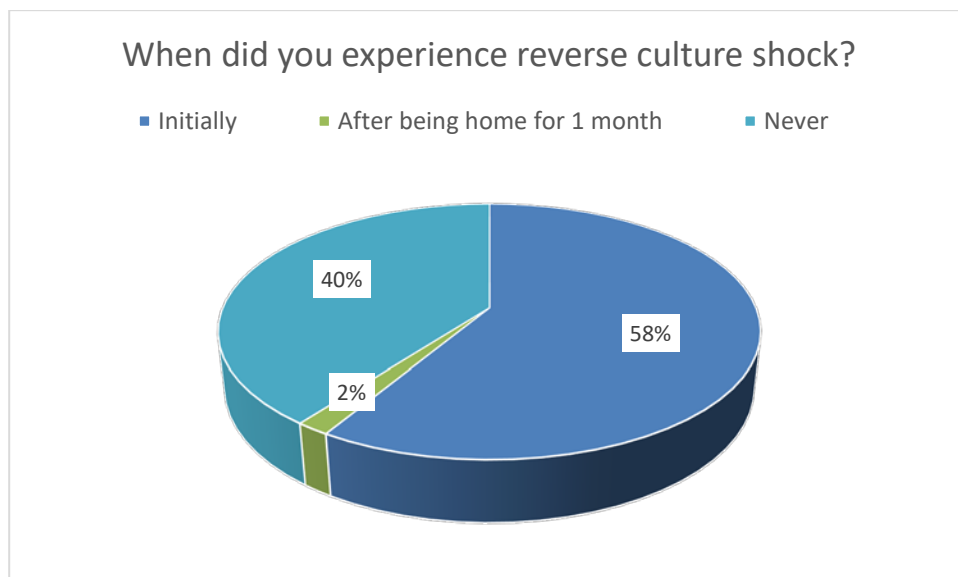




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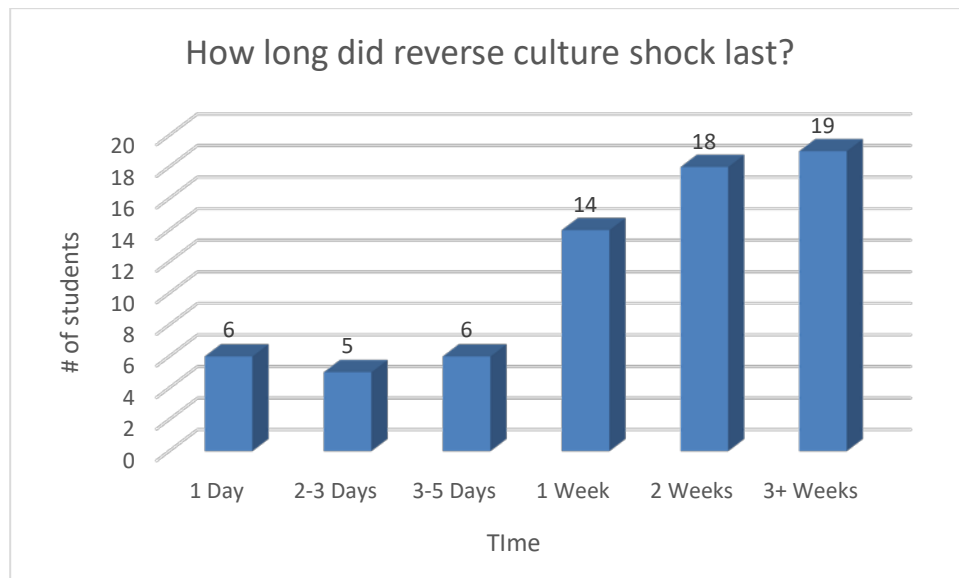
Appendix L – Reverse Culture Shock Breakdown



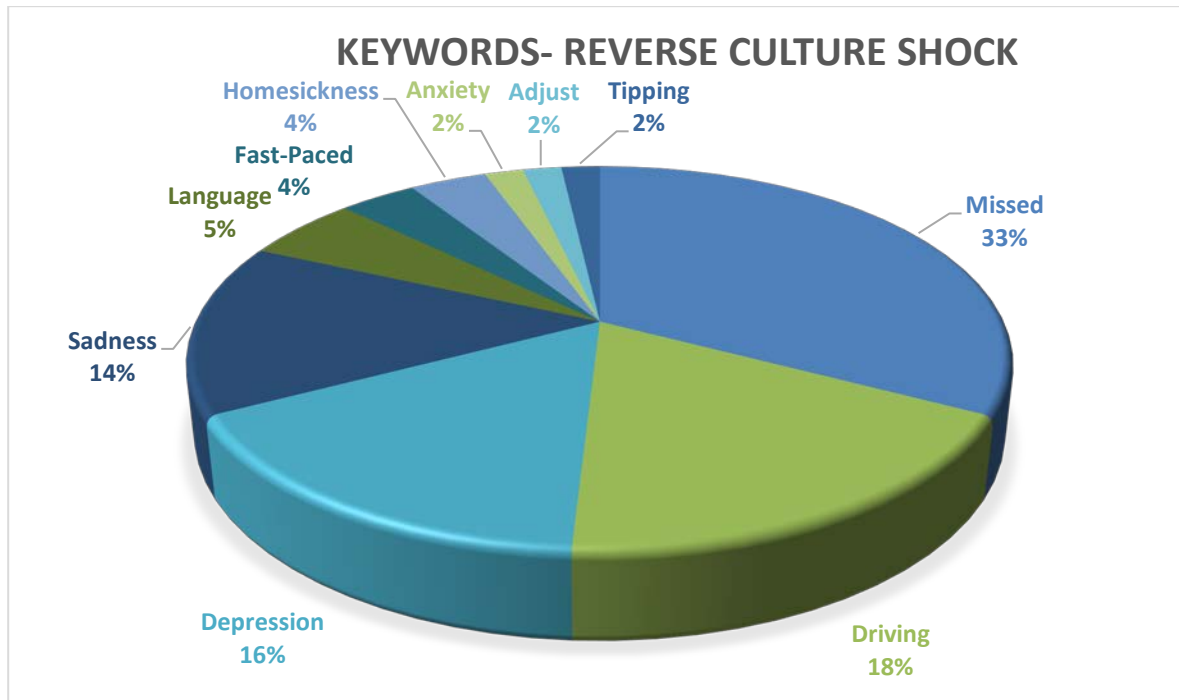
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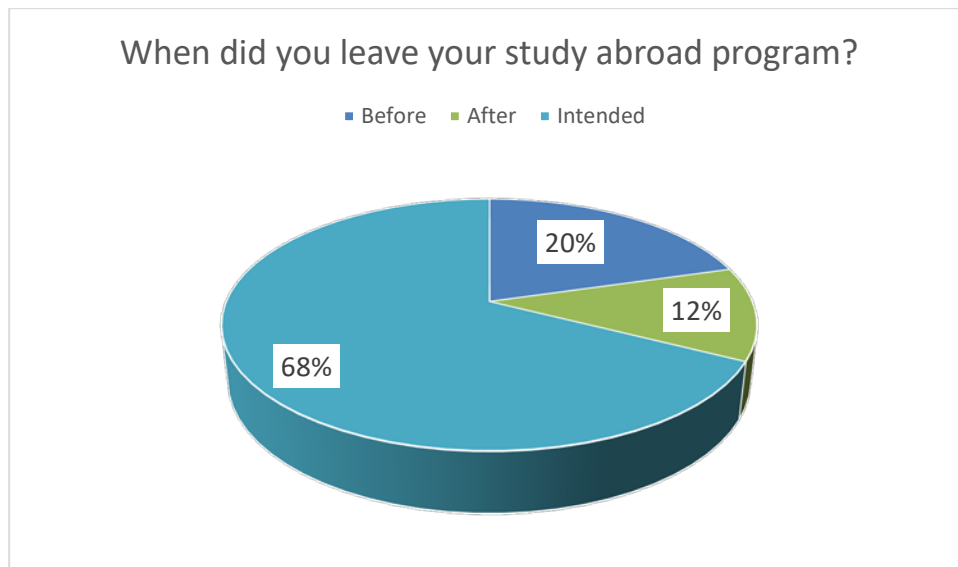
Appendix M – Length that Reverse Culture Shock Lasted



Appendix N – Reverse Culture Shock Keywords



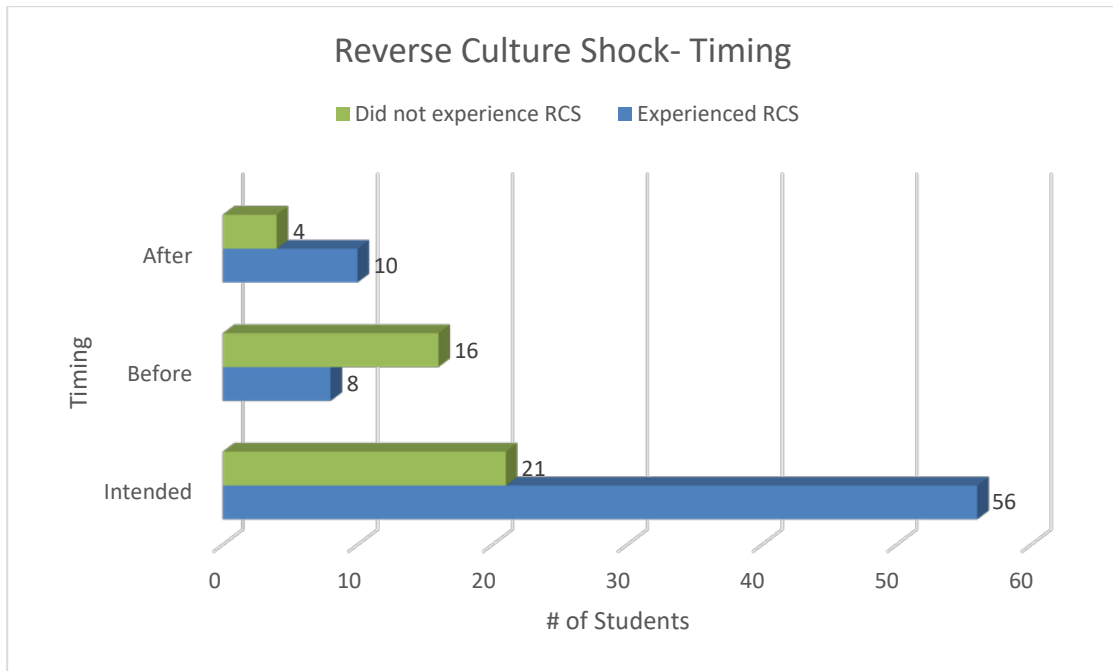
Appendix O – Timing



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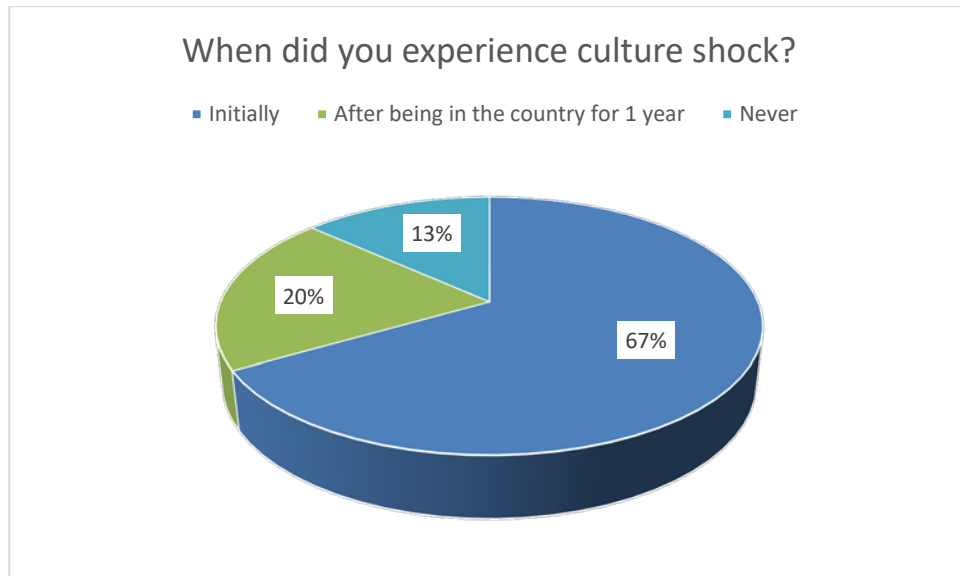
Appendix P – Reverse Culture Shock - Timing



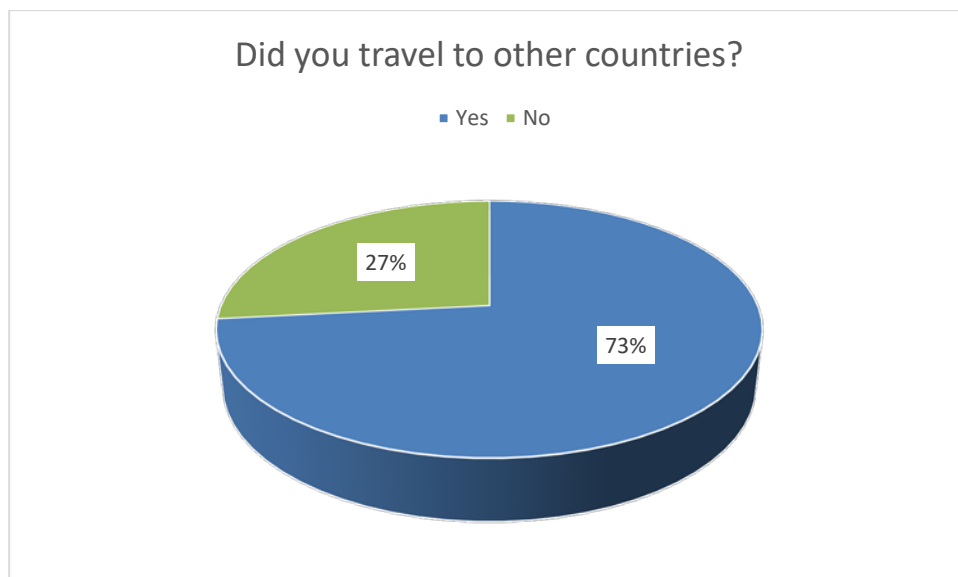
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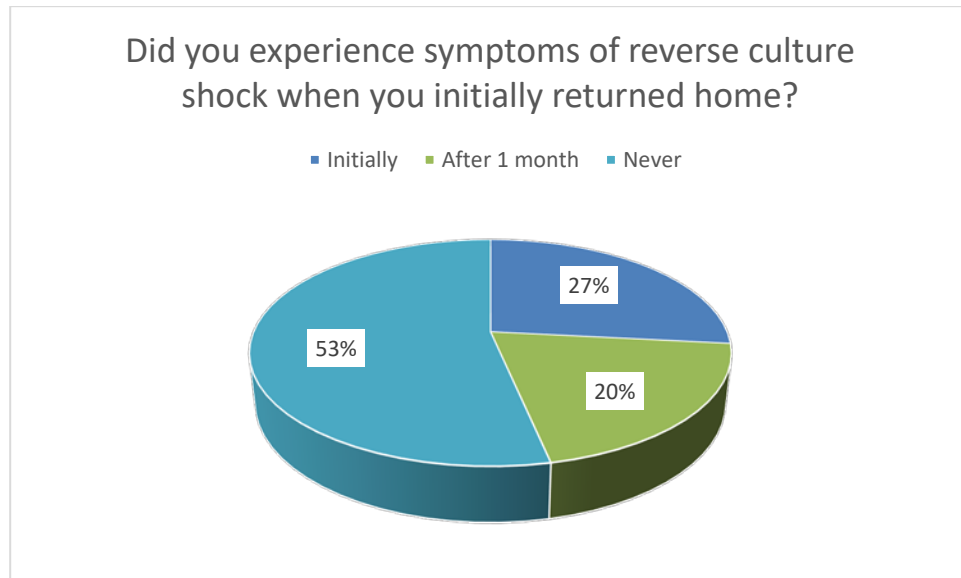
Appendix Q – Interview Data: Culture Shock Breakdown



Appendix R – Interview Data: Travel

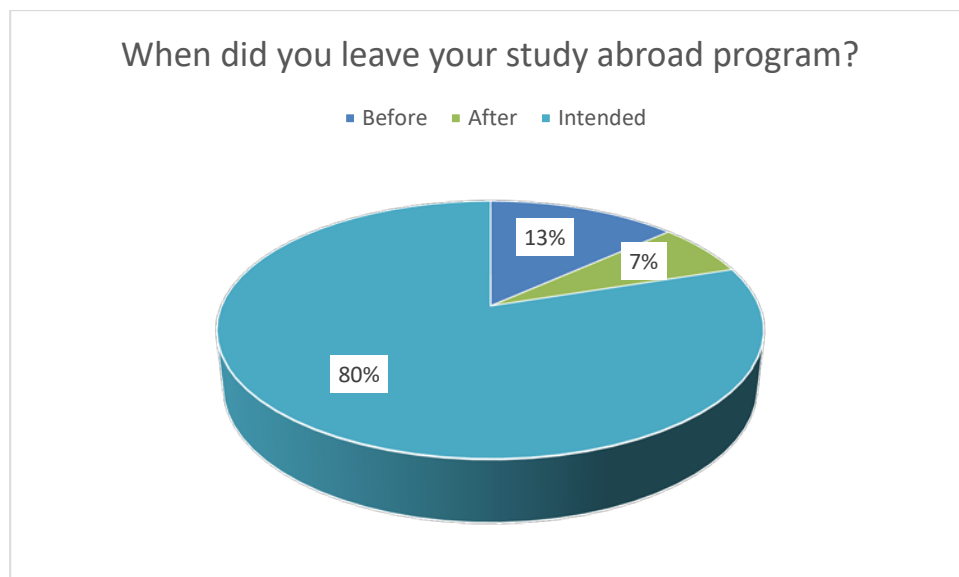


Appendix S – Interview Data: Reverse Culture Shock Breakdown





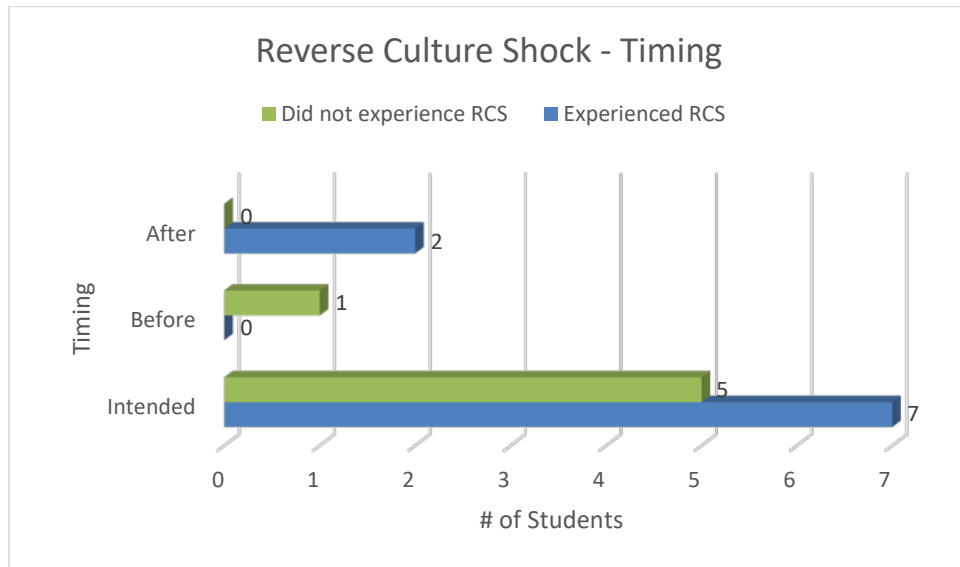
Appendix T – Interview Data: Timing



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Appendix U – Interview Data: Reverse Culture Shock Timing



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