

Soai's First "Year Abroad" Program and the Sojourner Adjustment Process

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In August 1993 the Humanities Department of Soai University implemented its first official year-long study abroad program, sending two third-year Soai students to the University of Northern Colorado at Greeley, U.S.A., for two semesters.

In late July, 1994, about two months after these two students returned from their nine-month sojourn in the United States, I interviewed them about their experiences over the previous year. My objectives in conducting the interviews were:

- 1) To give the returnees a chance for reflection on their personal, learning, and cultural experiences in the United States and to deal with cultural "reentry" stress
- 2) To see how these students' overseas experiences compared to the cultural adjustment stages observed by other researchers working with students who have studied abroad
- 3) To discover what strategies the students used for language and culture learning and adaptation while in the United States
- 4) To identify practical suggestions which will help future participants in the Soai Year Abroad Program

In the following paper I will discuss the American experiences of the two Soai returnees in the framework of cultural adaptation theory and research on the stages of adjustment of overseas students in academic-year programs. I will quote from the Soai student interviews to support my conclusions and recommendations for the Soai program, identifying the returnees only as "Student A" and "Student B" in order to preserve some degree of privacy.

Theories of Cultural Adjustment

Brislin defines cultural adjustment as having three aspects: 1) a person's perceived satisfaction; 2) perceived acceptance by the host culture; and 3) ability to function during everyday activities without severe stress. In discussing their cross-cultural experiences with the returned Soai students from the 1993–94 Year Abroad Program (YAP), I focused on the first aspect, their own perceived satisfaction during their stay in the host culture, the United States. However, the other two aspects, acceptance and ability to function, naturally contribute to the first, one's general level of satisfaction.

Although we do not completely understand the cultural adaptation/adjustment process, the "U-curve" model of adjustment seems to represent the process that many sojourners including overseas students go through in adjusting to a new culture.

The "U-curve" of cultural adjustment was first described by Lysgaard in a 1955 research project on adaptation of Norwegian Fulbright scholars living in the United States. Generally, the sojourn experiences of the Norwegian subjects fell into three stages: initial adjustment, followed by a period of crisis, and then readjustment. When graphed on a chart, their satisfaction levels formed a U-shaped curve, falling gradually during the first few months of the sojourn, and then rising again.

Expanding on this idea, Gullahorn and Gullahorn found that sojourners experienced a similar adjustment curve after returning home, the two experiences together forming a "W-curve".

The U-curve pattern, which describes an individual's subjective sense of cultural adjustment, fits in well with Oberg's four stages of "culture shock": the Honeymoon Stage (enchantment with the new culture, superficial relationships with hosts); the Crisis Stage (differences in language and communication styles lead to feelings of inadequacy, frustration, and anger); the Recovery Stage (the sojourner learns how to function in the new culture); and the Adjustment Stage (the sojourner begins to function well and enjoy the new culture). (See Thomas and Harrell, p. 93)

Kohls (p. 66–68) has proposed four similar stages: 1) Initial euphoria, 2) Irritability and hostility, 3) Gradual adjustment, and 4) Adaptation or biculturalism. Kohls says that there are usually two low points rather than just one in the cycle of culture shock, even in sojourns of less than one year.

Adler's concept of the "Transitional Experience" posits five flexible stages of cultural adjustment reflecting "a progressive depth of experiential learning." These stages

are: Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration, Autonomy, and Independence. (Adler, p. 16)

Torbiorn suggests that the U-curve of cultural adjustment may actually be the slope of an objective learning curve, so while “the type and degree of symptoms and reactions varies across individuals...the underlying process at a cognitive level may be largely the same.” (Torbiorn, p. 34) He believes that the symptoms we observe during the cultural adaptation process are in fact evidence of *cognitive reorientation*, a “restructuring of the frame of reference” (Torbiorn, p. 38) as individuals in a new culture are forced to adjust behavioral norms in order to decrease uncertainty and function effectively.

As Torbiorn (pp. 33–35), Thomas and Harrell (pp. 93–97), Furnham and Bochner (pp. 131–132) and others have pointed out, the U-curve and W-curve hypotheses are incomplete and limited in that they are largely *post hoc* and descriptive rather than predictive, and do not explain in depth the cultural adaptation *process* of a sojourner, the dynamics, the “why”. Additionally, one must beware of over-generalizing without taking into account individual differences in personality, as well as the many different facets of a person’s life, facets which interact but also have their own independent “ups and downs” at various points in every person’s life, whether one is at home or abroad. Also, not all student sojourners will adapt to a new culture successfully, and thus experience a rise in satisfaction, because “the rate of culture learning is not uniform across sojourners, but depends on all the contact variables...” (Furnham and Bochner, p. 133)

Although the U-curve hypothesis has limitations as a theory explaining cultural adjustment, practitioners in the field of foreign student counseling generally agree that “it continues to seem valid when explained to sojourners and therefore can be useful in counseling, as a framework for processing foreign and returned students’ personal stories.” (Thomas and Harrell, p. 97) Torbiorn says that such generalized phases of adaptation, while based only on anecdotal evidence, “can bring insights about the general character of certain phenomenon and make clear that one’s experiences are shared by others in corresponding situations.” (Torbiorn, p. 33)

When discussing their American experiences with the two recently returned Soai students in July of 1994, I hoped that giving them some information on the adjustment curve during our interview might help them gain additional perspective and understanding of the process they had recently experienced, and some understanding of the inevitability of re-entry stress as well.

It would also be useful to discuss the stages of cultural adjustment during pre-

departure training for students going abroad (see Summary, Recommendation 1). According to Thomas and Harrell, "the U-curve of adjustment can be useful in helping sojourners anticipate the ups and downs they will experience in the new culture. It also helps them to plan consciously for finding social support, and consider how they will go about learning the host culture norms and rules." (p. 99) Brislin believes it is beneficial if sojourners understand the curve of cultural adjustment and "are prepared for the initial downswing in mood. Because of the expectations, the actual experience is not so severe." (Brislin, p. 304-305)

In discussing the cultural adjustment process with the returned Soai students from the 1993-1994 program, I used Bettina Hansel's framework which consists of nine periods or stages from Arrival to Readjustment. This framework incorporates and integrates the various stages suggested by other researchers such as Lysgaard, Oberg, Adler, Kohls, and others, and is described in her very useful book *The Exchange Student Survival Kit*, which was written for students in international exchange programs. The cultural adjustment process of a typical student visiting the US is described in simple, non-technical language, with practical advice, and I would recommend this book as pre-departure reading material for students in the Soai Year Abroad Program.

In Hansel's model, the stages of adjustment may overlap, and of course the timing will vary for each individual depending on personal circumstances. For each stage, I have listed the "typical" occurrence and duration according to Hansel.

Experiences of the 1993-94 Soai Year Abroad Students

Stage 0: Preparation (Duration about one month prior to departure for the host country)

This is the stage in which students going overseas gather information about the host country and host institution, and prepare themselves practically and psychologically for the coming experience. For Soai YAP students, this stage occurred in late July and August of 1993. During late July, Soai students are preoccupied with semester exams. In August, school is not in session, and so they have little access to faculty advisors for information.

Preparation for students going abroad may include the following components:

- 1) Practical information on the program, host institution, and locale
- 2) Learning about the host country, its history and culture, using local informants

- from that country if possible
- 3) Language training (possibly in addition to students' regular college curriculum)
 - 4) Awareness training, such as clarifying individual objectives and expectations, increasing conscious understanding of one's own culture and values, and understanding the process of cultural adjustment.

Torbiorn says that the most productive pre-departure training for sojourners is that concerned with self-awareness, including culture contrast exercises which highlight differences between one's own culture and the target culture. He feels that detailed training about behavior and customs in the host culture is best left until later, when sojourners have had practical experience and can "relate what was learned to their own experiences." He also emphasizes that it is important to clarify one's motives for moving to the host culture and to understand in advance "the psychological mechanisms underlying the adjustment process." He considers this to be "the most effective means of dealing with adjustment strains" which may occur later. (Torbiorn, p. 41)

Since this was the first year of the program, Soai had not yet developed a systematic orientation program for Year Abroad students, and from their comments later, the selected students seem to have felt the lack of it. The 1993-94 Year Abroad Program students said that they would have liked to have had more practical background information from Soai or from UNC about the town of Greeley and about the UNC campus before their departure from Japan. For example, they would have liked to have known more about basic things like the climate of Colorado and what clothes to bring; not being aware that it can snow in Colorado as early as late August or early September, one student had not even brought along a warm coat or warm clothes. They would also have liked to have heard more about dormitory life, rules, and facilities; about a typical student schedule and student life; to have had a map of the town and campus, etc.

Lack of this information did not cause any critical problems for the students last year (except that one student who later wanted to move to an apartment was surprised to learn that she had a one-year contract for the dorm), but the students would have felt more comfortable if they had had a clearer idea of what to expect in Greeley. They also expressed a desire to know about local history of the area, because, "It's easier to communicate with them if we know the history." (Interview, Student B)

Most likely, information sheets on such topics already exist in English at UNC, or could be developed by Soai in cooperation with the Office of International Student Services there, and Soai faculty advisors could go over the information with the students before

departure, and answer questions. Previous program participants such as the two students interviewed for this paper could help compile information sheets in Japanese based on their own first-hand experiences.

About language preparation, Student A commented, "Before we were going, we were too busy [to study English]...We wanted a chance to practice, but we didn't have time. After we got there, it took *too long* to get used to hearing and speaking." Perhaps in the future, faculty advisors could recommend suitable intensive English home study materials with tapes for the students to use during the two or three weeks immediately prior to departure in order to heighten their receptivity to English. Specific language needs mentioned by the 1993-94 YAP students included: "how to buy something, how to pay, how much money to pay for the goods, tips, sales tax; how to open a bank account; using checks..." (Interview, Student A)

Since most of the literature on overseas study and cultural adaptation emphasizes the importance of personal and cultural awareness, and knowledge of the cultural adjustment process in helping students cope with the strain of cultural adaptation, Soai should consider developing a formal orientation program for YAP students which incorporates activities of this type, in addition to practical information (see Summary, Recommendation #1). One or two Soai faculty members should be in charge of designing and implementing this orientation program.

Also it would be useful to organize formal meetings between previous and new program participants in July and August in order for them to exchange information about all aspects of the sojourn experience. The first year participants only had limited private contact with the following year's students who left in August 1994; we might have made better use of the "veterans" as resources to prepare this year's participants.

Stage 1: Arrival (Duration three to four weeks)

This stage is characterized by both initial euphoria and excitement, and by fatigue. Once euphoria wears off, it is generally recognized that the period immediately after foreign students first arrive in the host country can be very tiring and stressful. In addition to being tired from a long trip, foreign students must acclimatize to their new homes both physically, emotionally, and culturally, and the process can be very demanding. Students often experience "post-arrival fatigue" in the first stage of their adjustment cycle. (See Hansel, p. 32-33)

In the case of Soai students going to UNC, they had to adjust to a time difference of

fifteen hours; to a different, drier climate with a harsher, earlier winter; and also to the mile-high elevation of Greeley as opposed to the familiar sea-level environment of Osaka.

Both Soai students mentioned that they felt physically tired not only during the first week or two of their stay in Greeley, but for several weeks after their arrival; in fact, they got in the habit of taking a nap in the afternoon between classes during the first semester. They attributed their fatigue in part to the high altitude of Greeley, but they also recognized that some of their tiredness was due to the demanding nature of communicating in a foreign language each day, coping with their classes, and adapting to a new culture:

Student B: The first month, we weren't used to English...I'm very tired of English, maybe.

Student A: We couldn't understand the classes.

The 1993–94 Year Abroad students felt that it would have been to their advantage to have arrived at the UNC campus a few days earlier, in order to have more time to rest and get settled before they moved into the dorm and started classes. They felt that arriving at least one week before the start of classes was desirable. This was suggested to the two 1994–95 participants, so the second pair of students arrived in Greeley around August 15, 1994, before the Soai Summer Program students had left for Japan, thus cushioning the new students' initial week in Colorado. The earlier arrival of the 1994–95 YAP students may have caused some short-term logistical problems with accommodations and increased numbers in the Summer Program activities, but we hope to hear that earlier arrival made the initial period at UNC less hectic and stressful for the students in the second year of the program.

The two 1993–94 students were very grateful that they had been assigned "host families" who met them at the airport, provided accommodation, took them shopping and helped them get settled in their dormitories. These families were also supposed to provide accommodation to the YAP students during school holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas-New Year's, and winter and spring break, when the dormitories were closed. As will be discussed later, this arrangement was successful for one student but not for the other because the host family home had no room available during the winter break. The problem was solved by the second Soai student spending the holidays with the host family of the first, but she felt a bit slighted by her own host family.

The 1993–94 YAP students felt that they had relatively few choices of university

courses the first semester because most courses were already fully enrolled by the time the Soai students arrived and registered in late August. They selected courses in Mathematics (not in their major field nor a particular interest), Black Studies (where they were the only non-African-American students save one), and English. Although the Black Studies course may have been a useful cross-cultural learning experience, they found the math class very difficult because their limited English proficiency made it hard for them to understand both the math problems and the instructions.

In the second semester they had greater choice and were more satisfied with their course selections, which included Speech Therapy, English, Geology and Sociology. They also served as Japanese teachers in the local high school.

Although there may be advantages to having the Soai YAP students choose their courses after they arrive at UNC, with the advice of an experienced student advisor familiar with both the course offerings and instructors, it might also be possible for an informed Soai faculty member to help the students to select a tentative course program and pre-register in June, perhaps getting feedback by fax from the UNC advisor. If able to choose courses more freely, YAP students might feel more motivated, more convinced of the relevance of their UNC courses, and more accountable for the results. More appropriate classes would lessen the strain on Soai students during the difficult first semester.

Stage 2: Settling In (Usual duration about five weeks)

During this period, sojourners typically get familiar with their new surroundings and develop new routines. They may begin making friends and feeling less lonely. Also they may re-examine their personal goals for the sojourn based on their initial experiences, and develop more realistic and achievable objectives.

As mentioned before, the 1993–94 YAP students felt a great deal of fatigue during the first few months of their stay, and felt the need for afternoon naps. They realized that some of their tiredness was due to communicating in a foreign language each day, coping with their classes, and adapting to a new culture.

About their classes, Student A said, "We couldn't understand the classes...I felt very sleepy [in class] because I couldn't." "It was so hard to understand the discussion," added Student B. "In Black Studies, all the students were African American, and it was so hard to understand their English." However, the students developed various strategies to get around their language problems, including explaining their needs to professors, clarifying

the homework assignments and instructions, asking classmates to paraphrase the discussion during class or make summaries of the lecture, and so forth. Things became easier in one class when they made friends with another student, who helped them.

Other minor initial adjustments included things like learning to share a communal bathroom in the dormitory, and getting used to sleeping on the top level of a bunk bed. Food wasn't a problem particularly, although both students reported large weight gains during their sojourns. They said that they could get most of the foods that they were accustomed to having in Japan, and they could cook Japanese food in their dormitories occasionally. Generally they slept well. However, they did report some physical complaints, including sore throats which may have been caused by the very dry climate of Greeley.

Stage 3: Deepening the Relationship (Duration about ten weeks; can overlap Stage 2)

This stage involves the trial and error process of learning the rules of the host culture and of the host family, if there is one. Sojourners also share their own culture with new friends.

As far as making friends, the 1993–94 Soai students did not feel that their dormitory roommates had any particular interest in knowing a Japanese or an international student, although some roommates developed an interest in Japan during the course of the year. One student commented that other friends (not roommates) in the dorm were very interested in Japan and she made friends there: “I think it was very good for me to live in the dorm. It was very easy for me to get close friends. Everyone knows my face and are kind to me.” (Interview, Student A)

However, the other student said that her dorm room was “very quiet and always empty... [because my roommates went out]...I felt very lonely. It was very difficult for me to communicate. They [the roommates] were younger than us and went to parties every night...But other students came to my room at night to visit.” (This student had other difficulties with her roommate which will be discussed later under “Culture Shock.”)

Gradually, Soai students began to share their culture and language with the American students and also with other international students, and they fixed Japanese food for parties in their dorms. “My dormitory friends love Japanese food, so we could have a party with them.” (Interview, Student A) These parties seem to have been more frequent later in the year, in the second semester, when the Soai students were teaching Japanese in the local high school and enjoying getting to know the students there.

The Soai students felt that it was often easier to make friends with other foreign students because they were having similar experiences in adjusting to American life, and because other foreign students were more sensitive to the English language limitations of the Soai students: "It is easier to make friends with exchange students, German and Korean. We have the same problems with English." (Interview, Student B)

Stage 4: Culture Shock (Average duration three months, beginning at the end of the first month)

As the sojourn progresses, students may find that they have trouble adjusting to certain aspects of the host culture or accepting certain behaviors. Of course, each individual's reactions will be different depending on individual personality and circumstances, but every overseas student should expect to experience some culture shock, including any of the following aspects: identity crisis; issues of dependence/independence; anger and frustration; grief and homesickness; and recovery as the sojourner gains confidence and also skills which allow her to function more effectively in the host culture. (Hansel, pp. 37-41) Both Soai students experienced culture shock and a low period after four to five months in the United States.

One Soai student experienced a serious cultural and interpersonal problem with her dorm roommate which escalated during the first semester and eventually caused the Soai student to move out into a private apartment with an American friend. The problem was more a question of individual behavior rather than differences in cultural norms (the roommate's boyfriend was habitually sleeping over, which was against dorm rules), but because the Soai student had this problem in a foreign country, where she lacked a support system and the skills and knowledge necessary for dealing with the problem in the new culture, it was more difficult for her to solve the problem, and more frustrating as the situation dragged on over three months. She tried consulting the dorm advisor first, but felt her English was inadequate. She also went to International Student Services for help and eventually to the Housing Director. Attempts to discuss the problem directly with the roommate were unsuccessful: "We talked, and finally I decided to move. She [the roommate] said, 'I can't change [my behavior.]'" (Interview, Student B)

Once Student B moved out of the dormitory, her life was much more satisfactory. However, Student A experienced her own low point at about that time. Her crisis came later than Student B's, between Christmas and the January exam period, which is often a low point for foreign students in the USA and for American students abroad, as will be

discussed in the next section. Student A's crisis period was characterized by anger, tears, "craziness", and feelings of being left out, which are quite typical symptoms of culture shock:

Student A: After that [Christmas], I almost became kind of sick, kind of crazy, because I felt alone, maybe. She got a Christmas present from her boyfriend [but I didn't]...

Student B: I got a new roommate, and we talked about American culture every night after dinner, but her [A's] roommate got a boyfriend, and she [A] felt a little bit lonely...

A: I was almost crying.

B: She was always saying, "I want to go back to Japan."

A: Very, very homesick. My uncle was very sick, so I thought, "I can go home", but my Dad said, "You don't have to go home." I think now, if I had gone home, maybe I wouldn't have come back.

B: She was angry.

By the beginning of the second semester, both Soai students had got over the most severe manifestations of culture shock and were able to begin to fully enjoy their American experience.

Stage 5: The Christmas-New Year Holidays

The New Year holidays can be an especially difficult time for Japanese students living overseas, just as many European or American overseas students find themselves most homesick when away in foreign countries at Christmas (see "The Holidays" stage of the Foreign Student Adjustment Cycle in Hansel, p.41-42). Examination pressures can also add to stress at this time of year.

In Greeley, the cold winter weather is likely to accentuate feelings of depression or loneliness normally felt by foreign students at this point in the adjustment cycle. Also, one of the Soai students pointed out that they have fewer activities during the holidays and thus have more time to feel homesick. It is essential to provide a warm and supportive homestay environment for overseas students during the winter holidays, and the Host Family plays a critical role in doing that.

Unfortunately for Student A, she was unable to stay with her host family during the Christmas holidays, and although she went to stay with Student B's family, she still felt a

bit left out. Both students agreed that this was the hardest, loneliest time of their nine months in the USA. For Student A, it was the beginning of her lowest psychological point during her stay in the US.

B: [New year's was] very hard, because our friends go back to their home country. And Christmas, we have a big family party [at the host family], but at New Year, they have their own party. My [host] sister had a party with her friends, and my host mother and father had a party with their friends.

A: Nobody but us [was at home]. My family went to a concert.

B: We two danced in the kitchen and made zaru soba for otoshikoshi soba [a traditional Japanese New Year's Eve dish]. We telephoned our parents, but it cost a lot.

A: It made us more homesick. And when I went to a party with my roommate and her American friends or her boyfriend, I missed my Japanese friends. We saw the very good friendly and close mood, and we remembered our family, and...

B: But that was a good feeling. Thanks to that, I noticed the importance of my family, the love of my parents...

A: Family is very important... and I could notice more [that] friends are important.

However, once the students got over their experiences of culture shock and the homesickness that the holiday season had accentuated, they were able to put the experience of their first months to good use in adjusting to student life in the United States.

Stage 6: Culture Learning (Usually from the fourth to eighth month)

"Culture learning consists of being able to absorb the experience of a new culture and respond appropriately to it, evaluating it carefully, adapting as necessary, and adopting new ways of thinking and behaving that seem desirable." (Hansel, p. 42)

Soai students felt less exhausted during the second semester in Colorado and stopped their custom of afternoon naps, partly because their schedule didn't allow it, but also "... maybe my brain was changing into English." (Interview, Student A) Both students found their second semester classes easier and more interesting.

Student B felt increasing satisfaction and personal accomplishment:

I was having many experiences...I became a person who talks, speaks my mind.

My host mother said so. Also my eye contact was getting out [increasing?]. [Now] I have the power to be independent. I think myself what I want to do, what I want to be, more deeply since last year, maybe because I went through many problems in America by myself. Of course many people helped me, many friends advised me, but I decided what I would do by myself.

Student A felt that her ability to communicate in English had improved: “Maybe last year I couldn’t speak a lot...just smile a lot. [Later] I can get more information from people. It’s very fun; I enjoy.”

For cultural information and advice, Student A was able to consult her roommate or dormitory friends, and Student B got information from her host mother, whom she telephoned once a week, as well as her new roommate.

Stage 7: Before Returning Home (Duration about six weeks)

It is usual for international students to feel confused and to have mixed feelings prior to leaving the host country to return home. This is also a very busy time for students, as it usually coincides with final exams as well as departure preparations.

When it came time to leave the United States in May 1994, the Soai YAP students were anxious to see their friends and family in Japan again, but at the same time they did not want to leave the United States and their new American friends:

Student A: I wanted to come back to Japan very, very much at the end of the [calendar] year, but getting nearer [to our return in May] I felt I wanted to stay in America to study English. [I came back to Japan because] I wanted to graduate from Soai University.

Student B: I didn’t want to separate from my host family, from my friends. But [a Soai professor] called us and said, “Come back to Japan as soon as you can.”

Both students have expressed a strong desire to return to the US to study or visit in the near future, if possible:

Student A: I want to go back. I hope so. But I need the money and the time...I don’t want to forget how to communicate with foreign people. I want to keep my English skill...My dream is I want to go back to America and develop my skill as a beginning, and then I want to find my “major” and interesting [field]...

Student B: I'm looking forward to having the chance to go to school again in the States. I don't know what I want to do yet, but I envy the Soai graduates who went to the graduation ceremony in Greeley...American graduation has a very good meaning...It's very hard to graduate from an American university, so it has value...

Stage 8: Readjustment (Duration from three to six weeks, possibly as long as several months)

Although international students are usually happy to be back home, they may also feel some cultural readjustment stress as they readapt to their home culture. Also it is natural for them to see their home country, their friends, and perhaps even their families, in a different light than before their overseas experience. Soai students experienced all these typical aspects of reentry.

Student A: In Colorado, I expect[ed] very good things about Osaka, but when I arrived in the airport...!

Student B: I thought, is *this* Osaka???

A: I mean, my image [of Osaka] is getting very good, but Osaka is NOT good!

B: I can't see blue sky. People weren't friendly. It seemed very crowded.

A: Very humid, very hot. [After coming back], I cried always. I miss my host family and friends.

B: I call my host family and friends, my roommate, once a week.

A: I think Japanese people are having [all] the same clothes...Their topics here, my friends topics, are always the same, always only one: just finding a job or a boyfriend, not[hing] different. In America, we talk[ed] about a lot of things: our culture, Japan, America, mother, family, a lot of things...and they [in the US] are talking not simple, [but] on a high level.

B: I had one class [where] the professor talked about AIDS and we talked about it. Sometimes our topic is a very difficult topic like AIDS or gays. We [in Japan] say it is very important to be internationalized, but we Japanese are still very closed, very old fashioned style... And we, the younger generation, don't have [our] own life. They aren't independent from their parents. Their behavior is childish...

Students can be helped through the readjustment process by formal debriefing activities such as the interview I conducted with these students, by journal writing to develop self-awareness, and by informal discussions with family, friends, teachers. Sharing

their experiences with the students who are about to go to the US can help the returned students get through this process of cultural reentry and re-adaptation, an important stage which should not be ignored.

Effects of the Sojourn Experience on Soai Students

Brislin lists the following as among the possible benefits of cross-cultural contact experiences (Brislin, pp. 305-306):

- 1) increased self-control and self-knowledge
- 2) an increase in internal control (believing that problems can be confronted through individual action)
- 3) a decline in authoritarian style thinking
- 4) an increase in achievement orientation
- 5) increased creativity and ability to look at problems in new ways
- 6) greater objectivity and flexibility in thinking
- 7) an increase in world-mindedness and tolerance, multiculturalism, and humanitarian tendencies
- 8) the ability to serve as cultural mediators

In addition, we should expect improvement in students' foreign language and communication skills as a result of the sojourn.

Two months after returning to Japan, the Soai YAP students had gained understanding of themselves and of their own culture because of their experience abroad, and they seemed more aware and more tolerant of diversity. Also they were aware that they had become more independent and self-confident as a result of their experiences in the United States. These feelings are expressed in some of their comments quoted in the previous section. In addition, they said:

Student B: Maybe if I had stayed in Japan, I would still depend on [my] parents.

Maybe there are a lot of problems which I had in America, but [which] help me to be strong.

Student A: Maybe I can have responsibility...I can recognize how money and family are very important...American students work for their school[ing], to save money for the tuition. Japanese students use their money for clothes or

going somewhere. So my roommate said to me, "You are spoiled!"

The Soai students also became more goal-oriented (a value which they may have acquired from American culture). Both expressed the intention of returning to the United States for further study at some time in the future, and to continue to improve their English. They commented:

Student A: [American students] have their aim to study for these four years, for example to be a teacher,...but Japanese people don't have their [own] future goal; they are just going to school...I have to read some materials, papers, books, so my skill will get better.

Student B: I want to keep my friends in America, so I want to speak English more. I want to take a license to be an interpreter-guide. I don't want to lose my English.

Student A: After graduation, I have to decide what to do, what I want to be, what kind of job I want to get. This time of life is a very good chance to think about that.

Having taught these two students at Soai prior to their departure for Colorado, I was impressed with their improved fluency and pragmatic skills in English on their return. Their ability to take part in a debriefing interview held completely in English is evidence of their improved English ability. Also, both students were clearly more mature, more poised, and more self-confident and self-aware after their return from their Year Abroad.

Summary and Recommendations for the Soai Year Abroad Program

The experiences of the two Soai students in the 1993-94 Year Abroad Program conformed to the U-curve model of cultural adjustment, with the lowest points for each student occurring about four months after their arrival in the United States, followed by a gradual increase in satisfaction, culture learning, and ability to function successfully within the host culture.

Both students appear to have benefited greatly from the Year Abroad Program in terms of improved English language ability and communication skills; increased understanding of themselves and their own culture; greatly enhanced independence and self-assurance; awareness and tolerance of cultural differences; and goal orientation. I feel

that both students have the potential to become “cultural mediators” between different countries. This kind of person is much needed in this age of the “global village.”

Based on the experiences of the first participants in the Soai Year Abroad program, the following practical recommendations can be made for the future improvement of Soai’s program:

1 . Soai and UNC should set up a pre-departure orientation program for Year Abroad students, including both information sheets on UNC facilities, and awareness training.

The 1993–94 students would have liked more information on local weather in Greeley, dorm facilities, a sample student schedule, maps, etc. It should be possible for Soai program advisors to work with International Student Services and other offices at UNC to develop a comprehensive information packet for our students.

It would also be helpful to familiarize the students with what they should expect as far as personal, psychological, and physical reactions during their stay in the US, based on research in the field of cross cultural adjustment. Bettina Hansel’s book *The Foreign Exchange Student Survival Kit* is one resource which could be used with students in pre-departure training.

Also, according to Torbiorn (p. 41), “Training on various aspects of self-awareness is appropriate during the pre-departure stage.” Cornelius Grove’s *Orientation Handbook for Youth Exchange Programs* gives some useful preparatory activities such as “Preparing to Describe the Home Community” (Chapter 4) and “Value Orientations” (Chapter 5). (Grove, pp. 51–65)

After students return to Japan, they should have some formalized activities at Soai, led by a qualified faculty member, to aid their reentry process and maximize culture learning. These activities could include a debriefing interview such as the one I conducted with the first participants.

2 . Soai and UNC should investigate whether it might be possible for Soai YAP students to pre-register for UNC courses in June, at the same time as regular UNC students, in order to have a better choice of courses.

3 . Soai Year Abroad Program students should arrive in Greeley at least one week prior to the start of the fall semester in order to have more time to rest and get settled before they move into the dorm and start classes

UNC International Student services has indicated that it would probably be possible to find temporary family accommodation for the Soai YAP students for a week or so before the dorm opens at a modest additional fee. A longer initial stay with the sponsoring

"host family" might also be considered if practicable.

4 . The sponsoring "host family" relationship is essential for the well-being of the visiting students and should be strengthened if possible. The 1993-94 students depended on their "host families" not only for accommodation and family warmth during school holidays; they also found host family members to be useful sources of cultural information and advice, and emotional support. The students suggested that it is important to select sponsoring host families who will definitely be able to accommodate the students during school breaks, which can be the hardest time emotionally for the visiting students.

5 . UNC Housing Services should consider the possibility of developing a way to match Soai students (and other international students) with dorm roommates who have a particular interest in Japan or in meeting international students, and with more mature students (not with Freshmen).

Perhaps a system already exists whereby the Housing Services Office queries dorm applicants about roommate preferences (e.g., smoker or non-smoker, etc.). Would it be possible to include a question such as, "Are you interested in rooming with an international student? Do you have a special interest in any particular country?"

UNC Housing Services might also try to match students with others of the same *age* rather than the same school year. I believe that it might be easier for roommates to overcome the normal friction of living together and to negotiate intercultural misunderstandings if the US student were particularly motivated by an interest in the visiting student's culture or language, or by the general idea of meeting someone from a different country. It would also be helpful if the US roommate is a more mature student.

The 1993-94 Soai Year Abroad Program students had a very positive and productive cross-cultural learning experience in the United States. By implementing the recommendations gathered from their experiences, we at Soai can increase the likelihood that future program participants will enjoy similar successes.

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