Dear Sophomores,

The summer before you arrived at “K”, you received lots of information about coming to school and the process of adapting to college life. Next year, if you decide to go on Study Abroad, you will again receive information about the process of adapting to a new country. In both cases, we hope that the information is useful in giving you an idea of what to expect – both the highs and the lows. For most of us, knowing something about the lows is particularly helpful, because it lets us anticipate how we might respond and realize that these are “normal” difficulties.

We’re writing this letter because we’ve been concerned for the last several years about sophomores. The concern was prompted by the realization that the largest number of clients we see at the Counseling Center are sophomores. That realization prompted us to do some reading about the sophomore year and, at the same time, an administrative research group began to do some research about sophomores at “K.” We’re hoping that sharing what we have learned will help you prepare and understand the ups and downs in your coming second year at “K.”

From our reading, we learned that the **sophomore slump** is “real” and has been observed for a long time. As early as 1969, researchers defined the sophomore slump as a time that second year students are dissatisfied with the college and with themselves. Others elaborated on the idea by describing the slump as an identity crisis involving the social, academic, and personal selves. Research suggests that sophomores report feeling less self-confident and less intelligent during the second year than they do as first years. For many students, this time involves confusion and uncertainty, as they search for a sense of meaning and purpose.

Many sophomores seem to be in an awkward “between” position – they have finished the transition to college life, yet they have no true commitment to a major. Some are not sure where their real interests and talents lie. Others are rethinking their goals because the plan they came with as first years has not worked out. According to the literature, a major realization for many sophomores is that it is **their** responsibility to find what they want for themselves and their lives, rather than relying on their parents or peers -- and that responsibility can feel quite burdensome.

In conversations with **faculty and staff** who are very involved with sophomores, we learned some helpful K-specific information. First, it became clear that two of the biggest stressors of sophomore year are the study abroad applications and the declaration of major.

In talking with the **CIP** staff, we learned that the process of applying for study abroad is typically very time-consuming and intense emotionally. One of the major stressors is that students often decide that they are only really interested in one program and, then, they worry about whether they will be accepted.

In our conversation with those involved in **advising**, we learned that sophomores really enjoy our annual Declaration of Major day; especially the “Declaration Cake,” to celebrate that you’re “marrying your major.” It’s always 5th week of winter quarter in the Fine Arts Lobby. Good sources of information about majors are faculty members and Departmental Student Advisors (DSAs). Even though you may not know exactly what you want your major to be, you know what you DON’T want—and, hopefully, you can focus your interests during fall quarter by taking classes in the areas you are considering and getting to know some of the faculty and students in that major. Please also discuss the possibilities with your faculty advisor, who has known you since last year. P.S. it’s very helpful to connect with your major department before you go on study abroad or on another off-campus program or summer activity.

In talking with the **CIP** staff, we learned that the process of applying for study abroad is typically very time-consuming and intense emotionally. One of the major stressors is that students often decide that they are only really interested in one program and, then, they worry about whether they will be accepted.

From **Student Activities**, we learned that sophomores are often involved in many organizations and provide leadership to those organizations. To go from membership to leadership in one year can be very stressful, but there are also great rewards and possibilities too.

From the Dean of the Sophomore class we learned that sophomores often feel hemmed in, that the choices they make can’t be changed or that it is too late to try something new (a new extracurricular
activity, sport, major or internship). Nothing could be further from the truth. The faculty and staff (including your class dean) are here to help facilitate new experiences throughout your college experience.

So, what can you do to improve your life as a sophomore?

First, the literature suggests that mentoring by faculty can make a significant difference in students’ experience of this challenging time. So, please try to get to know your faculty – stay after class, stop by during office hours, participate in research or other out-of-class experiences, especially in the departments that you are considering as majors. Also, develop connections with other college staff members in your life – coaches, work study supervisors, older adults that you enjoy and with whom you can talk about your life at “K.”

Second, the literature also suggests that a sense of community and belonging is important to sophomores’ understanding of who they are, where they fit in the world, and how they will find a sense of purpose. So, please join groups that interest you and/or consider a service-learning experience that will help you develop a sense of connection to other like-minded students and to “K.” But be careful not to overcommit yourself. Some sophomores report feeling overwhelmed or too thinly spread. We believe that a deeper connection to a couple of organizations or projects is probably more beneficial to you and to the organizations. Also, please make sure you receive the guidance and support you need from staff and others with experience. Remember it’s okay (even good) to ask for help.

Third, meet with the staff and peer advisors in the CIP to look carefully at study abroad options and develop a Plan B. Try to avoid the last minute crunch with your study abroad application. Know that there will be relief when it is completed, with a likely let-down for some sophomores. For so many “K” students, study abroad played a major role in their college decision, so it makes sense that there is heightened stress and intensity about this major part of the K plan. (Please also see the following articles on concerns about Study Abroad and on finding a study abroad program that is a good fit.)

Fourth, go to CCPD to explore your interests and opportunities. The staff at the Center is very much aware that sophomores face lots of important decisions—where to apply your passions and talents on campus, how to choose a major that fits with your interests and strengths, where to study abroad, which summer opportunities to pursue. The counselors at the CCPD have the tools and services to help students make informed, thoughtful choices. You can take career assessment tools, schedule one-on-one appointments with trained career counselors, and participate in the CCPD’s workshops and programs. Also, keep an eye out for the sophomore event that is a collaboration between the CCPD and Counseling Center and focuses on the Myers Briggs Type Inventory.

Fifth, remember to think about your strengths. At times, the feedback we get from profs, advisors, and friends is about what we can improve or what isn’t working. It’s important to balance that feedback with acknowledgment of all you do well!

Last, but not least, come to see us. We really enjoy sophomores and hearing about the important development processes of the second year!

The Counseling Center Staff

Please find below:
Concerns that Accompany Study Abroad at “K”
Finding the Best Fit with Study Abroad Opportunities
Disordered Eating and Study Abroad
Mental Health and Study Abroad
Adjusting to New Situations: The “W” Curve
Concerns that Accompany Study Abroad at “K”

1. **Before Departure**
   - Getting into the program you want
   - Writing the essays for the application
   - Wondering how you will do away from home (family, friends) for so long
   - Worrying that your language skills are not good enough
   - Hoping that you get along with your host family
   - Thinking about holidays and all other important family/friend activities you’ll miss
   - Liking/disliking/not knowing other students on your program
   - Worrying about family members who are sick/elderly

2. **While on Study Abroad**
   - Feeling insecure about language
   - Feeling uncomfortable with host family
   - Not getting along with other “K” students
   - Being lonely
   - Experiencing academic difficulties (especially ADD and LD students)
   - Partying too much
   - Suffering a trauma (harassment, assault of any kind)
   - Having mixed feelings about being an American
   - Having sick/elderly family members get worse or pass
   - Dating abroad

3. **Return to “K”**
   - Realizing very few people understand what you’ve experienced
   - Having more to say than people want to hear
   - Taking classes and planning your SIP when part of you is still away psychologically
   - Finding the pace at “K” to be unhealthy, dissatisfying
   - Realizing there is much more to life than good grades and accomplishments
   - Hating the consumerism of the U.S. culture
Finding the Best “Fit” Among Study Abroad Opportunities: An introduction to R. Michael Paige’s Intensity Factors

Selecting a study abroad program might be framed as three basis steps. The first step is to consider the essentials, such as language, minimum grade point average, program length, the number of students who can participate, financial aid, etc. Next, it is important to think about your goals for study abroad. Becoming a fluent speaker of the host country’s language, extensive travel in an intriguing region of the world, living in a major urban center, and sharing international experiences with friends and team-mates are very common goals, but there are literally hundreds more.

The third step is the more complex issue of fit: what is the best program for you given who you are at this point in your life? To think about fit students have to be pretty realistic about who they are and what kind of environment would be most beneficial for their development and growth. When identifying which programs might be a good fit for you, the following are questions for you might to consider:

- How do you respond to change?
- How do you cope when you have limited control over your situation?
- How important are comfort and familiarity to you?
- How different from the mainstream can you tolerate being?
- How much independence, privacy and time alone do you need to take care of yourself?

Answering questions like these sets the stage for students to be practical about the cultural differences between the home-culture and host culture and the discomfort (or culture shock) those differences are likely to generate.

Educator, Dr. R. Michael Page developed a list of contrasting cultural circumstances that have a significant psychological impact upon individuals in cross-cultural educational experiences. He names these circumstances "intensity factors" because they can heighten the psychological intensity of stress in the adjustment process (1).

Because there is no inoculation against culture shock, careful and honest consideration of the following intensity factors can be an important part of determining a program’s fit. These factors often help students anticipate potential adjustment challenges overseas. The ten intensity factors are:

1) Cultural differences
   The degree of actual difference between home and host cultures and how negatively the student views those differences.

2) Ethnocentrism (the extent to which one’s own group is considered superior)
The more ethnocentric a student is,
   a. the more difficulty he or she will have in accepting the other culture, and,
   b. conversely, the less accepting of difference the host culture is—the more
      ethnocentric the country as a whole is—the more difficult it will be to become
      engaged with people in that culture.

3) Language
   The less language ability one has and the more essential language is to functioning
   well in the host culture, the more difficult it will be to function.

4) Power and Control
   To the extent that students feel they have no power and control in intercultural
   situations, especially over their own circumstances, the intensity of the experience
   rises.

5) Cultural Immersion
   Generally, the more completely the student is immersed in the culture, the higher the
   intensity.

6) Cultural Isolation
   The level of intensity increases with the reduction of access to the student's own
   cultural group. Students should consider the degree of isolation from their own
   cultural group when considering study abroad programs and sites. Cultural
   immersion is different from isolation.

7) Prior Intercultural Experience
   If this is the first time the student has been out of his or her own culture, the intensity
   of the experience will be higher.

8) Expectations
   If the student’s expectations are unrealistic—extremely positive and/or naïve —
   disappointment can be a serious factor. Conversely, extremely negative expectations
   can often create a self-fulfilling prophecy. A wise saying related to this aspect of
   intercultural preparations is that “Expectations are premature disappointments.” The
   antidote is keeping expectations reasonable and realistic.

9) Visibility and Invisibility
   Being physically different from the host nationals and thus being very visible can
   make the experience more intense. Having to keep parts of one’s identity, such as
   being gay, hidden, can also increase the intensity.

10) Status
    Feeling that one is not getting appropriate respect can raise the intensity. Conversely,
    receiving attention that does not seem warranted is equally distressing. Whatever
the cause, receiving unwanted attention or scrutiny (good or bad) can intensify the experience significantly. (1)

The Intensity Factors Index is a tool students can use before application to study abroad or before overseas travel to identify potential adjustment challenges. It also offers practical steps for the preparation process to address the challenges.

**INTENSITY FACTORS INDEX**

To complete the index, rate each of the following ten intensity factors by estimating the degree to which that factor might play a role in your overseas adjustment. Check the number you best think fits the culture you are going to or your own personal circumstances. If you are unsure of what the category means, go back to review the Intensity Factors description. When you are finished, total your score.

Feel free to discuss what you learn about the intensity factors with the staff of the CIP and the Counseling Center. These factors are often at the heart of many concerns as students make decisions about study abroad programs or begin to prepare for their international opportunities. At the same time, students’ abilities to respond constructively to the challenges the 10 factors present leads to the life-changing quality of study abroad.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTENSITY FACTORS INDEX</th>
<th>Least intense</th>
<th>Most intense</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Cultural differences</td>
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<td>2. Ethnocentrism</td>
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<td>3. Language</td>
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<td>4. Cultural immersion</td>
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<td>5. Cultural isolation</td>
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<td>6. Prior intercultural experience</td>
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<td>7. Expectations</td>
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My Score is: [ ]
Score Interpretation

When your score falls on the low side of the intensity factors scale (10 - 39).

This might be because you believe that the country you are going to will seem very similar or familiar to home. You may have even been there before. Or, if it is your first time abroad and you are going to an English-speaking country, you may feel that since they speak "your language" and their culture is European-derived, that your adjustment will be relatively easy. It might also be low because you are going to study abroad in an area and in a language you already feel comfortable with because of your ethnic heritage, such as studying in Mexico as a U.S. Mexican American or in Vietnam as a Vietnamese American. You may well be correct in your assessment, but we simply caution that a low score might also suggest that you are underestimating the degree to which such intensity factors might impact you. We suggest that rather than be complacent about your ability to "fit in," you look a little deeper into the intensity factors and try to be as objective and honest as you can in your self-assessment. That way you can be prepared for things that otherwise would catch you by surprise.

When your score falls within the middle range of the intensity factors scale (40 - 79).

It seems likely that you have a reasonable idea of what kinds of issues might arise while you are overseas, even if it is only a guess. Since you have identified at least some of the factors as relevant to your situation and the country you are going to study in, you are in a position to work out strategies to deal with those elements which might cause you the most stress. Realizing in advance what elements you might have to deal with gives you the ability to conceptualize appropriate responses and be prepared to encounter them. If it turns out later that you over- or under-estimated some of these, at least you have raised your consciousness about potential areas of concern and that should help you make a better adjustment in any case.

When your score falls at the high end of the intensity factors scale (80 - 100).

This score could indicate several things. One is that you are correct that the country you are going to and the circumstances of your study abroad program are such that the number of stressors will be high. For example, a US-American woman of European, non-Muslim descent who is studying abroad in a rural middle-eastern context will find that high visibility, degree of cultural difference, and ethnocentrism are likely to be quite high. A Caucasian male or female going to areas of Central Africa are likely to find the same factors significant, although there will also be many differences.

On the other hand, a high score might indicate that you are either overestimating your potential degree of difficulty or have developed a high anxiety about the trip. Only you can determine if your perception of intensity factors seems accurate, but you might want to check with people recently returned from your intended study abroad site to compare your projections with their actual experience. It is good to "worry" about your upcoming study
abroad experience if it leads you to seek out an accurate and reliable picture of what you will face, but "obsessing" about it is generally unproductive. On the other hand, if you "prepare for the worst" and it turns out to be much easier than anticipated, at least you were ready for anything by having seriously considered the intensity factors (2).


(2) This section is adapted from Pacific University's intercultural training website, “What’s Up with Culture?”
Disordered Eating and Study Abroad

We’re writing this article because we have been involved in several difficult situations that involved students with disordered eating behaviors and study abroad in the last few years. It is important that you know that the CIP, Student Health Center and Counseling Center staff have serious concerns about sending students who have suffered from eating disorders, are at a very low body weight, or are currently engaging in disordered eating habits to other countries.

Our major concern is that “K” students going on study abroad have a safe experience and maintain their physical and emotional well-being. In order to do so, students need to be able to eat in a healthy way, even in an environment where the food may be very different and the control over what and when food is eaten may be in the hands of host parents or others. In our experience, the transition to another country and the pressures associated with food in another culture can be very difficult to manage for people who have struggled/are struggling with eating in this country. If you have had an eating disorder in the past, we would recommend that you contact the people with whom you worked to talk about how to manage eating on study abroad and to anticipate possible issues that may arise. If you cannot make contact with those providers, please see someone in the Counseling Center to talk through concerns that you have and those we know have arisen for other students.

If you are currently engaging in disordered eating behaviors or are at a very low body weight (BMI <18), please contact the Student Health Center and the Counseling Center, so we can help you assess your current situation and make appropriate plans.

If you are the friend or parent of someone in this situation, please communicate your concerns directly. We have found that a statement of concern using “I language” is most effective. For instance, a friend may say “I really care about you and know that you came to K to go on study abroad, but I’m afraid that your weight is too low for you to be healthy enough to go.” A parent may say: “We are so eager for you to have the experience of study abroad, but we just can’t let you go unless we know you’ll be safe medically.” If these approaches do not seem to fit for you, please call or make an appointment at the Counseling Center to talk about your particular situation.

The Counseling Center Staff
Mental Health and Study Abroad

We are writing this article at the request of the Center for International Programs to provide you with the clearest information and thinking we have about Study Abroad for students who have psychiatric disorders or psychological difficulties. Our three major concerns are that students maintain their treatment plans while abroad, inform important personnel of their disorders/concerns, and take good care of their medication needs.

First, it is critical that students stay with their prescribed treatment plan to make study abroad a success. Our experience is that students who do not follow through (especially with medication) end up having a much more difficult experience, causing the host family and program directors serious worry, and/or having to return to the U.S. before the end of the program. The best way to avoid these difficult outcomes is to follow the plan that you’ve made with your providers and to be in touch with them or with providers in the host country if you notice any concerning symptoms or have any very disruptive experiences.

Second, it is in the best interest of students who have been diagnosed with psychiatric disorders or who know they suffer from psychological difficulties to fill out the Health History form accurately and to let the program manager at K and the program director at the site know of their situation as early as possible. Some students are hesitant to provide this information. Over the years, we have found that clear communication makes a significant difference in students’ experiences because a safety network can be developed. That network seems to reassure both students and parents and puts all of us in the best possible position if there is a major problem.

Some students are not forthcoming about their history with mental health because they believe that Study Abroad will provide a respite from their problems. In our experience, that is not usually the case. There are so many challenges in living in a different country and some of those challenges create considerable stress. We have found that the challenges of a new environment can easily exacerbate psychological concerns and psychiatric symptoms.

The third important concern is medication. It is very helpful to take all the medication that you’ll need with you, along with a letter from the prescribing provider indicating why you are taking the medication. If for some reason that cannot happen, it is important that you make a connection with a prescribing provider early in your stay abroad. We have found that even medications with the same name may be slightly different because they are manufactured abroad. We also know that it is often difficult to get an appointment at the last minute and running out of medication can complicate life a great deal.

Students often wonder about discussing their mental health situation with their host parents. Typically, a pretty matter of fact statement early on can be helpful (e.g., “I take medication because I have experienced depression. I don’t think you need to worry about me because the medication is effective and I’ve learned a lot about managing my difficulties. My parents are completely informed of my situation and are confident that I will be able to do well here. I also want you to know that you do not have to worry that I will hurt myself.”) One other note about home stays for those who take medication: it is extremely important to make sure that you keep your medication safe and out of the way of children or pets.

Finally for those on medication, it is very helpful to carry a list of your medications with the copy of your passport in case you need emergency medical help. Knowing the medication you’re taking can make a significant difference to the health professionals in emergency situations.

The Counseling Center Staff
Adjusting to New Situations – the W Curve

When students are preparing for study abroad, we talk to them about the typical response to the experience of living in another culture. The response has been described as the W Curve – we start at a high point at the top of the W, typically head downward to a crisis point, and then gradually return to a more adaptive perspective. When we return home, we “do” the second half of the W – our excitement at being home gradually gives way to disenchantment, eventually to a crisis and, finally, to a sense of belonging. We find that this model can be applied to the adaptation to any new situation – like beginning college.

The first phase of the adjustment, which typically lasts several weeks, is the honeymoon phase during which everything about the new place or situation is exhilarating. We are enthusiastic as we discover new aspects of the culture/college and find all of what we are learning interesting and exciting.

The honeymoon phase gives way to the increasing participation phase and during this time, which typically also lasts about a month, we begin to feel more frustration, impatience and restlessness about the way things are done in the new environment. We are not as enthusiastic as we were and we begin to question the values we see in the new place and our own values.

The frustration culminates in the crisis phase, which typically occurs in the third month. At this point, we do not like the new environment – even feel hostile to it. The differences from home feel like too much to deal with and we become discouraged about our ability to adapt. Homesickness and loneliness are part of this phase. If we were offered the opportunity to go home, we would take it.

After this very tough time, most people begin to adapt to the new environment. The adaptation phase usually involves a sense of understanding the differences and seeing both the advantages and disadvantages. People report greater comfort with their surroundings and a sense of belonging in the new place.

When re-entry happens, the cycle repeats. First, most of us are very happy to be home and to see everyone we’ve missed and enjoy all the activities/foods/conveniences we did not have when we were away. We experience the honeymoon of re-entry.

After several weeks, however, we start increasing our participation at home and notice the things that we don’t like so well – things that we liked better about the host country/college. We begin to miss our experience away and to feel frustrated with some of the ways of home.

Again, a crisis typically occurs, when we would love to return to the host country/“K”. We miss everything about our other world and how we felt there. We would go back today if that were possible.

Finally, we begin to adapt to home. We see the differences, but know there is good in both places. We feel clearer that we belong where we are and can once again feel at home here.

This model seems to be useful because it gives us a frame for understanding our experience and our feelings about it – and for normalizing what can be very difficult times. Students report using the model on study abroad (particularly when the crisis hits) and reminding each other where they are on the “W Curve”. Thinking about the “W curve” is often reassuring because it reminds them that the process of adaptation is a tough one and they are right where they need to be and that they will be okay.