



BRING
LIGHT
TO
STUDENTS'
MENTAL
HEALTH

Mental health of students

80 % of college students regularly or occasionally feel **stressed** (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2021)

45 % of college students seek psychological **counseling** for excessive **stress** (American Psychological Association, 2019)

Since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, the prevalence of anxiety and depressive disorders has increased by **25 %** (World Health Organization, 2022)

51 % of adults who feel stress also exhibit **depressive symptoms** (Mental Health Foundation, 2018)



Did you know:

... that the study abroad experience is fundamentally influenced by **preparation** (Kudlova (2014)).

... psychological problems abroad can be prevented or at least mitigated by sufficient **previous training** (Krutílková (2014)).

... students abroad **very often experience** feelings of loneliness, increased aggression, feelings of anxiety, stress, self-pity, homesickness and other conditions that are often related to culture shock (Malá (2020), Krutílková (2014) and Dolanská (2017))

The idea behind the COSTABEX project

- Our own experience
- Need of students
- Research papers

3 year-long Erasmus+ project (2021 - 2024)

Partners

CTU

- The Czech Technical University in Prague is one of the largest and oldest technical universities in Europe.

VGTU

- Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (VILNIUS TECH) is one of the largest research universities in Lithuania. VILNIUS TECH has extensive experience in the implementation of international projects

Partners

Academia Maribor

- ACADEMIA is a private College of Short-Cycle Higher Education, with approximately 25 years of experience in the field of education, employment programs and management consulting.

Palacky University in Olomouc (Institute of Social Health)

- It is a modern higher education institution with a wide range of study programmes and abundant scientific and research activities.

Goals

- Prioritize mental health
- Potential risks and problems that may occur during the mobility
- Raise awareness about the need to work with mental health
- Support before, during and after mobility
- Positive mobility experience

“The aim of our project is to create a Mental Health program for university students going on mobility abroad and then to provide them with the necessary support during the stay itself and after their return.”

What are the outputs?



Handbook

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Training

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Website



Tools to help students - trainings

1. Stress management
2. Culture shock
3. Mental health
4. Crisis situations
5. Intercultural communication
6. Conflict management
7. Finance management



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1. How to deal with stress - stress can be a friend

Stress management workshop provides practical strategies for handling the pressures of studying abroad. Through interactive sessions and discussions, participants learn how to identify stressors, develop personal skills to manage effectively stress and its elements, and build resilience. Attending this workshop helps to explore techniques for maintaining mental well-being and increase success of expected outcomes.

Objectives:

- **Identify common stressors** experienced during mobility, study abroad programs.
- Learn effective **stress management techniques**, such as mindfulness and relaxation.
- Understand the importance of **self-care** and establishing healthy habits.
- Explore strategies for maintaining **balance** between academic responsibilities and personal well-being.
- Build resilience to **overcome challenges** and adapt to new environments confidently.

How could you manage stress at Erasmus?

Contact with
family/friends
at home

Talk about your
problems

Student club
ESN



Buddy and
other Erasmus
students

Don't be
afraid to ask

Do not compare
yourself with
others

My Mental Rescue Box



- My stressors
- How to recognize stress on myself (scale)
- What I will do for myself as a prevention
- How do I handle the "usual" stress/uncertainty
 - What/who can help me with this
- How do I handle the excessive load
 - What/who can help me with this

Ten Commandments

- I'm getting enough sleep
- I'm getting enough rest
- I eat healthy
- I watch my vitamin intake
- I have a sufficient drinking regime
- I have an active movement
- I'm deep breathing
- I'm outside
- I'm developing kindness
- I care about relationships

2. Culture shock - clash with reality

Culture shock workshop offers insights and support for navigating the challenges of adapting to a new cultural environment during mobility. Through engaging activities and discussions, participants will explore the stages of culture shock, understand cultural differences, and gain valuable insights into cultural adjustment.

Objectives:

- Recognize the **stages of culture shock** and understand the emotional and psychological impact of cultural transition.
- Develop skills to effectively **manage the challenges** associated with cultural adjustment.
- Explore techniques for building **inter-cultural competence** and fostering meaningful connections with individuals from diverse backgrounds.
- Gain awareness of cultural differences and learn how to navigate cultural norms, values, stereotypes and communication challenges.



Culture Shock

Why are we experiencing it?

Summary

- Culture shock refers to the **feelings of uncertainty**, confusion or anxiety that people may experience when they move to a new country or environment.
- Culture shock can occur when people move to a new city or country - studying abroad for school.
- Cultural adaptation is normal and is a consequence of being in an unfamiliar environment.
- Culture shock is usually divided into four phases: honeymoon, frustration, adaptation and acceptance.
- Over time, people can become familiar with a new environment as they make new friends and learn the customs, leading to an appreciation of the culture.
- The process of **adaptation due to culture shock can improve over time, leading to growth and understanding of the new environment.**

4 Stages of Culture Shock:

- **Honeymoon**
"Wow, this is great!"
- **Frustration**
"What have I done?"
- **Recovery**
"I think I can, I think I can..."
- **Acceptance**
"I love these people. I don't want to go home!"

team.org/blog

How to take care of yourself?

Body level

- Sufficient vitamins and nutrients (especially magnesium, vitamin D)
- Movement (take advantage of university sports centres)
- Poor quality sleep
 - *Up to 40% of adults experience sleep difficulties. Approximately 10% of these have permanent sleep problems.*
 - The problems are then linked:
 - no regeneration of the body
 - high cortisol
 - appetite stimulation
 - hormonal imbalances
 - impaired immunity
 - impaired cognitive function, attention

Mental level

- **I know „why“**
 - What did I come to Erasmus for?
 - People who have high expectations of their cultural experiences tend to struggle more with culture shock. Those who travel with an open mind and heart tend to adapt better.
 - I have clear goals
 - One of the most important factors is motivational orientation – it generally helps to adapt more easily to a culture shock.

3. Mental health - how to enjoy a mobility and not to go crazy

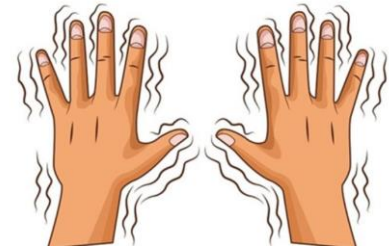
Mental health workshop provides a safe and supportive space for students to explore and prioritize their mental well-being during their mobility journey. Participants will learn about common mental health challenges, stigma reduction, and self-care strategies. This workshop presents practical tools and resources for maintaining mental wellness and seeking support when needed during mobility.

Objectives:

- **Increase awareness** and understanding of common mental health challenges faced by students during study abroad experiences. Stress; anxiety; depression.
- Learn **practical self-care techniques** and strategies for managing stress, anxiety, and other mental health concerns.
- Identify local and remote resources for mental health support and learn how to access them effectively.
- Develop skills for recognizing signs of distress in oneself and others, and explore strategies for offering support and seeking help when necessary.

Anxiety

- Anxiety, from a medical (psychiatric) perspective, is a complex combination of emotions, including fear, foreboding and worry.
- It is often accompanied by physical symptoms, such as palpitations, a feeling of nausea, chest pain, shortness of breath, trembling hands.
- Anxiety is an unpleasant emotional state whose cause cannot be defined.
- Anxiety can be acute, last for a short time, or long term. The intensity of anxiety varies from mild restlessness to a state of panic.



Gratitude

In positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly associated with greater feelings of happiness, mental and physical health. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, enjoy positive experiences, improve their health, cope with adversity, and build strong relationships.

- **Gratitude Journal** - writing down at least 5 things I am grateful for each day/week
- **A visit of gratitude** - to write a letter to a person who has done something really important for me
- **Reminder slips** - "I am grateful for..."
- **Stopping with gratitude** - a ritual of thanksgiving alone and with loved ones (in the morning, before meals, before bed)

DEAR LIFE,
THANK YOU!

LOVE, ME.

WWW.MYBEAUTIFULWORDS.COM

[Angela+Gwinner++Dear+Life.jpg](#)

4. Crisis situations: challenge that has a solution

Crisis management workshop offers valuable insights and practical strategies for handling unexpected challenges and emergencies while studying abroad. Through **scenario-based exercises** and discussions, participants will learn how to assess risks, develop emergency plans, and respond effectively to various crisis situations.

Objectives:

- Increase awareness of potential crisis situations that students may encounter while studying abroad
- Develop skills for assessing risks and identifying warning signs of impending crises.
- Learn how to create and implement effective emergency plans.
- Explore strategies for managing stress and uncertainty during crisis situations.
- Foster collaboration and teamwork skills to support peers and coordinate responses in times of crisis.

Crisis situations during Erasmus?

- Bad roommate
- Too much time together in room/apartment
- Food allergies - finding suitable foods abroad
- We're out of money
- I don't have a place to live
- I can't find accommodation
- Quarrel with your partner (break-up during Erasmus)
- How to handle a long distance relationship
- I'm afraid that I won't be able to communicate with teachers in English at a foreign university and will have to rely on the basics of the language
- Lost luggage
- ...

Post-crisis growth

Post-traumatic growth can manifest itself in five areas

- The first is relationships with **other people** - growth can be manifested, [].
- The second area is **new possibilities in life** - where growth is manifested, for example, by discovering new areas of interest and opportunity, [].
- The third area is **personal growth** - here the growth is manifested e.g. by a feeling of increased self-confidence, [].
- The fourth area is **spiritual change** - growth is manifested, for example, by an understanding of one's own or others' spiritual needs, [].
- The last, fifth area is the **appreciation of life**, [].



My personal Erasmus plan

- Why am I going to Erasmus?
- What am I most looking forward to?
- How do I recognize stress on myself?
- What's guaranteed to upset me?
- What's guaranteed to calm me down?
- Who can I turn to if it gets really bad?
- My favorite relaxation exercise:
- In a crisis, I will follow these steps:
- First thing I'm gonna do when I get home:

5. Intercultural communication - how to get along with people from other cultures

Intercultural communication workshop provides practical insights and skills for navigating cross-cultural interactions during your study abroad experience. This workshop is designed to improve students communication skills and foster positive relationships with individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Objectives:

- **Increase awareness of cultural differences** in communication styles, norms, and values.
- Develop skills of effective communication and connection with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Enhance **cultural sensitivity** and awareness of potential misunderstandings.
- Learn strategies for **overcoming** language **barriers** and nonverbal communication differences.
- Cultivate **empathy and open-mindedness**.

Communication barriers

To overcome our perception of others, we must realize that other people are not better or worse, just different. In order to successfully deal with others and control our own feelings when faced with ambiguity or uncertainty, we must do three things:

- **Accept difference:** we should accept that others are different from us.
- **Acknowledge ignorance:** we should realize that we do not know exactly how others differ from us. In trying to make decisions, we choose to fill in or ignore contextual information and use our own pre-programmed cultural biases.
- **Accept responsibility:** we should accept responsibility for our feelings and reactions when dealing with others.

How to overcome diversity

- Be **open-minded** and get to know a new country or culture to understand the reasons for cultural differences.
 - Be aware of your own prejudices!
 - Be aware of the heterogeneity of society.
- Don't dwell on thoughts regarding your home and **stop comparing** it to your new surroundings.
- Don't keep it to yourself - **be active and socialise** with the locals.
- **Be honest** if you feel disoriented and confused - ask for advice and help.
- Talk about and **share your cultural background** - communication goes both ways.

6. Conflict management - how to say no

Conflict management workshop equips students with valuable skills and strategies for resolving conflicts effecting their study abroad experience. Through interactive exercises and discussions, participants will learn constructive communication techniques, negotiation strategies, and conflict resolution frameworks. This workshop helps to gain the confidence and tools needed to navigate interpersonal conflicts and maintain positive relationships while abroad.

Objectives:

- Increase awareness of common **sources of conflict** that may arise during mobility..
- **Develop communication skills** for expressing needs, concerns, and emotions in conflict situations.
- **Learn negotiation techniques** and problem-solving strategies for reaching mutually beneficial resolutions.
- Explore **methods for de-escalating conflicts** and managing emotions during difficult conversations.
- **Foster empathy, understanding**, and respect for diverse perspectives to promote conflict resolution and maintain harmonious relationships within the international community.

Can you tell the difference?



Assertiveness

Assertiveness is a social skill. It is a way of communicating our needs, our wishes and our feelings to others without violating their rights. It teaches us self-control and the art of asserting ourselves while respecting the needs of others.

Typically, what we associate with assertiveness is saying **NO**, but it's also about the topic:

- **tolerating criticism from others**
- **be able to give feedback constructively**
- **the art of asking for a positive feedback**
- **know how to appreciate and empower others**

Open door (consent technique)

We agree with every truth contained in the partner's statement.

We acknowledge all the arguments of the partner that might have something to them. Gradually, the partner loses the energy to look for more arguments. It's like he's pushing full force on a door that isn't closed.

We will not, however, agree on matters that humiliate us or are of fundamental importance

Principles of assertive „consent“:

To agree with every truth: 'It is true...'

Agreeing even with every probable truth: 'You may be right...' or 'It's probably true...'

To agree even with the general truth in the claims of people who try to manipulate us: 'That might be true...'
or 'It makes sense...'

However, we can add our own perspective to our answer: 'It doesn't bother me that much...'

7. Finances management - it pays to plan

Finance management workshop provides essential guidance and practical tips for managing finances effectively during your study abroad experience. Participants will learn budgeting techniques, financial planning strategies, and money-saving tips tailored to the unique challenges of living and studying in a new country.

Objectives:

- Increase awareness of the financial implications and challenges associated with studying abroad, including, cost of living differences, travel cost and unexpected expenses.
- **Develop budgeting skills** for creating realistic and sustainable spending plans based on individual needs and priorities.
- Learn **strategies for tracking expenses**, managing cash flow, and avoiding common financial pitfalls.
- Explore **opportunities for saving money**, such as student discounts, meal planning, and affordable transportation options.
- Gain confidence in making financial decisions, accessing resources for financial support or emergencies while abroad.

TIPS for developing your budget

- 1) Determine the total amount of income:** This may include scholarships, grants, or part-time job income.
- 2) Make a list of expected expenses,** including accommodation, food, transportation, and school supplies, as well as any additional expenses such as entertainment and leisure activities.
- 3) Set priorities:** you should allocate more money towards necessities such as accommodation, food, and transportation, and less towards entertainment.
- 4) Track spending:** use budgeting apps, spreadsheets, or pen and paper to track their expenses.
- 5) Adjust the budget as needed:** If unexpected expenses arise, students may need to reduce spending in other areas to stay within their budget.
- 6) Save for emergencies:** such as medical bills or travel disruptions.

Key questions

- **What are my priorities?**
 - What I „must“ do every week/month?
 - What I „want“ every week/month?
 - What I don't want, but I have to think about?
- **How to manage daily life challenges?**
 - Do your income and expenses balanced?
 - Vital resources within reach
 - Access to public transport
- **General "how to save" lessons**
 - Have clearly allocated amounts for "leisure" spending
 - Prepare food at home
 - ISIC card
- ESN support **Is where/how to earn extra money**
 - Is there anything you can sell of your stuff before you leave? Clothes, electronics, etc.
- **What events are free at the venue?**
- **Keep your own little books**
 - set a monthly budget and ideally a daily budget
- Use an app (Spendee, Wallet, etc.), pencil/paper
- I work with finances „consciously“



Tools to help students - counseling emails



Counseling emails

- **15** informational **newsletters** shared in a timeline from before-departure, during the study abroad time, to return from Erasmus+ program
- Provides students with **regular reminders** on various **practical** and **wellbeing**-related topics to help them improve study abroad experience



Topics

Sending pre-departure

- 1 Mobility process
- 2 Accommodation
- 3 Formalities
- 4 Finance management
- 5 Language development
- 6 Cultural adaptation
- 7 Students helping students
- 8 It's packing time!
- 9 What could go wrong

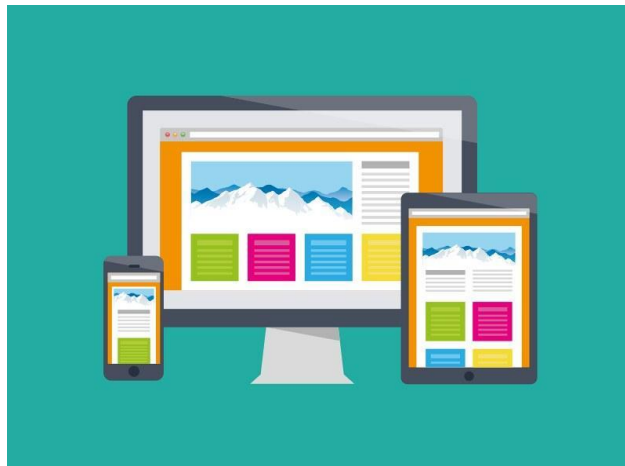
Sending while abroad

- 10 Study advice
- 11 Stress management
- 12 How to manage crisis
- 13 Work-rest balance

Sending after return

- 14 Re-entry shock
- 15 Personal development

Where to find all information - website



How to implement the outputs - Handbook



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What do our students say?

“it's great to get this information and advice now rather than having to deal with it at Erasmus”

“it helped me to realize how important it is to pay attention to how I feel and to recognize when something is wrong and that it is worth addressing”

“opening my eyes to everything I may be facing and how to prepare for it”

“I'm glad I understood that other students have the same concerns as me”

Thank you for your attention



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Q&A