

What Happens Abroad Stays Abroad? Going on a Student Exchange While Being in a Committed Relationship

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ABSTRACT

While substantial research focuses on genuine long-distance relationships, there is a lack of studies dealing with temporary long-distance relationships due to studies abroad. The present study with Austrian students tried to uncover differences between couples who terminated versus those who sustained their relationship during the exchange period. Participants ($N = 119$, 73.9% females, $M_{\text{age}} = 24$ years) were asked about perceived changes in the relationship due to their exchange experience, which they mainly spent abroad in Europe. Couples sustaining their relationship had more in-person contact. Thus, visits are essential for maintaining long-distance relationships during time abroad. In addition, participants still in their relationship after the exchange noticed different effects of changes on their relationship than did couples who separated.

Keywords: emerging adulthood, international exchange programs, intimate relationship, student mobility, study abroad

INTRODUCTION

Due to the globalization and internationalization of education, it has become more important for students to include an exchange semester abroad into their academic carriers. In 2015, 18% of Austrian students participated in an exchange semester abroad while 15% plan to do so, and numbers have increased continually over the last decades (Institute for Advanced Studies, 2007, 2016). Still, the majority of Austrian students do not go abroad. Students who are not willing to plan a semester abroad

name “being separated from family and/or partner” as one of the biggest self-identified barriers (Heublein et al., 2011). Therefore, we studied exchange students’ temporary long-distance relationships to see if the fear of separation or even the termination of relationship is justified, what kind of changes regarding the relationship were noticed, and what reasons for a possible break-up were given.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Student Mobility: Why Bother To Go Abroad?

Studying abroad is becoming more popular among students worldwide, and thus, the number of students studying abroad is increasing each year (De Wit et al., 2013; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019). In Austria the percentage of students with an exchange experience rose from 11% in 2006 to about 20% in 2015 (Institute for Advanced Studies, 2007, 2016), and in Germany 36% of students reported having been abroad during their studies in 2017 (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2018). Moreover, student mobility is highly endorsed by universities which are trying to raise their mobility exchange rates supported by the European Union’s increased ERASMUS (EuRopean Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Student) budget of about 40% (University of Innsbruck, 2016).

The majority of exchange students think very highly of their exchange experience and its benefits both on a personal and an academic level (Gesslbauer et al., 2012). Regarding personal development, the main reason for students to go abroad is to broaden their horizons. Many studies also show that studying abroad affects personality factors and intercultural competencies (Forsey et al., 2012; Mapp, 2012; Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013). Mapp (2012) revealed a significant increase in emotional resilience, flexibility/openness, perceptual acuity, and personal autonomy, while Zimmermann and Neyer (2013) found significant changes in openness, agreeableness, and neuroticism after a study abroad experience of 5–8 months. Concerning academic benefits, most students are satisfied with the quality of their education abroad (Gesslbauer et al., 2012). Furthermore, the experience contributes to better chances in the job market (Teichler & Janson, 2007).

Nonetheless, only a low number of Austrian students have been mobile during their studies by going on an exchange semester (Grabher et al., 2016). In a representative study of German students, Heublein et al. (2007) found that 34% of respondents were not interested in participating in an exchange program. The three main reasons deterring students from participating in a student exchange were financial liabilities, accreditation problems, and being separated from family and/or a partner (Heublein et al., 2011). Similarly, Puntenev (2016) found separation from family, friends, or significant others to be the top concern regarding studying abroad. Souto-Otero et al. (2013) used a large sample with students from different countries. The data consisted of (a) ERASMUS participants, (b) students who considered participating in ERASMUS but did not, and (c) students who did not even consider participation in an ERASMUS exchange. Their findings showed that the most endorsed self-identified barrier for people not considering an ERASMUS exchange

was being separated from their family and/or intimate partner. The question thus becomes whether fear of separation—as described by Souto-Otero et al.'s (2013) respondents not considering ERASMUS participation—is justified and leads to termination of relationships.

Long-Distance Relationships: Why Do We Need Further Research?

Although long-distance relationships are a well-studied field (Cate et al., 2002; Roberts & Pistole, 2009; Sahlstein, 2004; Stafford, 2005; Stafford et al., 2006; Stafford & Reske, 1990), there is a lack of research on temporary long-distance relationships due to studying abroad. Findings of “common” long-distance relationships state that the maintenance of such relationships is simply different compared to those in which couples are geographically closer, and that maintenance may need more effort (e.g., every day contact is not possible, and thus personal visits as well as virtual appointments need some kind of planning; Pistole et al., 2010). Dainton and Aylor (2002) also found that face-to-face contact is very important in maintaining a long-distance relationship, as it is associated with greater satisfaction, trust, and commitment and can lead to less jealousy in the relationship.

The question remains if findings of such studies on common long-distance relationships can be applied to the distinct cases of long-distance relationships caused by one partner of the couple studying abroad. In common long-distance relationships, it is often unclear when or even if both partners will live in the same place again. However, if a partner decides to take part in a study exchange program, the duration of time spent separately from their intimate partner is clearly set beforehand. Furthermore, long-distance relationships can occur at any stage of life, whereas long-distance relationships due to studying abroad are often limited to the age of emerging adulthood. An Austrian student social survey showed that only 6% of students over 30 years old are planning or at least considering a semester abroad (Institute for Advanced Studies, 2016). On the contrary, students between the ages of 21 and 25 as well as the group between 26 and 30 years have the highest percentage (20% and 24%, respectively) of stays abroad during their studies (Institute for Advanced Studies, 2016).

Emerging Adulthood: What Are the Defining Features?

Arnett (2000, 2014a) defined emerging adulthood as a distinctive developmental period in life with five defining features: identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and possibilities/optimism. Regarding identity exploration—historically seen as a main developmental task of adolescence (Erikson, 1950)—Arnett (2014a) argued that it may start in adolescence but continues into emerging adulthood. The time span of the late teens through the late 20s is associated with great changes in emerging adults' love and work lives, which is why Arnett (2014b) called it a time of instability. He further emphasized the self-focus of individuals at this age, because he considers it very important to be self-focused at some point in life, and this age can offer such an opportunity. Emerging adults do not have as many obligations as adolescents and at the same time have not yet taken on all the new

responsibilities of adults. One very defining feature of this stage is that emerging adults often feel like an adult in some respects but not in others. Arnett (2014b) described this as feeling in-between. Even though emerging adulthood is a time of instability and change and emerging adults often do not know how life is going to turn out for them, they are still very optimistic that everything will turn out well or at least better than it did for their parents (Arnett, 2014b).

Emerging Adults' Long-Distance Relationships During Studies Abroad

Studies abroad, especially in the period of emerging adulthood, offer many possibilities and opportunities for individuals to explore their identity (i.e., finding out who they are and what their likes and dislikes are). Furthermore, emerging adults can use the time abroad to reflect upon their committed relationship and whether it is worth sustaining. Taking into account the complex processes emerging adults are going through, it is clear that these processes are also present while being on a semester abroad, which may have an impact on committed relationships before, during, and after those emerging adults stay abroad. Therefore, we consider temporary and common long-distance relationships to be distinct.

However, there is a lack of research concerning long-distance relationships where one party (an emerging adult) is participating in a student exchange program. The question arises why some couples are able to sustain their relationship whereas others terminate theirs. What happens to a relationship when one partner decides to go on a student exchange?

Before we can address specific questions, we have to ask if the two studied groups (students who sustained vs. students who terminated their relationship) are inherently different in their (a) sociodemographic variables (age, portion of women and men, parental education, etc.), (b) characteristics of the student exchange (exchange type, destination, duration of time abroad), or (c) length of relationship and perceived relationship quality. We considered this preliminary analysis essential to interpret the results of the following research questions:

1. Are there differences in the way couples who sustain their relationship communicate versus those who terminate theirs?
2. Do people notice a change in their relationship due to the student exchange?
3. How do people explain their ability to sustain their relationship across the distance, and what reasons do they give for the break-up if they were not able to sustain it?

METHODS

Procedure

The study was conducted via an online survey. To reach as many potential participants as possible, we sent a link to the survey to the international offices of all Austrian tertiary education institutes with the request that they forward the survey

link to their former exchange students. Furthermore, the survey was posted in Facebook groups related to studying abroad and spread using the snowball system. Data was collected from December 2014 to April 2015.

Participants

The study was open to all Austrian students who had experienced a student exchange abroad with a minimum duration of 3 months within the last 3 years. Additionally, all participants had to have been in a romantic relationship at the point of starting their exchange.

A total of 119 participants took part in the survey. The sample's mean age was 24 years ($SD = 1.90$) and the majority of participants were women (73.9%). Seventy-nine percent spent their time abroad in Europe with an average duration of 5.5 months. Eighty-five percent of the participants studied abroad while the other 15% used their time abroad for an internship. Regarding subjects' relationships, 42 subjects terminated their relationship during or after their time abroad (RT group). The other 77 participants were able to sustain their relationship (RS group) throughout their exchange period and beyond (see Table 1).

Measures

We asked participants to provide sociodemographic data, information about their student exchange, and information about their relationship before, during, and after the time abroad. We asked them how often they used different kinds of media to stay in touch and how often and long they visited or were visited by their partner during the time abroad (see Table 2). We also asked if they noticed any changes in the relationship after the exchange – and if so of what nature – and why they stayed or did not stay together (open-answer format).

We employed the “Partnerschaftsfragebogen-Kurzform” (PFB-K; Kliem et al., 2012), which is the short form of Hahlweg's (1996) Partnership Questionnaire, to assess the couples' perceived relationship quality (tenderness, fighting behavior, similarities, and communication) prior to the student exchange. The questionnaire originally was conceptualized using three scales, but Kliem et al. (2015) found that the PFB-K actually shows a one-dimensional structure in representative German speaking samples. Therefore, only the total score of the nine items was used. The PFB-K asks for the frequency of certain behaviors (e.g., “He/She hugs me”) in the relationship, which participants rate from 0 (*never/rarely*) to 3 (*very often*). Kliem et al. reported an internal consistency of $\alpha = .84$ for the total score, which was $\alpha = .65$ in the present study. One additional item assessed the degree of the couple's happiness with their relationship on a scale from 1 (*very happy*) to 6 (*very unhappy*).

Data Analysis

We analysed the answers to the open-ended questions using qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014). The complete qualitative data was segmented into codable units. We developed category systems inductively that contained main and

subcategories, definitions, anchor examples, and coding rules (Mayring, 2000, 2014). The first author developed coding categories. We coded all of the answers twice (by the first author and a second coder), with resulting Cohen’s kappa values ranging from .71 to .81. Cohen’s kappa values of .70 and above were regarded as reliable (Mayring, 2000). A significance level of $p \leq .05$ was assumed for all statistical analyses.

RESULTS

Preliminary analysis showed no significant differences between the two groups (RT group vs. RS group) regarding sociodemographic data, information about the student exchange, length of the relationship, or quality of the relationship (see Table 1). These results imply that the two groups were not inherently different before their exchange experience, which is why potential differences in other variables are of an even greater importance.

Table 1: Participants’ Sociodemographic Data, Information About Their Exchange Term, and Information About Their Relationship (N =119)

Variables	RT	RS	RT vs. RS	
			Test ^a	<i>p</i>
Number of participants	42	77		
Age	<i>M</i> = 24.10 <i>SD</i> = 1.85	<i>M</i> = 23.57 <i>SD</i> = 1.86	<i>t</i> = 1.47(117)	<i>p</i> = .14
Female	28 (66.67%)	60 (77.92%)	$\chi^2 = 1.79$ (1)	<i>p</i> = .18
Fathers’ education			$\chi^2_F = 1.96$	<i>p</i> = .78
Compulsory school only	5%	1%		
Apprenticeship	29%	32%		
High school	21%	16%		
College	7%	10%		
University	38%	41%		
Mothers’ education			$\chi^2_F = 1.58$	<i>p</i> = .84
Compulsory school only	7%	5%		
Apprenticeship	12%	20%		
High school	36%	30%		
College	14%	16%		
University	31%	29%		
Exchange type				
Internship abroad	8	9	$\chi^2 = 1.20$	<i>p</i> = .27
Study abroad	34	68		
Destination of exchange term				
Europe / other continent	32 / 10	63 / 14	$\chi^2 = .54$	<i>p</i> = .48
Duration of time abroad (in months)	<i>M</i> = 5.75 <i>SD</i> = 2.18	<i>M</i> = 5.17 <i>SD</i> = 2.39	<i>t</i> = 1.27(113)	<i>p</i> = .21

Variables	RT	RS	RT vs. RS	
			Test ^a	<i>p</i>
Exchange semester mandatory?	yes: 3 no: 39	yes: 10 no: 67	$\chi^2_{\text{F}}=2.47$	<i>p</i> = .33
Length of relationship before time abroad (in months)	<i>M</i> = 23.71 <i>SD</i> = 17.31	<i>M</i> = 23.90 <i>SD</i> = 20.80	<i>t</i> = -0.05(117)	<i>p</i> = .96
Relationship quality before time abroad				
PFB score (Mean rank)	55.60	61.66	<i>Z</i> = -0.93	<i>p</i> = .35
Happy (Mean rank)	64.11	56.95	<i>Z</i> = -1.16	<i>p</i> = .25

Note. RT = Relationship terminated; RS = Relationship sustained. PFB = Partnership Questionnaire. ^aDifferences regarding RS and RT group were analyzed using *t* test (*t*) or Mann-Whitney-U-Test (*Z*) and chi square test (χ^2) or Fisher's exact test (χ^2_{F}).

Potential differences in ways of maintaining the relationship during the time spent abroad (Research Question 1) were analyzed by comparing the frequency in the two groups who stayed in touch by video calls (people talk to each other while seeing the other person on screen; e.g., Skyping or Facetimeing), phone calls, text messages, (including all kinds of messaging via phone, PC or tablet), letters, and in-person visits. We found a significant difference between the two groups regarding video calls, text messages, and visits. Whereas the RT group made more use of video calling and texting with their partner, the RS group spent more days physically with their partner. There were no significant differences between the groups regarding phone calls and writing letters (see Table 2).

Table 2: Different Forms of Contact and Frequencies of Using Them

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
Videophone call ^a		-2.86	.01
RT	71.05		
RS	53.12		
Phone call ^a		-0.95	.35
RT	63.45		
RS	57.32		
Text message ^a		-3.21	.01
RT	71.81		
RS	51.83		
Letter ^b		-1.25	.21
RT	64.42		

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
RS	56.78		
Visit ^c		-2.28	.02
RT	49.95		
RS	64.78		
Days spent together while abroad ^d		1987.50	.02
RT	48.48		
RS	63.98		

Note. RT = relationship terminated ($n = 42$); RS = relationship sustained ($n = 77$). Differences regarding RS and RT group were analyzed using U tests by Mann-Whitney. Answering options: ^aSeveral times a day, once a day, several times a week, once a week, several times a month, once a month, several times per semester, once in a semester, never. ^bSeveral times a week, once a week, several times a month, once a month, several times per semester, once in a semester, never. ^cMore than three times, 2–3 times, 1 time, never. ^dNumber of days.

We asked participants whether they noticed any changes in their relationship because of their exchange (Research Question 2). Regarding the main categories (see Table 3 for categories), the RT group named more negative relationship changes and self-centered changes, while the RS group noticed more positive relationship changes (Fisher’s exact test: $\chi^2 = 66.79, p < .001$). Examples for positive relationship changes are “no doubts about / strengthening the relationship” or “more intimacy”, whereas “distance” or “more arguments” are examples of negative relationship changes. Statements like “clarity about emotions” or “more time alone” were categorized as self-centered changes (see Table 3). One participant stated, “We feel even more certain now that our relationship is one that will last forever” (no doubts about / strengthening of the relationship), while another had a very different feeling, “We grew apart” (distance).

Table 3: Changes Noticed in the Relationship Due to Time Spent Abroad

Variable	Total		Relationship terminated		Relationship sustained	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Positive relationship changes	74	52.9	6	11.8	68	76.4
No doubts about strengthening the relationship	17	12.1	0	0.0	17	19.1
More intimacy	14	10.0	1	2.0	13	14.6
Better usage of time together	10	7.1	1	2.0	9	10.1
More appreciation for each other	10	7.1	1	2.0	9	10.1

Variable	Total		Relationship terminated		Relationship sustained	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Security and trust	9	6.4	1	2.0	8	9.0
Importance of honest conversations	3	2.1	0	0.0	3	3.4
Joint plans for the future	3	2.1	0	0.0	3	3.4
Negative relationship changes	32	22.9	24	47.1	8	9.0
(Geographical) distance	15	10.7	10	19.6	5	5.6
More arguments	5	3.6	3	5.9	2	2.2
Partner more withdrawn	3	2.1	3	5.9	0	0.0
Doubts about relationship	2	1.4	2	3.9	0	0.0
Fears (e.g., possible separation)	1	0.7	1	2.0	0	0.0
Partner is envious	1	0.7	1	2.0	0	0.0
Jealousy	1	0.7	1	2.0	0	0.0
Less affection	1	0.7	1	2.0	0	0.0
Self-centred changes	25	17.9	12	23.5	13	14.6
Clarity about emotions	7	5.0	5	9.8	2	2.2
More time alone	6	4.3	3	5.9	3	3.4
More aware of differences	4	2.9	2	3.9	2	2.2
More traveling	1	0.7	0	0.0	1	1.1
Mentioned separation only	7	5.0	7	13.7	0	0.0
Relationship turned into friendship	2	1.4	2	3.9	0	0.0
Total	140	100	51	36.4	89	63.6

Also of great interest was why the RS group thought they had been able to sustain their relationship and why the RT group thought their relationship had ended (Research Question 3). We separated the answers of the RT group into the categories “separation with mutual consent,” “reasons within oneself,” and “reasons within the partner.” We categorized “different views” or a “mutual feeling of growing apart” as “separation with mutual consent.” When participants thought it was mostly them who had ended the relationship, we used “personal growth” as the subcategory. The category “reasons within the partner” did not have any subcategories mentioned by more than 10% of the RT group (see Table 4).

The RS group highlighted the importance of using specific strategies during the time abroad, such as staying in close contact: “He visited me and got to know the environment and the people there.” The second most frequent mentioned main category was “relationship qualities,” where the emphasis was put on tolerance and

trust. For example, participants answered, “Great trust and understanding that my girlfriend showed me” and “our relationship is based on mutual trust.” In general, they had many different ideas of why they were successful in sustaining their relationship. Tables 4 and 5 provide a rich picture of what reasons participants gave for terminating or sustaining their relationship.

Table 4: Reasons Why Couples Terminated the Relationship

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Reasons within partner	17	23.6
Partner met someone new	6	8.3
Jealousy	4	5.6
Partner changed	3	4.2
Lack of interest	1	1.4
Reasons within oneself	25	34.7
Personal growth	9	12.5
Met someone new	6	8.3
Doubts	6	8.3
Lack of interest	3	4.2
Separation with mutual consent	30	41.7
Different views	9	12.5
Growing apart	8	11.1
Not happy anymore	3	4.2
Lack of communication	2	2.8
Arguments	1	1.4

Table 5: Reasons Why Couples Sustained the Relationship

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Special effort	93	43.7
Staying in close contact	33	15.5
Visiting each other often	17	8.0
Honest and open conversations	17	8.0
Having shared experiences	10	4.7
Endurance	6	2.8
Giving one’s partner space	5	2.3
Relationship qualities	72	33.8

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Tolerance, trust, etc.	34	16.0
Love	16	7.5
Faithfulness	5	2.3
Being happy together	5	2.3
Being a good match	4	1.9
Stable relationship beforehand	4	2.8
Relationship duration beforehand	6	2.3
Joint goals for the future	5	2.3
Spatial separation is temporary	5	2.3
I do not know	5	2.3
Knowing what you got yourself into	4	1.9
Looking forward to being united	3	1.4
No doubts	3	1.4
Little distance	2	0.9
Previous long distance relationship experience	1	0.5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Studying abroad is becoming increasingly important in higher education. Many students worldwide seize the opportunity, but many do not. One of the most endorsed reasons for being deterred from studying abroad is the separation from family and/or a romantic partner (Souto-Otero et al., 2013). The main aim of the presented research was to find out if doubts about the compatibility of studying abroad and maintaining a romantic relationship are justified. As results showed, there were couples who stayed together throughout and after their geographical separation, but which factors are beneficial for a relationship and have a supporting effect on the partners?

The present study revealed differences between those participants who terminated their relationship, compared with participants who sustained their relationship, taking into account that perceived relationship quality did not differ before the exchange. A limitation of the present study is that the participants gave retrospective evaluations of events that had happened up to 3 years ago. This means that the quality of the prompted information is heavily reliant on the clarity of the participants' memory. Nevertheless, it seems that actual face-to-face contact is very important in sustaining a romantic relationship during an exchange term (although it is difficult to say if this is a cause or an effect). In the time of social media, this is a crucial information for students who are planning to go abroad. Even though many participants stated that virtual communication made it easier for them to stay in touch and maintain the relationship, it does not seem to be sufficient.

When planning to study abroad, students should also keep in mind that a study exchange is very defining personally (Arnett, 2014a; Gesslbauer et al., 2012), but as answers of the participants show, also for a relationship. Both groups noticed changes in their relationships due to studying abroad. Therefore, the partner who is not going abroad should be equally comfortable with this decision. It is not just the time apart that affects both partners but furthermore, after the return, both partners have to adjust to the changes the relationship has undergone.

Possibly, some people use their time apart in a more beneficial way for the relationship than others and are therefore better able to sustain the relationship. They could, for example, talk more and get to know each other even better to strengthen their relationship emotionally by being a part of the partner's everyday life despite the lack of physical contact (e.g., tenderness, affection, and sexuality) in their relationship during the exchange. Thus, when partners are separated due to an exchange term, the time spent apart is just as important as the time spent together. As Arnett (2014b) stated, a lot of identity exploration happens during the time of emerging adulthood. Some couples develop in similar ways, whereas others do not. It is possible that some of the relationships would have been terminated either way, as the partners followed different identity development paths. Therefore, a suggestion for further research would be to conduct a study on temporary long-distance relationships with a longitudinal design and to follow a couple coping with this mobility exchange by investigating both partners.

Is there something to learn from couples who have successfully undergone the experience of a study abroad? Participants of the RS group highlighted that it requires special effort during the time separated to make the relationship work. This may seem obvious, but it is not always easy. At times the decision is between spending time with new friends and enjoying the life abroad versus staying in close contact with friends or a partner at home. This can be challenging, especially with different time zones complicating the situation. The solution seems to be to find a good balance between these two competing interests.

The lesson learned from couples who terminated their relationship (RT group) include that the reason for the break-up is often not within only one of the partners, but is a mutual decision based on the feeling of having grown apart. It is difficult to say if these couples could have prevented the separation by staying in closer contact or if the break-up was inevitable and the time apart was a trigger for them to realize their differences. What can be said is that the perceived relationship quality before the exchange did not differ from that of members of the RS group. Therefore, assuming that these couples had also planned to stay together, trying to stay as close as possible during the exchange seems a promising approach for granting the relationship a chance to survive.

Possible changes in the relationship due to the exchange could also be seen in relation to identity exploration and commitment making. Regarding the open answers to the question why the relationship was sustained or terminated, participants of the latter seem to explore their identity (e.g., highest endorsement of answers in the categories of different views, growing apart, personal growth, met someone new and doubts), whereas the participants who sustained their relationships seem to have already made commitments regarding relationship. They invested a lot of effort in

sticking to this decision (highest endorsements of answers in the categories staying in close contact, visiting each other, communicating honestly and openly, showing tolerance and trust).

Regarding Erikson's psychosocial theory of development, the successful solution of the identity crisis is the prerequisite for committing to a stable partnership and being capable of intimacy (Erikson, 1968). Recent research confirms this assumption (e.g., Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010; Seiffge-Krenke & Beyers, 2016). One could hypothesize that participants of the RS group already reached intimacy whereas the RT group was still in the process of exploring and did not solve the crisis of identity achievement yet. This group seems to be the prototypical "emerging adult" (Arnett, 2000) using the mobility exchange for identity exploration.

Implications

On a final note on this topic, couples facing a temporary separation could profit from information including how to communicate with a partner during a student exchange, as well as the importance of planning in-person visits. Couples should be aware of what to expect in general and especially in terms of their relationship.

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