

STAGES OF REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

Emotional Health

Many students expect to experience culture shock when they arrive in their host country; but did you expect it when you returned home?

This unpleasantness can be attributed to your new attitudes and perceptions you may have developed while overseas. Research has shown that re-entry is at least as frequent as the initial culture shock. It is therefore an inevitable part of your study abroad experience.

STAGE 1: Disengagement

While you are still abroad, you begin to start thinking about moving back to the U.S. and moving away from your overseas experience and friends.

STAGE 2: Euphoria

You may be very excited to be back in your own country and others may be equally delighted to have you back. After people express their pleasure in seeing you again, and listen politely to your stories for a few minutes, you may suddenly and/or painfully realize that they are not particularly interested in what happened to you and would much rather prefer to talk about their own affairs.

STAGE 3: Alienation

In this stage, you experience dampened euphoria with feelings of alienation, frustration and anger. You may even feel like an outsider - a foreigner in your own country. America will be different from how you remembered it (the pollution may be worse; the pace may be more hurried and hectic; etc.) Suddenly you feel irritated with others and impatient with your own inability to do things as well or as quickly as you hoped. Resentment, loneliness, disorientation and even a sense of helplessness may pervade.

STAGE 4: Gradual Readjustment

The fourth stage of reentry includes a gradual readjustment to life at home. During this stage, you will no longer be shocked by the variety you find on the supermarket shelves and be able to contain your comments about differences between cultures that come to your attention. If you have difficulty filtering out the foreign words in your conversation, you will find that your English-only conversational skills will improve during stage four.

Comments

It may be helpful for you to identify with your fellow returnees. They will be able to relate to your growing pains and can provide you with needed support as you readjust to living at home. The best immediate remedy for reentry shock is to talk to others who have gone through a study abroad experience. They will be natural partners for communication.

Communicating will reduce your sense of loneliness and frustration. Rest assured, you will eventually regain your balance and reach Stage 4, where your overseas experience becomes an integrated part of your life!

If you are experiencing any emotional stress, are having a difficult time readjusting or feel the need for individual counseling, please contact the Counseling Services in 108 Murphy Hall at 334-7727.

Physical Health

You should not expect problems adjusting back to the local cuisine. Some students, however, do experience some bouts of diarrhea, colds, and other minor discomforts after returning.

If you do not feel well or are returning from a developing country, please see your primary care physician for a check-up.

Coping with Reverse Culture Shock

One way to ease back into life here is to spend some time with people who have also had experiences abroad, or those who are just beginning to plan their own overseas journey. Contact OIP for volunteer opportunities that will allow you to:

- Speak with students who are considering studying abroad;
- Speak with other students returning from their study abroad experience;
- Meet and help international exchange students adjust to the US;
- Help prepare students who are about to begin their study abroad experience; and
- Learn more about careers in international affairs.

These are just a few activities that will help you readjust to live in the US while cherishing your study abroad journey.