

STUDY ABROAD RETURNEES: WELCOME BACK!

Few people anticipate culture shock when they return home, but many students actually find that it is just as challenging to get used to being at home again as it was to get used to living abroad. Some students find that they have changed and grown a great deal while abroad, but that home, family and friends have not, and this gap makes it challenging to slip back into settings, routines, and relationships that were once familiar and comfortable. You should expect a certain amount of this if you have had a full and enriching time overseas. It is important not to ignore the experience of reentry as a facet of study abroad: readjusting to life at home is difficult and what you're feeling is entirely legitimate.

Common Reentry ("Reverse Culture Shock") Experiences:

- Impression that you can't fully explain your experience or its importance
- Realization that others do not want to hear very much about your adventures
- Sensation of being "out of place" despite being home
- Boredom with being home
- Experiencing "reverse homesickness" for the place where you studied abroad
- Seeing that relationships with family and friends have changed
- Feeling that others misunderstand your growth, or see the "wrong" changes in you
- Assessing your home in a way that is judgmental or overly critical
- Feeling that your experience abroad is lost or cut off from the rest of your life

"There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered." - Nelson Mandela

If you find yourself experiencing difficulty after coming home:

- Try to use the same cultural adaptation skills that you developed while you were getting used to being abroad (e.g. keep active, maintain a sense of humor, find a support group, expect differences, allow yourself to make mistakes, stay flexible) to make the transition to being home
- Be reflective. Give some thought to your return, to the types of intellectual and emotional changes that you have undergone as a result of your time abroad.
- Expect some negative feelings about your "home" culture. Try not to be too critical of shortcomings that you did not see before. Remember that at there are positive and negative aspects of all cultures.
- Accentuate the positive. Try to identify what you like about both cultures and try to incorporate the best aspects of these into your life.
- Be patient with your friends and family who are trying to understand your recent experiences. Listen to them, too, about the changes they underwent during the time you were away.
- Maintain connections with "the international life" through the many opportunities available at UMASS: come into our Advising Center, evaluate your program [http://www.umass.edu/ipo/sax_return.html] help spread the word about study abroad to your friends and classmates, act as an E-mail Ambassador for students who are interested in the program through which you chose to study.
- If you have a few special photos that could be used in our Education Abroad materials, please drop them off or mail them to the office - we'd love to see them! If you are interested in sharing your experiences through photos, please e-mail them to: abroad@ipo.umass.edu
- Set goals for your development. Realize once again that change can be stimulating and this could be your chance to develop in new directions. Set some long-term goals, which may involve finding ways to return abroad.

*"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."
--T.S. Eliot*

Re-Entry Resources

Austin, Clyde. *Cross-Cultural Re-entry: A Book of Readings*. Abilene, Texas: Abilene Christian University Press, 1986.

Bruce, A. *Culture Shock at Home: Understanding Your Own Change - The Experience of Return*. *Transitions Abroad*. January/February, 1997, p. 79-80.

Citron, James. *Short-Term Study Abroad: Integration, Third Culture Formation, and Reentry*. NAFSA: Association of International Educators (<http://www.nafsa.org>).

Hess, J. Daniel. *Studying Abroad/Learning Abroad: An Abridged Edition of the Whole World Guide to Culture Learning*. Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, 1997.

Hogan, John T. *Culture-Shock and Reverse-Culture Shock: Implications for Juniors Abroad and Seniors at Home*. Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American College Personnel Association (Houston, TX, March 13-16, 1983).

Howell, Leah. *Coming Home: Sustaining the Experiences of Studying Abroad*. *The Vermont Connection*. 1999. (<http://www.uvm.edu/~vtconn/journals/authors.html>).

Paige, R. Michael, Andrew D. Cohen, Barbara Kappler, Julie C. Chi and James P. Lassegard. *Maximizing Study Abroad: A Student's Guide to Strategies for Language and Culture Learning and Use*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 2002.

Woody, Stacey. *Programming for Reentry: Issues and Solutions for Study Abroad Returnees*. *Transitions Abroad*. Mar/Apr 1998, p. 107-108 (<http://www.transabroad.com>).

Useful web sites:

What's Up With Culture: On-line Cultural Training Resource for Study Abroad:
<http://www3.uop.edu/sis/culture/index.htm?page=/sis/culture/>

Culture Matters: *On-line workbook developed for the Peace Corps for helping participants to acquire the skills and knowledge to work and live abroad successfully*:
<http://www.peacecorps.com/wvs/culturematters/index1.html>

It's Your World: Studyabroad.com's Pre-Departure Handbook for Students, *Handbook Part V: Re-entry*
<http://www.studyabroad.com/guides/handbook/handbook5.html>

NAFSA: Association of International Educators web site for study abroad resources:
<http://www.secussa.nafsa.org/resources.html>

Writing about your study abroad experience:

<http://www.abroadviewmagazine.com/>

<http://www.transitionsabroad.com/>

<http://www.glimpseabroad.org/>