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# WELCOME HOME!

We hope you have just returned from one of the most academically, personally, and culturally enriching experiences of your life! Studying and living abroad has probably changed you, perhaps in ways you may not even recognize. Many students find they have grown a great deal while abroad, but sometimes find that, upon returning home, friends and family have not or that they have changed in different ways than expected. This can lead to a challenging reentry process. This is perfectly normal. Often students experience more difficulty readjusting to home than you may have when you first went abroad. This guide is to offer you some information, support, and resources on how to cope with cultural adjustment.

Maybe you aren't experiencing any challenges in reentry! This guide also has resources for you on "What now?" You have had this amazing experience but what do you do with it now? We will explore the many ways to integrate your experience into your academic, professional, and personal goals and development.

The information in this guide was current at the time of publication, though changes may occur at any time.

## TOP 10 RE-ENTRY CHALLENGES

There are lots of reasons to look forward to going home, but there are also a number of psychological, social and cultural aspects which can prove difficult – often because they are unanticipated. The following list was generated by interviewing students like you who have been through the experience and survived nicely. However, they say you should take the process seriously by being realistic and thinking about it and your possible reactions. They offer the following thoughts on reentry for your consideration in the hope they will make your return both more enjoyable and more productive.

### **1. BOREDOM**

After all the newness and stimulation of your time abroad, a return to family, friends, and old routines (however nice and comforting) can seem very dull. It is natural to miss the excitement and challenges which characterize study in a foreign country, but it is up to you to find ways to overcome such negative reactions – remember a bored person is also boring.

### **2. "NO ONE WANTS TO HEAR"**

One thing you can count on upon your return: no one will be as interested in hearing about your adventures and triumphs as you will be in sharing those experiences. This is not a rejection of you or your achievements, but simply the fact that once they have heard the highlights, any further interest on your audiences' part is probably unlikely. Be realistic in your expectations of how fascinating your journey is going to be for everyone else. Be brief.

### **3. YOU CAN'T EXPLAIN**

Even when given a chance to explain all the sights you saw and feelings you had while studying abroad, it is likely to be at least a bit frustrating to relay them coherently. It is very difficult to convey this kind of experience to people who do not have similar frames of reference or travel backgrounds, no matter how sympathetic they are as listeners. You can tell people about your trip, but you may fail to make them understand exactly how or why you felt a particular way. It's okay.

#### ***4. REVERSE “HOMESICKNESS”***

Just as you probably missed home for a time after arriving overseas, it is just as natural to experience some reverse homesickness for the people, places, and things that you grew accustomed to as a student overseas. To an extent it can be reduced by writing letters, telephoning, and generally keeping in contact, but feelings of loss are an integral part of international sojourns and must be anticipated and accepted as a natural result of study abroad.

#### ***5. RELATIONSHIPS HAVE CHANGED***

It is inevitable that when you return you will notice that some relationships with friends and family will have changed. Just as you have altered some of your ideas and attitudes while abroad, the people at home are likely to have experienced some changes. These changes may be positive or negative, but expecting that no change will have occurred is unrealistic. The best preparation is flexibility, openness, minimal preconceptions, and tempered optimism.

#### ***6. PEOPLE SEE “WRONG” CHANGES***

Sometimes people may concentrate on small alterations in your behavior or ideas and seem threatened or upset by them. Others may ascribe “bad” traits to the influence of your time abroad. These incidents may be motivated by jealousy, fear, or feelings of superiority or inferiority. To avoid or minimize them it is necessary to monitor yourself and be aware of the reactions of those around you, especially in the first few weeks following your return. This phase normally passes quickly if you do nothing to confirm their stereotypes.

#### ***7. PEOPLE MISUNDERSTAND***

A few people will misinterpret your words or actions in such a way that communication is difficult. For example, what you may have come to think of as humor (particularly sarcasm, banter, etc.) and ways to show affection or establish conversation may not be seen as wit, but aggression or “showing off”. Conversely, a silence that was seen as simply polite overseas might be interpreted at home, incorrectly, as signaling agreement or opposition. New clothing styles or mannerisms may be viewed as provocative, inappropriate, or as an affectation. Continually using references to foreign places or sprinkling foreign language expressions or words into an English conversation is often considered boasting. Be aware of how you may look to others and how your behavior is likely to be interpreted.

#### ***8. FEELINGS OF ALIENATION***

Sometimes the reality of being back “home” is not as natural or enjoyable as the place you had constructed as your mental image. When real daily life is less enjoyable or more demanding than you remembered, it is natural to feel some alienation. Many returnees develop “critical eyes”, a tendency to see faults in the society you never noticed before. Some even become quite critical of everyone and everything for a time. This is no different than when you first left home. Mental comparisons are fine, but keep them to yourself until you regain both your cultural balance and a balanced perspective.

#### ***9. INABILITY TO APPLY NEW KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS***

Many returnees are frustrated by the lack of opportunity to apply newly gained social, technical, linguistic, and practical coping skills that appear to be unnecessary or irrelevant at home. To avoid ongoing annoyance: adjust to reality as necessary, change what is possible, be creative, be patient, and above all use the cross-cultural adjustment skills you acquired abroad to assist your own reentry.

## ***10. LOSS/COMPARTMENTALIZATION OF EXPERIENCE (SHOEBOXING)***

Being home, coupled with the pressures of job, family, and friends, often combine to make returnees worried that somehow they will “lose” the experience. Many fear that it will somehow become compartmentalized like souvenirs or photo albums kept in a box and only occasionally taken out and looked at. You do not have to let that happen: maintain your contacts abroad; seek out and talk to people who have had experiences similar to yours; practice your cross-cultural skills; continue language learning. Remember and honor both your hard work and the fun you had while abroad. (Dr. Bruce La Brack, School of International Studies, University of the Pacific)

## **REENTRY SHOCK**

Reverse culture shock or reentry shock is often a normal part of the process of going abroad and returning home. Many people after returning home experience sadness, frustration, restlessness, depression, boredom, isolation, critical attitudes, and changes in your perspectives. This is all a normal part of the readjustment process. You may have experienced some of these same feelings when you first went abroad. The stages of reverse culture shock are similar to what you may have experienced when you first went abroad.

Below you will find a graphic that visually depicts cultural adjustment process, both in your host country and the return home, as well a detailed description of each phase of the reentry shock.

### ***1. DISENGAGEMENT***

This first phase begins prior to leaving your host country when you start to think about returning to your home culture. It is a busy time with finishing your course work, saying goodbye and goodbye parties, and packing, that your last few days may fly by with little time to reflect on your emotions and experiences. You already start to miss your new friends and are reluctant to leave.

### ***2. INITIAL EUPHORIA***

Shortly after you arrive home, you may experience feelings of immense joy and excitement. You are happy to see your friends and family, and be reunited with some things you may have missed, such as pets, your favorite foods, a great shower, your bed! This state is similar to the initial fascination you experienced when you first went abroad. The length of this stage is variable, but often ends with a realization that people are not as interested in listening to your stories, as you are in telling them.

### ***3. IRRITABILITY AND HOSTILITY (REENTRY SHOCK)***

In this stage, you may experience symptoms such as alienation, frustration, anger, depression, boredom, loneliness, helplessness, restlessness, etc. You may feel like an outsider in your own country and feel very critical of attitudes and behaviors in your home culture. People often feel like they want to go back abroad because they miss it or they believe things are better abroad.

### ***4. RECOVERY AND REINTEGRATION***

Eventually you will enter into the recovery and reintegrations phases of reentry shock where things begin to feel somewhat normal. You are able to navigate through your day to day life with the new attitudes, beliefs, and goals you developed while abroad. Remember to incorporate the positive aspects of your study abroad experience into your life at home.

(adapted from [www.studentsabroad.com](http://www.studentsabroad.com))



## REENTRY SOLUTIONS!

### ***Keep Practicing your Writing Skills in the Foreign Language***

When you return home for a sojourn abroad, it may be difficult to continue practicing your writing skills in the foreign language. Here are a few quick ways to keep up your writing:

1. Write a letter to your host family every so often – you may also be able to email them.
2. Keep a short journal on aspects of your experience abroad that are particularly memorable by using your newly learned language skills.
3. Continue writing about how your life has changed since the experience, and try to explain your feelings regarding these changes.
4. If you are more fluent in the second language, find a local newspaper that is written in the language and send in an article. Take it through the writing processes and find someone to give you honest feedback on your writing. You might discover a talent you never knew you had. (Maximizing Study Abroad p. 230)

## PRESCRIPTIONS FOR REENTRY WOES

### ***Study Abroad Returnee Gatherings***

Attend the semi-annual Study Abroad Returnee Gathering! This informal meeting provides the opportunity to meet other returnees, visit with fellow program participants, discuss and share stories, and learn how to market your study abroad experience. Light refreshments are provided. The Center for International Education (CIE) will send more information about the gatherings closer to the dates.

### ***Speak at Study Abroad Orientation***

Come help future students learn about a program by answering questions at study abroad orientation. For more information, email [studyabroad@uwec.edu](mailto:studyabroad@uwec.edu).

### ***Become an International Classroom Speaker***

Earn money for talking about your experience! Give 10 minute presentations on study abroad to five classes around campus. Develop presentation skills, discuss your experiences, and help others learn about study abroad. International Classroom Speakers participate in a training session at the beginning of each semester. Email [studyabroad@uwec.edu](mailto:studyabroad@uwec.edu) for more information.

### ***Apply to be a Peer Guide***

Every semester, new international students arrive at UW-Eau Claire. Current students, both international and domestic, have the opportunity to assist new students adjust to the United States and UW-Eau Claire campus through being a Peer Guide. This is a great opportunity to meet new people, help others, and interact with individuals from all over the world! Check out the Web site for more information on becoming a Peer Guide: <http://www.uwec.edu/CIE/divisions/services/students/cultural/pgp.htm>

### ***Attend the UW-Eau Claire Folk Fair***

Folk Fair is the largest international festival of its kind in the area, and brings the community together in celebration of culture. It takes place every fall on the UW-Eau Claire campus and offers all who attend an enriching cultural and education experience: <http://www.uwec.edu/CIE/divisions/services/students/cultural/folkfair.htm>

### ***Correspond with friends from abroad***

With letters, postcards, email, Facebook, and Skype, it is easy to stay in touch with friends from abroad. Staying in touch allows the opportunity to keep experiences fresh! Maintaining these relationships also keep the option open for visiting and going abroad again.

### ***Be a Resource at the Study Abroad Fair***

Each fall semester, the CIE sponsors the Study Abroad Fair. Returned students are always welcome to speak to interested students about their program. Email [studyabroad@uwec.edu](mailto:studyabroad@uwec.edu) if you are interested in volunteering at a program table.

### ***Join an Internationally-Focused Student Organization or Create Your Own***

With over 250 student organizations, UW-Eau Claire provides a multitude of opportunities for students to explore extra-curriculars! To see the list of organizations visit <http://uwec.orgsync.com/>

### ***Take Internationally-Focused Courses On Campus***

Many courses on campus integrate global learning into the curriculum. Check the Undergraduate Catalogue to learn about new and existing program offerings.

### ***Subscribe to a Newspaper from Your Host Country or Read it Online***

Visit <http://www.kidon.com/media-link/index.php/> for international newspapers, magazines, and radio!

### ***Start Planning How You Might Go Abroad Again***

There are opportunities to intern, volunteer, work, and study abroad. For more information, visit the Re-

turned Participants section on the Study Abroad Web site: <http://www.uwec.edu/cie/studyabroad/>

### ***Study Abroad Keepsakes***

There are many different craft ideas to keep the memory of your study abroad adventure alive. The Study Abroad Office has their very own Pinterest page dedicated to creative ways of always keeping your study abroad memories with you. These ideas range from map keychains to shadow boxes full of your souvenirs. Follow us on Pinterest for more great ideas! <http://pinterest.com/uwecstudyabroad/>

## **REENTRY ONLINE RESOURCES**

### ***5 Things NOT to do After Returning from Abroad***

A humorous set of suggestions.

<http://matadornetwork.com/abroad/5-things-not-to-do-after-returning-from-abroad/>

### ***What's Up With Culture?***

A wonderful online resource from University of the Pacific. Check out Module 2 for an interactive online resource to help you unpack your return home.

<http://www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/index.htm>

## **REENTRY RESOURCES**

There are many books and articles that can help you continue to process your experience abroad.

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.

Chisholm, Linda A. and Howard A. Berry. 2002. "Understanding the Education—and Through It the Culture—in Education Abroad." New York, NY: The International Partnership for Service-Learning.

Furnham, A. & Bochner, S. (1986) *Culture Shock*. Routledge (available through Intercultural Press., Yarmouth, Maine)

Gaw, K. F. (2000). Reverse culture shock in students returning from overseas. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 24, 83-104.

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.



Kauffman, Norman L., Martin, Judith N., and Weaver, Henry D. "Students Abroad: Strangers at Home." Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, 1992.

Kepets, Dawn. "Back in the USA: Reflecting on Your Study Abroad Experience and Putting it to Work." NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 1995.

Kohls, L. Robert. "Survival Kit for Overseas Living." Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, 1996.

La Brack, B. (1999-2000). The missing linkage: The process of integrating orientation and reentry. SAFETI On-Line Newsletter, 1(1), 241-279 (see link below).

Martin, Judith N. "Patterns of Communication in Three Types of Reentry Relationships: An Exploratory Study." Western Journal of Speech Communication. v50 n2 Spring 1986, p. 183–99.

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.

Ryan, M. E., & Twibell, R. S, (2000). Concerns, values, stress, coping, health and educational outcomes of college students who studied abroad, International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 24, 409-438.

Storti, Craig. 2001. "The Art of Coming Home." Yarmouth, ME. Intercultural Press, Inc.

Wang, M.M. (1997). Reentry and reverse culture shock. In K. Cushner & R. Brislin (Eds.), Improving intercultural interactions: Modules for cross-cultural training programs, Vol. 2 (pp. 109-128). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Woody, Stacey. Programming for Reentry: Issues and Solutions for Study Abroad Returnees. Transitions Abroad. Mar/Apr 1998, p. 107–8.

What's Up With Culture: Online cultural training resource for study abroad

Culture Matters (PDF): Online workbook developed for the Peace Corps for helping participants to acquire the skills and knowledge to work and live abroad successfully

# **CONTACT NAMES & ADDRESSES**

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