

UW-Eau Claire Study Abroad



Re-Entry Guide

We hope that you have 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 haven't changed or that they've changed in different ways than expected. This can lead to a challenging re-entry 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 the re-entry process.

Maybe you aren't experiences any challenges in re-entry! This guide will still have some resources for you on what to do now that you've had this amazing experience. We will explore the many ways to integrate your experience into your academic, professional and personal goals.

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

Top 10 Re-Entry Challenges

Boredom

- After being abroad, returning home can seem boring. It is natural to miss the excitement and challenges of being abroad but it is up to you to overcome your negative reactions.

No one wants to hear

- Your friends and family will be interested in your stories for about 1 day, then they lose interest. Or if you start every sentence with, "when I was in ____" they may ignore you. This isn't meant to hurt you but when one has never experienced what you did, they will lose interest very fast.

You Can't Explain

- Even when given the chance to explain all the things you did/saw/experienced, it is likely to be frustrating to relay them coherently. It is hard to explain to those who don't have similar references or travels. It's okay if you can't 100% explain everything you experienced.

Reverse Homesickness

- Just like how you probably missed home when you first went abroad, it is perfectly normal to miss the place you grew to know as home, when you were abroad. To help with these feelings, try to stay connected with new friends and your host family (if applicable).

Relationships Have Changed

- It is inevitable that when you return home, some of your relationships may have changed. Just how you have altered some of your own ideas and attitudes, people at home may have also experienced changes. These changes may be positive or negative but expecting no change to have happened is unrealistic.

People See "Wrong" Changes

- Sometimes people may ascribe "bad" traits to the influence of your time abroad. This can sometimes be motivated by jealousy, fear, or feelings of superiority/inferiority. This phase can pass quickly if you do nothing to confirm their stereotypes.

People Misunderstand

- The way you act, dress, communicate, etc. may have changed when abroad and people at home may not understand. Be aware of how your changed behavior may be interpreted by others.

Feelings of Alienation

- Sometimes the reality of being back home isn't so enjoyable. You may develop "critical eyes" for the society you call home, things you never would have noticed before.

Inability to Apply New Knowledge and Skills

- Some returnees get frustrated when they can't use their newly gained skills right away at home. Have patience and be creative in how you practice your new skills.

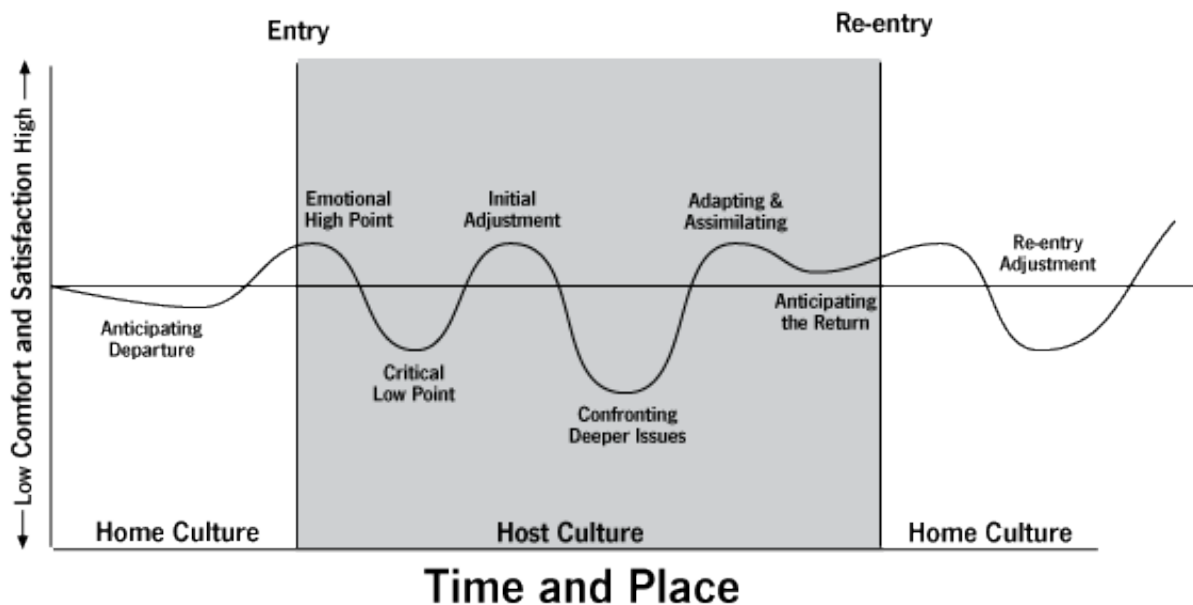
Loss of Experience

- Being home, coupled with school, jobs, friends, family, etc, often make returnees worried that they will lose their experiences and memories.

Reverse Culture Shock

Reverse culture shock or re-entry 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 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, both in your host country and the return home, as well as a detailed description of each phase of the reverse culture shock.



Disengagement/Anticipation

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 up course work, saying good-bye and packing. 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 may be reluctant to leave.

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 things you missed, like your pets, favorite foods, shower, bed, etc. 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.

Irritability and Hostility

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 be very critical of attitudes and behaviors in your home country. People often feel like they want to go back abroad because they miss it and they believe things are better abroad.

Recovery and Reintegration

Eventually you will enter into the recovery and reintegration phase of reverse culture shock. This is 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 when abroad. Remember to incorporate the positive aspects of your study abroad experience into your life at home.

Prescriptions for Re-Entry Woes

Here are some ways to stay involved with an international setting:

Attend Returnee Events

- Keep an eye on your UWEC email, once you return, to learn about the returnee events that are planned! This is a great place to meet others who have studied abroad!

Get Involved in the CIE

- The CIE has a variety of ways for you to get involved and continue sharing your study abroad experiences:
 - Speak at orientation
 - Becoming an International Classroom Speaker
 - Be a peer advisor
 - Represent your program at the study abroad fair
- Keep an eye on your email for when we need volunteers or for when we're hiring!

Be an International Buddy

- This program pairs a domestic student with an international student to help them transition to life in the U.S. Returned study abroad students make great buddies because they know what it is like to be in a new environment. Again, keep your eye on your email for when we are looking for new buddies.

Attend the UWEC Folk Fair

- The Folk Fair is a larger international festival that takes place on campus each spring!

Take Internationally-Focused Courses on Campus

- There is a wide variety of courses on campus that have a global learning component to them. If one fits in your degree plan, take it!

Start Planning to Go Abroad Again

- There are a variety of programs that you can participate in, if it works to study abroad again. Otherwise, after graduation consider joining the Peace Corps, applying to teach English as a second language or applying for a Fulbright scholarship.

Stay in Contact with Friends from Abroad

Additional Online Re-Entry Resources:

Life After Study Abroad

<http://www.lifeafterstudyabroad.com>

- Articles on the transition
- Ways to go abroad again

- Resume and interview tips

Small Planet Studio

<http://smallplanetstudio.com>

- Webinars and articles to help roadmap your re-entry (some do cost money)
- Workbook to go through (does cost money)

What's Up with Culture?

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

- Click on Module 2

Articles that use humor to help put into words the re-entry process

- [15 Delusions I've Had About Returning Home](#)
- [5 things Not to do After Returning from Abroad](#)
- [Coming Back Home from Abroad as Told by Harry Potter](#)