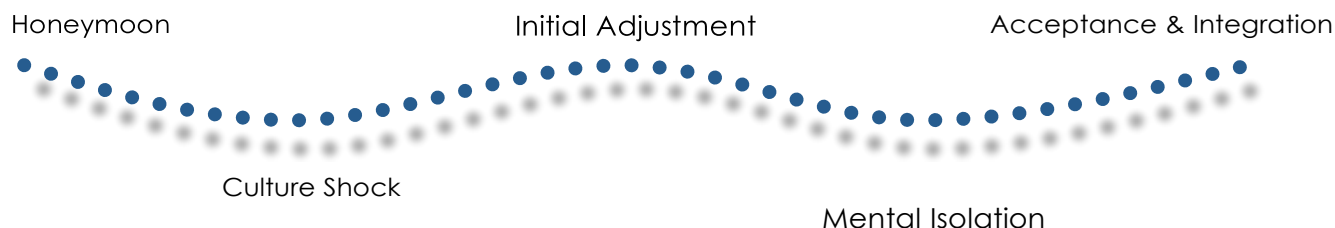


Cultural Adjustment

“Somewhere along the way, I succeeded in reconciling my past and present, instead of forsaking one for the other. I now have a much broader perspective, as I need not accept or reject either Bulgaria or America, but can embrace only the positive from both.”

Stephen Kobourov, Assistant Professor of Computer Science at Arizona State University

Typical Stages of Cultural Adjustment



How you might feel/think in these stages:

- **Honeymoon Stage:** You are starting a new adventure! Everything is great, new, and exciting!
- **Culture Shock Stage:** You may be feeling frustrated, sad, upset, confused, overwhelmed and out of control. Even some small things such as the noise from the room next door could irritate you. Experts have said that culture shock is the “abrupt loss of the familiar, which leads to a sense of isolation and diminished self-importance.” Are you experiencing anything like this?
- **Initial Adjustment Stage:** You are starting to understand how the system works. You may have already created some new routines in your life and feel okay about your new environment. At the same time, sometimes, you may find yourself resisting or questioning how you did things in your home country/culture.
- **Mental Isolation Stage:** You may believe you should be feeling secure about your surroundings but often, you just want to remove yourself from the situation. Some of your relationships with others might not be going smoothly and you cannot explain why you are feeling the way you feel.
- **Acceptance & Integration Stage:** You have a good understanding of why people act the way they act, some things make sense and some don't, but you are okay with the differences. You can be objective about your home culture and the culture that you live in and combine the aspects that make sense for you.
- **Reverse Culture Shock:** When you return to your home country/culture after staying in a foreign culture for a period of time, you may experience culture shock even though it's your home. To learn about ways to cope with Reverse Culture Shock, read the **RE-ENTRY BOOKLET** under Departure – Living Essentials on our website: <http://studentaffairs.duke.edu/ihouse/living-essentials#node-1173>

PLEASE NOTE: You may not move from one stage to another in the order described above. You may skip stages as well. Sometimes, you may even repeat the stages depending on the situation, environment, and people you are interacting with. These are all common and normal reactions!

**Try to avoid judging yourself about how you are feeling/what you are experiencing.
Just notice it and, if possible, embrace the experience.**

It takes a while to adjust to a new environment! Take as much time as you need to adjust!

Your cultural background, language skills, familiarity with U.S. classroom procedures, roommates, and hundreds of other factors will affect how quickly you adjust. In the meantime, do not judge yourself by how you think your classmates and new friends are coping! Respect your own transition period and consider the whole experience like an experiment.

Coping Strategies:

- **Talk to people:** Friends, Family, Mentors, Peers, Resident Assistants, Resident Coordinators and International House staff
- **Write down your experience:** Blog Online, E-mail friends/family, or Journal
- **Stay active/Find simple pleasures:** Go to the gym, go for walks, play sports, meditate, pray, etc.
- **Socialize:** Get out of your room and meet people! Talk to classmates, co-workers, and Duke staff! Share your experiences & your culture! Ask questions to get people to talk to you, and listen to other people's stories.

As you start a new chapter of your life here at Duke, remember that it is fine to feel lost at first and to miss your home country's people, food, and ways of life.

Journaling tips

Why write a Journal?

- Journal writing **LOWERS STRESS:** Helping you to clarify and focus what you are feeling and experiencing
- A journal serves as a record of experiences
- Provides a reference for learning and development

Guideline:

1. **Find something suitable to write about.**
2. **Choose a time of day to write** when others won't interrupt you.
3. **Date your entry & start writing!**
4. **Be creative.** Try different techniques, such as lists, collage, drawing, other visual styles, or whatever tickles your fancy. Your journal is a place to **express your thoughts and emotions**. Forget the rules and what others expect. Play with ideas and use your journal for your own benefit.
5. **Re-read what you've written**, if you can. Either read it directly after making the entry or set aside a time to read your past entries. There is much to **gain from rereading your journal** entries. It's like looking at a mirror and noticing something you had never realized before.
6. **Make a commitment to yourself to write regularly.** Just make it **a regular practice**. You gain some benefit in writing a single entry, but the greatest benefit remains in *making a habit of writing in your journal*.

Edited by Yoko Hisano using the online source, "How to write a journal. Retrieved January 19, 2009, from wikiHow Web site: <http://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Journal-Entry>"

The staff of International House is available to speak with you about any concerns you have.

If you begin to feel like: *there is no one to talk to; no one listens to you or understands what you are going through; or, you think you have made a mistake by coming to Duke, PLEASE COME SEE US!* We are open 8.30am-5pm.

Location: 300 Alexander Avenue.

Email: ihouse@duke.edu

TEL: 919.684.3585 to make an appointment; or just stop by during our office hours!

On-Campus Resources:

- **Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)** TEL: 919.660.1000
GRADUATE & UNDERGRADUATE (Full Time Enrolled) STUDENTS ONLY. <http://www.studentaffairs.duke.edu/caps>
CAPS is located in the Page Building, Room 214. CAPS has trained psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors who can discuss any of your issues confidentially.
- **Religious Counseling** (Associate Dean for Religious Life, Christy Lohr-Sapp) TEL: 919.684.2909
- **Personal Assistance Services** TEL: 919.416.1727
Open to Employees and Scholars on Duke Payroll. <http://www.hr.duke.edu/pas>
PAS is located at 2200 West Main St., Erwin Square Tower, 4th floor, Suite 400A.
- **Duke Psychology Clinic** TEL: 919.660.5716
OPEN TO ALL. Day and evening appointments. <http://psychandneuro.duke.edu/graduate/training/clinical/clinic>
The Duke Psychology Clinic is located on West Campus in the Psychology/Sociology Building, Suite 312. The clinic specializes in a variety of services, including individual and couples counseling, bereavement and trauma-focused therapies and stress management. Session fees are at a low cost.