

RE-ENTRY

RETURNING TO YOUR HOME COUNTRY?

WHETHER YOU ARE...

A STUDENT GOING BACK HOME AFTER COMPLETING A DEGREE...

A SPOUSE GOING BACK HOME ALONG WITH YOUR HUSBAND/WIFE...

A SCHOLAR FINISHING YOUR APPOINTMENT AT DUKE UNIVERSITY AND GOING BACK...

AN EXCHANGE STUDENT AT DUKE UNIVERSITY AND RETURNING...

OR, ...

This booklet will help you navigate your way and assist you in the process before you get on that airplane and after you are settled in your home country.

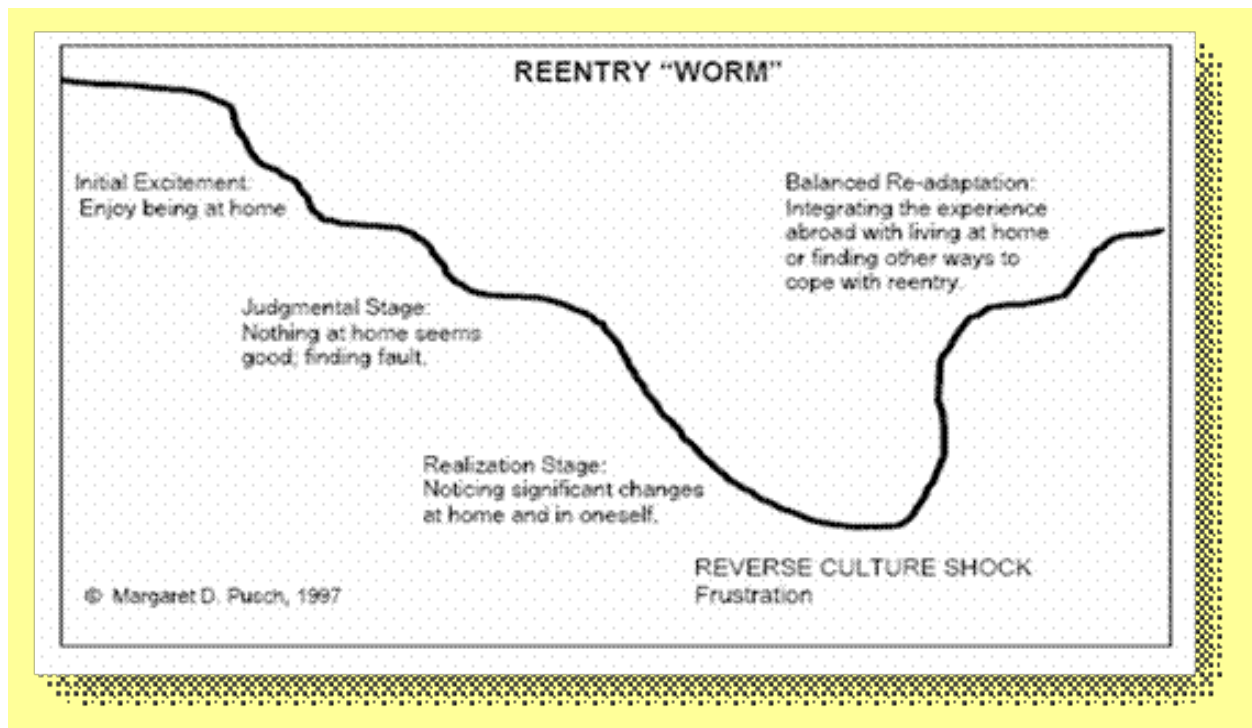
What is Re-entry?¹

Re-entry is the process of returning home after spending time abroad. It is a powerful experience that has the potential to allow for personal growth, to provide mobility for social action and civic engagement, to enhance skills for your professional life, and lastly the ability to further your knowledge about the world and your place within it.

The traditional view of re-entry has focused mainly on the emotional challenges that come with seeing your home community or country again after studying or living abroad. Like many other students returning from studying abroad, the emotions are just one aspect of your experience. You may also need to:

- meaningfully connect with others through social action or civic engagement;
- integrate your new experiences into your academic and professional life;
- find ways to continue to embody the global understanding that you experienced abroad.

To get you started, the re-entry worm² can be a useful tool in helping you realize that you are not alone in feeling a range of emotions. We recognize that illustrations like the "reentry worm" may be useful for many students and that NOT all students' experiences fit into these categories. While the worm shows these emotions in an order, we know that emotions can happen at any point during your re-entry. In fact, you may not classify any of your experiences this way. The worm offers us a range of feelings that may be happening.



¹ This material was adapted from World Learning <ourworld.worldlearning.org>.

² Others have extended the usefulness of the helpful illustration that depicts culture shock as a U-curve, by adding a second U. Thus they speak of the challenge of re-adaptation to one's home culture as a W-curve. The "reentry worm" shows more vividly that each person's re-entry experience can be quite different from another person, i.e. a range of feelings and time.

TOP TEN IMMEDIATE REENTRY CHALLENGES

There are many 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 who have been through the experience and have survived nicely. However, they say you should take the process seriously by realistically thinking about the process and your possible reactions to it. They offer for your consideration the following thoughts about reentry, hoping to 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 and seen a plethora of photos and mementos, any further interest is unlikely and diminishing. 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. This is 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 emailing, phoning and generally keeping in contact can reduce it, but feelings of loss are an integral part of international sojourns and must be anticipated and accepted as a natural result of having studied abroad.

5. Relationships Have Changed

It is inevitable that when you return you will notice that some relationships with friends and family 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 seem positive or negative to you, but expecting that no change has 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 as aggression or "showing off." Conversely, 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,” or a tendency to see faults they 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. There are ways 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. Losing/Compartmentalizing the Experience (“Shoeboxing”)

Being home, coupled with pressures of school, job, family and friends, often makes returnees worried that somehow they will “lose” their overseas experience. Many fear that it will somehow become compartmentalized like souvenirs or photo albums kept in a box and only occasionally taken out and enjoyed. You don’t 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.

SOURCE: DR. BRUCE LA BRACK, METRO BOSTON STUDY ABROAD RE-ENTRY CONFERENCE, SUFFOLK UNIVERSITY, NOVEMBER 8, 2003

BRUCE LABRACK is the director of Pacific Institute for Cross-Cultural Training at the University of the Pacific’s School of International Studies. This “Top 10” list as well as other materials are available on the “What’s Up With Culture?” Website (<http://www3.uop.edu/sis/culture/index.htm>), which is funded through the U.S. Department of Education.

ICEBERG ANALOGY OF CULTURE 1

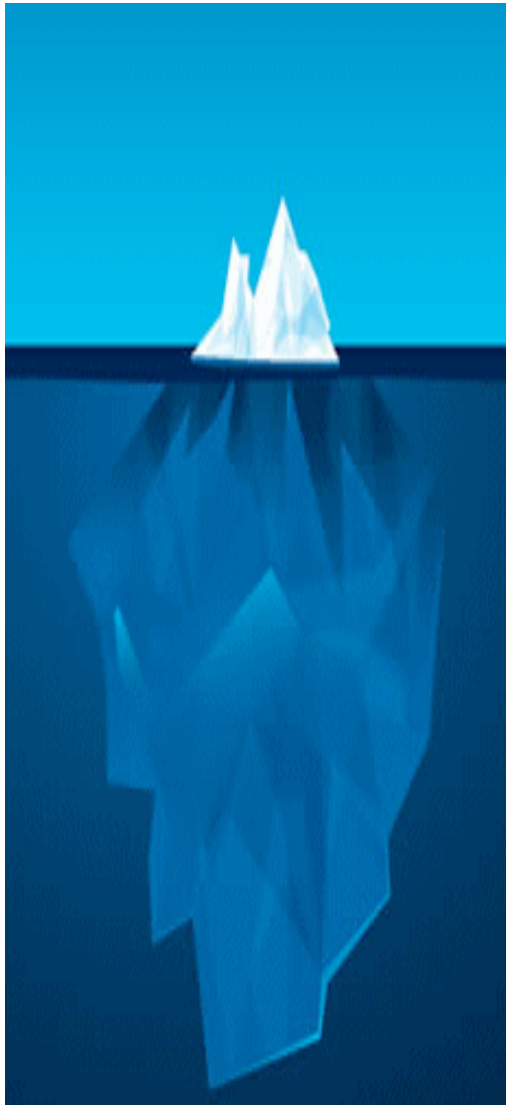
Do you know about the Iceberg Analogy?

What comes into your mind when you think about culture?

What are the visible aspects of culture?

What are the hidden, invisible aspects of culture?

Take a moment to think about them and write your ideas of what a culture is, down below.

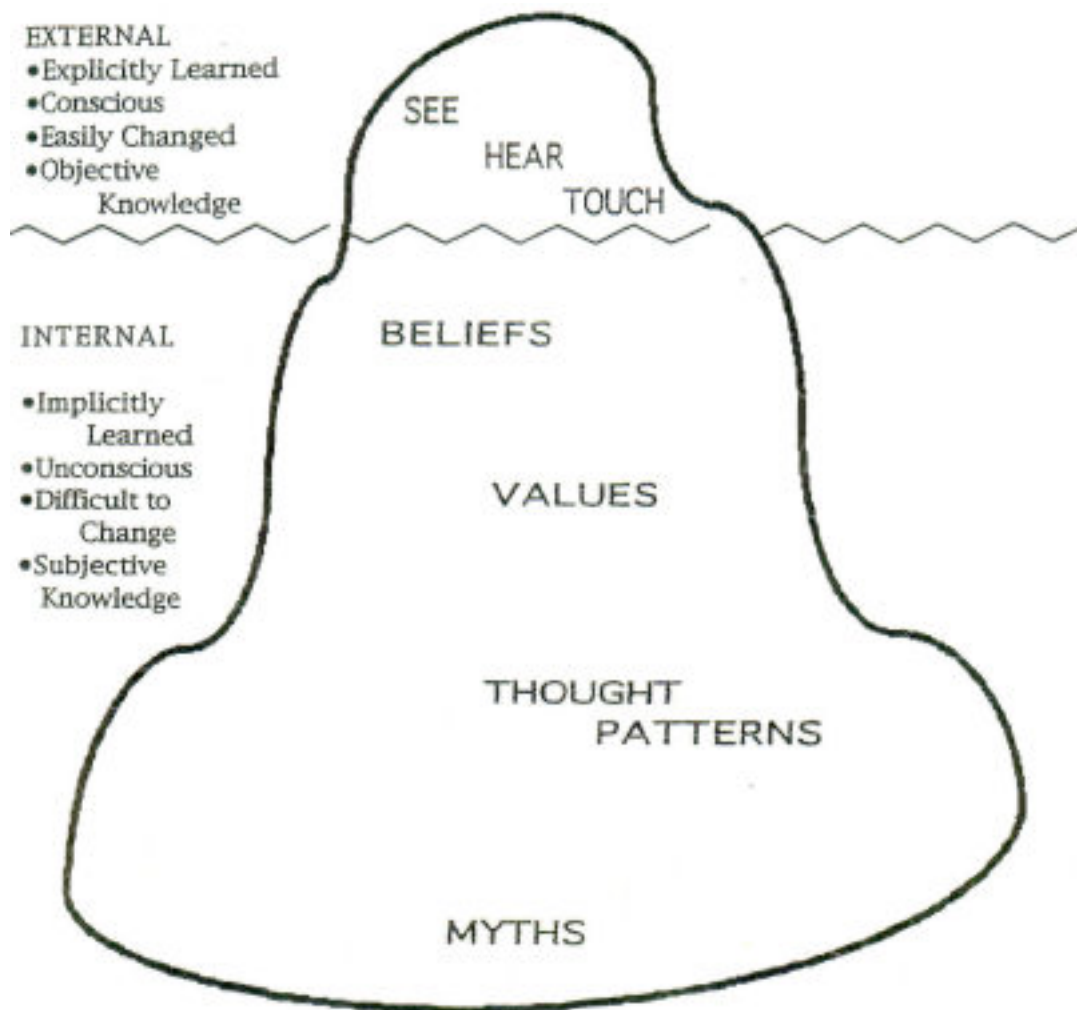


Visible (eg. Food, Fashion, Music)

Invisible (eg. Weather forecasting, counting)

ICEBERG ANALOGY OF CULTURE 2

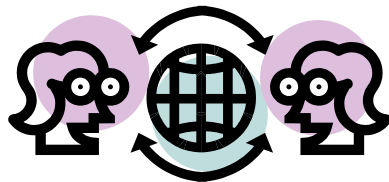
If you look at the diagram below, the invisible aspects of culture are what you see, hear, and can touch; as in what's known as external factors that have impacts on shaping one's culture. On the other hand, the invisible aspects of culture are the beliefs, values, thought patterns, and myth. These are internal factors that shape one's culture which one build up over a number of years through various experiences, thus may not be immediately recognized but have an important role in forming one's culture.



COPING STRATEGIES

Active Re-entry

1. Acknowledging your change as well as others in your home country
We all change! Accept it and be easy on yourself and others.
2. Keep track of your re-entry, transitioning process
 - ↳ **Writing a journal** (see attached doc. on How to write a journal)
 - ↳ Writing an online blog
 - ↳ Use Facebook: Go to International House group page and write about it!
3. **Keep in touch** with your fellow DUKIES
 - ↳ Stay connected using Facebook: Pls. Remember, now there's International House group page on Facebook!!
 - ↳ Write E-mails, cards, letters
 - ↳ Make phone calls
 - ↳ Visit your friends



4. Contact the **Duke Alumni Association**
 - ↳ <http://www.dukealumni.com/>
There are international regional contacts on their website: Click on VOLUNTEER on the left hand corner
5. **Find international opportunities locally!**
 - ↳ Language schools: Help visitors in your home country by volunteering with the schools
 - ↳ **Get involved** in a language exchange program
 - ↳ Check out International & cultural organizations
 - ↳ Find **volunteering** opportunities at local schools to give presentations about your experience in the US
 - ↳ Be proactive!

6. Go abroad again!

Would it help to consider going abroad again?

If that makes you happy... WHY NOT?

- ↳ Study Abroad?
- ↳ Volunteer Abroad?
- ↳ Short-Term Work Abroad?
- ↳ Teaching Abroad?
- ↳ International internships?
- ↳ International Careers?
- ↳ Fellowships?

7. Make **NEW** Internationally-minded **friends**

Don't hide yourself just because you feel like you have to fit in! Remember, you are not the only one!!! Go find people who share your values and experiences!

- ↳ Craigslist: Yes, it's not only in the US! [www.craigslist.org]
- ↳ Meetup: online tool to make friends [meetup.com]
- ↳ Any other ways to find others... be creative!

8. **Be patient** with yourself and **remember** that **it is normal for you to**

go through this process. It takes time to find out your own ways of re-adjusting and to find the balance between your home culture and the cultures that you now have become familiar with.

HOW TO WRITE A JOURNAL

*Why write a Journal?

- *Journal writing lowers stress: Helps clarify and focus what you are feeling and experiencing*
- *Journal serves as a record of experiences*
- *Provide a reference for learning and development*

1. **Find something suitable to write on.** Perhaps, use the Duke notebook from the Transitioning Workshop? Or you might like to shop for something that makes you feel good about writing inside the pages. Decide what you are going to write with. Just make sure the implement feels **comfortable in your hand**. Of course, if you prefer, or need to, use a word processor, typewriter, or similar instead.
2. **Choose a time of day to write** when you won't be interrupted by others. Although it might not be easy, make a point of being alone to write in your journal. Make sure you have a **comfortable place** to write. You may enjoy the privacy of your own room for writing, or a busy cafe. **Sitting in the same place** to write can help you get into the right frame of mind for journal writing.
3. **Date your entry.** This may seem a real drag, but this is the only real rule when it comes to keeping a journal. You'll be amazed just how useful having each entry dated can be.
4. **Start writing.** Just write whatever comes to mind. You may need a journal prompt. Look into the materials from the workshop, think about a conversation you had about **your experience at Duke/USA**. There are plenty online materials that talk about life, transitioning, work, career, school, friends, relationship, family, and international experiences too.
5. **Be creative.** Try different techniques, such as lists, collage, drawing, other visual styles, or whatever takes 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.
6. **Stop writing, expressing, or creating at some point.** Decide on a time or page limit, when your materials run out or just when you feel you've written all that is on your mind.

7. **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.

8. **Make a commitment, to yourself, to write regularly.** While daily entries are ideal, there is no limit to how often you should write in your journal. Just make it **a regular exercise**. You gain some benefit in writing a single entry, but the greater benefits remains in making a habit of writing in your journal.

Edited/Added by Yoko 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>"

EXERCISE FOR REFLECTION: BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE U.S.

1. In what ways might my friends or family have changed?
2. How would I like my family and friends to treat me when I return home?
3. How have my communication style changed?
4. What am I looking forward to the most?
5. What are the lessons I have learned that I never want to forget?
6. Many say that the experience of re-entry is more challenging than your initial move to another place. What are some things I might do to make the transition easier?
7. What have been the important things about this experience that I want to share with my family and friends?
8. What do I want to do with the experiences I've had (e.g., stay in touch with people I've met, continue with a new interest)?

Most of the following questions were adapted and cited from Our World website of *World Learning: A Thoughtful Return* and *Maximizing Study Abroad, Student Handbook pp. 141-142. University of Minnesota.*

RE-ENTRY ACTION PLAN

A worksheet to outline strategies on the areas of re-entry

PERSONAL/EMOTIONAL PROCESS PLAN I plan to do the following in order to prepare for and deal with the personal/emotional stress I may face upon my return to home:

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT I plan to do the following in order to contribute to positive social change in my home community through engagement in my home community and/or continued involvement with my host country or region:

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN I plan to do the following in order to incorporate my new skills and interests into my professional path:

PREPARING TO RETURN HOME: QUICK TIPS

by Dr. Bruce LaBrack

Reentry into your home culture can be both challenging and as frustrating as living overseas, mostly because our attitude toward going "home" is that it should be a simple matter of getting resettled, resuming your earlier routines, and reestablishing your relationships.

However, world wide reentry has its own set of special social and psychological adjustments which can be facilitated by being aware of the reentry process and following some advice from those who have already returned.

The following list is compiled from many sources, but all of the tips come from returnees who offer these ideas in the hope of making your reentry easier for you and for those at home.

1. Prepare for an adjustment process.

The more you consider your alternatives, think about what is to come, and know about how returning home is both similar to and different from going abroad, the easier the transition will be. Anticipating is useful. As one psychologist put it, "Worrying helps."

2. Allow yourself time.

Reentry is a process that will take time, just like adjusting to a new foreign culture. Give yourself time to relax and reflect upon what is going on around you, how you are reacting to it, and what you might like to change. Give yourself permission to ease into the transition.

3. Understand that the familiar will seem different.

You will have changed, home has changed, and you will be seeing familiar people, places, and behaviors from new perspectives. Some things will seem strange, perhaps even unsettling. Expect to have some new emotional and psychological reactions to being home. Everyone does.

4. There will be much "cultural catching up" to do.

Some linguistic, social, political, economic, entertainment and current event topics will be unfamiliar to you as new programs, slang, and even governmental forms may have emerged since you left. You may have some learning to do about your own culture. (Note: most returnees report that major insights into themselves and their home countries occur during reentry).

5. Reserve judgments.

Just as you had to keep an open mind when first encountering the culture of a new foreign country, try to resist the natural impulse to make snap decisions and judgments about people and behaviors once back home. Mood swings are common at first and your most valuable and valid analysis of events is likely to take place after allowing sometime for thorough reflection.

6. Respond thoughtfully and slowly.

Quick answers and impulsive reactions often characterize returnees. Frustration, disorientation, and boredom in the returnee can lead to behavior that is incomprehensible to family and friends. Take some time to rehearse what you want to say and how you will respond to predictable questions and situations; prepare to greet those that are less predictable with a calm, thoughtful approach.

7. Cultivate sensibility.

Showing an interest in what others have been doing while you have been on your adventure overseas is the surest way to reestablish rapport. Much frustration in returnees stems from what is perceived as disinterest by others in their experience and lack of opportunity to express their feelings and tell their stories. Being as good a listener as a talker is a key ingredient in mutual sharing.

8. Beware of comparisons.

Making comparisons between cultures and nations is natural, particularly after residence abroad; however, a person must be careful not to be seen as too critical of home or too lavish in praise of things foreign. A balance of good and bad features is probably more accurate and certainly less threatening to others. The tendency to be an "instant expert" is to be avoided at all costs.

9. Remain flexible.

Keeping as many options open as possible is an essential aspect of a successful return home. Attempting to re-socialize totally into old patterns and networks can be difficult, but remaining aloof is isolating and counterproductive. What you want to achieve is a balance between maintaining earlier patterns and enhancing your social and intellectual life with new friends and interests.

10. Seek support networks.

There are lots of people back home who have gone through their own reentry and understand a returnee's concerns: academic faculty, exchange students, international development staff, diplomatic corps, military personnel, church officials, and businessmen and women. University StudyAbroad and foreign student offices are just a few of the places where returnees can seek others who can offer support and country specific advice.

Compiled by Dr. Bruce LaBrack. School of International Studies, University of the Pacific for use by the Institute of International Education, San Francisco. Aspire Newsletter, Spring 1996.

COMING HOME: RELATIONSHIPS, ROOTS, AND UNPACKING³

Written for “Transitions Abroad” by James L. Citron and Vija G. Mendelson (2005)

Cross-cultural reentry—what happens when you come home from living abroad—has interested researchers for more than 50 years. Early writers saw reentry largely as a set of problems or challenges that returnees suffered. One, Asunción-Lande, even compiled a list of 50 types of reentry difficulties, ranging from linguistic barriers to the inability to find a job where you can use your new skills. In the last 30 years, though, it has become more common to think of reentry as a positive challenge or an opportunity for growth and self-discovery rather than as a set of problems.

When you’re the one going through the adjustment, however, it’s normal to experience the transition as both positive and negative. You may even feel like you are on a roller coaster—one minute excited to be home and proud to share all you’ve learned, and the next bored or frustrated and feeling out of sync with those people who have always been closest to you. Having ups and downs is common, and whether you see your glass as half-full or half-empty may depend on whether you are having a good day or a bad day (see sidebar below).

ON A GOOD DAY

- I have the flexibility to fit in anywhere.
- I am bilingual/multilingual.
- I can empathize with multiple viewpoints.
- I respect cultural differences.
- I have tolerance for ambiguity.
- I feel challenged/empowered by new experiences..
- I am aware of global issues (news, politics, media, resource distribution, etc.)
- I accept challenges to my lifelong beliefs and values.
- I have a more complex/defined sense of self.
- I act more socially responsible.
- I enjoy a personal connection to the larger world.
- I take risks and embrace the unknown.
- I am curious and eager to learn.

ON A BAD DAY

- I don’t seem to fit in anywhere. I resist change. I feel rootless.
- I am semi-lingual in two or more languages.
- I am frustrated by the narrow mindedness of people at home.
- I become impatient with monoculturalism.
- I am frequently indecisive.
- I feel bored by the mundane.
- I am uninformed about local issues and unable to apply what I’ve learned to my life at home.
- I am becoming re-socialized into my home culture’s pattern of thought.
- I have a more fragmented sense of conflicting identities.
- I act judgmental and self-righteous in the face of others’ social choices.
- I feel disconnected/alienated from my home environment.
- I feel overwhelmed by the known and the unknown.
- I feel depressed and reluctant to engage.

³ This material is excerpted from materials from the Boston Area Study Abroad Reentry Conference, 2005.

Being able to think optimistically about what you've learned abroad not only helps you feel better as you process your feelings about coming home, but it can also help you articulate how you are different—to family, friends, teachers, mentors, and current and potential employers.

At first, it may be challenging to put your experiences and thoughts into words, and it's normal to have conflicting feelings about being back. Judith Martin, an authority on intercultural reentry and reverse culture shock, says, "Although this confusion may lead to temporary reentry difficulties, effective communication and relationship formation play important roles in processing this identity change and in integrating old and new knowledge, behaviors, feelings, and perspectives—all of which require time and effort."

Relationships

Margaret Pusch, an expert in intercultural communication, has suggested that when you come home from studying abroad, every relationship in your life may need to be renegotiated.

At least four types of relationship changes often occur during re-entry. The first is with those people who stayed at home while you were abroad. You'll likely find some of these relationships to be what a friend of ours likes to call "low-maintenance" friendships, the kind that don't need constant nurturing. You can pick up right where you left off, even after being apart for months or years. Others are apt to be "high-maintenance" friendships, the kind in which after you are apart for a period of time you suddenly discover that you don't have all that much in common any more. Recognizing the difference can help make these changes easier to accept.

It's also helpful to realize that while some of your low-maintenance friends will want to hear all about your overseas experiences—and the most empathetic of them may even be able to relate to many of your stories—sometimes they just won't "get it." Some of your experience may need to be internalized, processed, and integrated into your own life in ways that make sense for you, without your ever being able to fully share them with anyone else. Don't let this discourage you.

A second set of relationships that may change as you come home is with students who were abroad with you and who may be coming home with you to the same town or campus community. These are people who actually can relate to much of what you experienced abroad, and they can be an invaluable source of support when you're feeling down. Seek them out and share your feelings. But just as you may discover that you had some high-maintenance friends at home from whom you've grown apart by being abroad, it's not uncommon for the same phenomenon to occur with your fellow study-abroaders. When you no longer have the common experience of living, studying, or working together overseas, you might start to drift apart, too.

The next set of relationships that usually changes when you come home is with the people you grew close to while you were abroad and who didn't come home with you. These may be host family members, classmates, housemates, or other friends, either from the host country, from

(This material is excerpted from materials from the Boston Area Study Abroad Reentry Conference, 2005.)

third countries, or from other parts of the U.S. As much as you may try to stay in touch with them—and new technologies make this easier nowadays—it’s never quite the same as being in the same place at the same time. Knowing that you have friends in far corners of the globe who may visit you and whom you can visit someday is exciting and empowering, but not having them with you when you need them—especially when your friends at home can’t fully relate to everything that you experienced while you were abroad—can feel isolating and lonely. Starting to view yourself as “horizontally-rooted” with friends all over the globe rather than “rootless” can often make these feelings easier to accept and even embrace.

The final set of relationships to consider: the new ones. If you formed close ties while you were abroad, you have proven how good you are at forming new relationships. The ability to form new relationships is a skill that often grows from venturing out of your familiar environment. Now that you’re back, there are countless people out there just waiting to meet you, to learn from you, and to share their own lives with you. This is your chance to establish connections to new people and places.

Roots

People sometimes say they feel “rootless” when they come home. They no longer feel as attached to their home culture as they once were. Yet they also may never feel completely connected to a country where they haven’t grown up. As you live, study, work, and play in your community, you develop ever-deeper roots. We think of people who spend a long time living in one place as being “vertically-rooted.”

When you go abroad, you deliberately “uproot” yourself from the environment where you have always lived and, in the process, lose a lot of familiar reference points and distance yourself from your familiar support networks. At first your host country may present some challenges, but ideally you learn to adapt as you adjust to a new way of life. You meet new people, from many different backgrounds, and you form new relationships that act as your support network abroad. You become comfortable with this new environment, find your place in it, and develop something akin to what David Pollack, an expert on “Third Culture Kids,” has called an extended root system of perhaps less entrenched, but more far-reaching roots that now provide your support.

We think of people who have lived in more than one place as being more “horizontally-rooted,” a trait that may be accompanied by a feeling of wanderlust as you realize how eager you are to explore new places. People who have had the experience of adapting to different ways of living develop skills that can enable them to adjust—plant their roots, if you will—in other new environments with increasing ease. This ability to feel almost at home anywhere— but not quite as totally rooted anywhere, as you once did—can be at once exhilarating and frustrating.

This is not to say you forfeit your home connections, your “vertical roots,” by choosing to embrace new experiences and expand your network of relationships. But it is a common experience for people returning home after time abroad to have a confused sense of self and conflicting loyalties

(This material is excerpted from materials from the Boston Area Study Abroad Reentry Conference, 2005.)

about how they fit back into their home culture.

Your horizontal roots replaced some of the functions of those vertical roots that served you well for so long while you were gone. Where are you going to plant your roots now? Are you exactly the same person you were before you studied abroad? Do your parents or friends think so? Odds are that you have changed, and you will need to think about these changes in order to come to terms with the “new” you and appreciate the rich hybrid that you have become as a result of blending your home and host culture perspectives and experiences.

Unpacking

How can you tackle the challenge of sorting through your recent experiences, sharing your thoughts and feelings with the people important to you, and blending the key parts of life at home and life abroad to reflect the person you want to be? Here are some ideas on how to “unpack” from your study and travel abroad.

One of the first things you may want to do is communicate the wonder of your experiences to those close to you. But the reality is that few people, even your loved ones, will have the patience to listen to every anecdote about your time abroad or examine with boundless enthusiasm every photo you took.

One way to deal with this is to try to distill the experience so that you can express the importance of your adventures without recounting every single thing that happened to you. Try to think about the moments that stood out for you and the people or places that made a deep impression on you so that you can at least share the highlights.

And be careful about how you talk about your experiences: nothing turns off even a faithful listener faster than hearing about how superior you think that your study abroad experience is to your home situation, or about how much wiser you feel now compared to the ignorant person you were before going abroad. Use your newfound cultural sensitivity to avoid alienating your audience.

Another important part of processing your experience is internalizing the most important aspects of it. A lot of times you return home only to be faced with new classes, a new job, new living arrangements, new academic or professional interests, new people, etc. It seems natural to dedicate your energies fully to this challenging and stressful present and to let your study abroad memories fade into the hazy past, mentally filed away under “Surreal, Once-in-a-Lifetime Experience.” This is what Bruce La Brack refers to as “shoe boxing”—when you take the entire experience and put it in a mental “shoebox,” tuck it away in the closet of your mind, and only rarely take it out for periodic reminiscing. This weakens the power of your study abroad experience; without serious thought about what you have learned and gained from your time overseas, it is all too easy to minimize the impact of the experience on your future academic, professional, and personal lives and stifle your own growth.

(This material is excerpted from materials from the Boston Area Study Abroad Reentry Conference, 2005.)

Bringing it Home

If you are part of the small percentage of the world's citizens that has had the opportunity to live life on another culture's terms, you've probably found that the experience awakened your senses and led you to new understandings and personal growth. Coming home might feel like a letdown after all that excitement. But it's also an opportunity to put your new skills to use. The challenge now is to take both your new knowledge and your exploration skills and integrate them permanently into your life ahead. It might sound like a daunting task, but, supported by your horizontal roots, the new you is destined to thrive.

(This material is excerpted from materials from the Boston Area Study Abroad Reentry Conference, 2005.)