

The Return Home: Readjusting to Life Back in the US

We know that you must be excited and awaiting the return home of your student. Your student may also be eagerly anticipating their return home. It is very important to catch up with family and friends and talk about the experience abroad. However, the return may also bring with it an assortment of mixed feelings as they re-adjust to life at home and back on campus.

Re-entry Adjustment or Reverse Culture Shock is a normal part of the study and living abroad cycle. Although students are returning to their own culture, re-entry shock is the unexpected confrontation with the familiar. After all, some transformation is expected, such as a change in level of personal and intellectual maturity, independence, and in the sense of direction and involvement. The time of readjustment will vary from student to student. This will also depend on the level of immersion the student has had with the host culture. But, not to worry. The symptoms of re-entry shock are seldom long-lasting, but a natural evolution that comes from, as some indicate, a life-changing experience.

You can help your student by recognizing some of the feelings they will go through.

Top Ten Re-Entry Challenges Faced by Returnees

1. Boredom
2. "No one wants to hear"
3. Reverse homesickness
4. Relationships have changed
5. People see the wrong changes
6. People misunderstand
7. You can't explain
8. Feelings of alienation/critical eyes
9. Inability to apply new skills and knowledge
10. Loss/compartmentalization of experience

Some Tips on How to Help Your Student with the Transition

- Your support, interest and understanding will help your student through the return home transition.
- Create opportunities for your student to express his or her new perspective. You are probably the persons who will want to hear more than most others.
- Take time to look at their pictures.
- Give them space and time to reconnect and readjust.
- Avoid criticism, or sarcasm for odd patterns of behavior, speech or new attitudes.
- Expect some critical comparisons of culture and lifestyle. Don't take their comments personally. Keep your responses neutral.
- Encourage your student to maintain personal and professional contacts with friends and institutions in the former host country.
- Support your student's interest in international matters. Encourage and support their involvement with activities or programs with an international dimension, be it on campus or in the local community.

Adapted from Bruce LaBrack, What's Up With Culture, School of International Studies, University of the Pacific.

As always, the Study Abroad Office is available to answer your questions. To speak to one of the Study Abroad Advisors, please contact us at duabroad@du.edu or 303-871-4912.

Some internet resources on Re-entry or Reverse Culture Shock:

- Culture Matters, an online cultural training resource for study abroad
- <http://www.pacific.edu/sis/culture/index.htm>.

- The Center for Global Education.
<http://www.studentsabroad.com/reentrycultureshock.html>

- Study Abroad.com website handbook
- <http://www.studyabroad.com/handbook/handbook.html>.