

Reverse Culture Shock

Just like you prepared to go abroad, you need to prepare to return home. Though it seems that going home would not require an adjustment, you will be surprised to find that it does. Life has gone on without you at home and you have changed tremendously while you have been away. You will discover that you are not returning to the “familiar” culture you expect, because not only have there been many small changes, but you will be viewing home with different eyes. A successful, and a less stressful, re-entry is possible if you understand the concept of Reverse Culture Shock.

Reverse Culture Shock can be defined as “temporal psychological difficulties that a returnee experiences in the initial stage of the adjustment process at home after having lived abroad for some time.” It takes place over time and is completely normal. It is important to remember that the feelings you will experience are shared by many others in similar situations.

Phases

Reverse Culture Shock begins before you even leave your host country. In the first phase you will feel anticipation and excitement about going home, as well as sadness about leaving your host country. Once you return home, you will be treated like a celebrity by family and friends, and will do all the things you missed doing while you were away. In this second phase, you will not notice all that has changed. Soon, however, things will settle down and the novelty of being home will wear off. In the third phase you will begin to notice all of the changes and may begin to feel lonely, left out, or marginalized. Personal changes and growth that have occurred may make you feel as though you do not have as much in common with your peers. Eventually, in the fourth phase, these feelings subside and you will get back into a routine and rekindle your friendships. You will feel comfortable again and have readjusted to life in the United States.

Factors affecting reverse culture shock

- Length of stay in host country
- Opportunity to visit home
- Frequency of keeping in touch with family and friends
- Quality of experience
- Emotional change (maturity)
- How one is received at home upon return

Signs of reverse culture shock

- Feeling isolated
- Feeling marginalized
- Loneliness
- Frustration at lack of interest in your experience from family and friends
- Frustration at not being able to continue speaking a foreign language
- Depression

Helpful Tips

- Stay in close contact with your friends from your exchange - plan a reunion
- Take a group picture of all your friends on your exchange
- Keep writing in your journal
- Re-read your journal
- Share your experiences abroad as well as your re-entry experiences with other study abroad participants
- Volunteer your time in the study abroad office - help with recruiting and orientation
- Get involved in local international and cultural activities
- Stay flexible
- Contact the Rutgers Global–Study Abroad office for support if you need it

Developmental Changes

See how many of the following changes apply to you. These will all affect how you experience Reverse Culture Shock.

- Improved ability in a foreign language
- More knowledgeable about another culture and lifestyle
- Greater ability to empathize with others, to put yourself in another person's
- Place when making judgments
- More easily able to accept failures and shortcomings in yourself
- Fuller understanding of your strengths and weaknesses
- Increased self confidence
- Increased assertiveness
- Greater capacity to accept differences in others
- Increased curiosity in other cultures
- Increased awareness in other cultures
- Increased flexibility
- More tolerant of ambiguous situations
- More likely to take risks
- New attitude on life
- Increased patience
- Changed values and beliefs
- Increased open-mindedness
- Increased maturity
- More adaptable
- New interests

All students are welcome to come to the Rutgers Global–Study Abroad office to talk to their program adviser after they return to the US. We have all been through this process ourselves and would be more than happy to help you through it. We also love just hearing about your experiences!

You should also take advantage of the Reentry Events that the Study Abroad Office coordinates each semester. Please check your email for event announcements.