Reverse Culture Adjustment

“I am not the same having seen the moon shine on the other side of the world”
- Mary Anne Radmacher, author

Since returning from your experience abroad, you may be feeling a variety of emotions while adjusting to being home, just as you experienced when you first arrived overseas. The Office for International Programs (OIP) would like to make this transition a little easier by providing you with information about reverse cultural adjustment.

**Reverse Culture Adjustment - What is it?**

Does it feel as though your friends/family don’t understand the importance of your experience abroad? Do they ask questions about your time overseas, but then seem to lose interest after a few minutes? Does everyday life here seem to be so trivial? Do you feel any of these emotions: wanting to be alone; depression; confusion; restlessness; negativity towards the U.S.; changing goals and priorities?

If these questions identify feelings you’ve been having recently, you may be experiencing “reverse culture adjustment.” In the same way that you may have experienced culture shock when you were adjusting to your new cultural surroundings abroad, you will now experience a re-adjustment period in the U.S. These feelings can be attributed to your new attitudes, values and perceptions that you developed while abroad.

You may have initially looked at some local customs abroad as silly and wondered why people there did not ‘do things right’ or do things ‘the American way.’ Over time, you probably lost some of these feelings and began to feel that your host culture has even better customs and ways of dealing with situations than at home. Now that you’ve returned to the U.S., you may experience similar feelings, wondering why Americans don’t do things right or follow what you have now come to believe as the correct way to deal with a situation.

Every individual deals with these feelings in a different way:
- Some people want to be left alone by everyone and allow interaction only with others who were abroad with them.
- Others will want to tell everyone they meet about their experiences abroad.
- Some returnees will have a difficult time finding anything positive to say about the U.S., while others will hardly feel out of place at all.

The key to re-entering your home culture is to realize that there may be frustration with adjusting to life in the U.S., and that the frustrations are a normal part of the total learning process, and an on-going part of your entire cross-cultural experience. If friends, roommates or parents seem to be somewhat mystified or bothered by your behavior once you’re back home, you may want to explain to them a little about reverse culture adjustment. Knowing what is happening and that there is a process of adjustment going on can make it more understandable to those close to you, and can help them to be more supportive and understanding of what you are going through.
Stages of Reverse Cultural Adjustment
Research has shown that re-entry cultural adjustment is at least as frequent as the initial cultural adjustment/adaptation. It is therefore an inevitable part of your study abroad experience.

Stage 1: Disengagement
While still abroad, you begin to start thinking about moving back to the U.S. and moving away from your overseas experience and friends.

Stage 2: Euphoria/The Honeymoon
You may be very excited to be back in your country and others may be equally delighted to have you back. After people express their pleasure at seeing you again, and listen politely to your stories for a few minutes, you may suddenly and/or painfully realize that they are not particularly interested in what happened to you and would much rather prefer to talk about their own affairs.

Stage 3: Alienation
In this stage, you experience dampened euphoria with feelings of alienation, frustration and anger. You may even feel like an outsider – a foreigner in your own country. America will be different from how you remembered it (the pollution may be worse; the pace may be more hurried and hectic, etc.). Suddenly feel irritated with others and impatient with your own inability to do things as well or as quickly as you hoped. Resentment, loneliness, disorientation and even a sense of helplessness may pervade.

Stage 4: Gradual Readjustment
The fourth stage of reentry includes a gradual readjustment to life at home. During this stage, you will no longer be shocked by the variety you find on the supermarket shelves and be able to contain your comments about differences between cultures that come to your attention. If you
have difficulty filtering out the foreign words in your conversation, you will find that your English-only conversational skills will improve during stage four.

**Ideas for Making the Transition Easier**

- Remember that you are experiencing a transition with distinct stages. You may encounter all or none of the feelings described in the four stages of reverse cultural adjustment. Learn ways to take care of yourself and ease into your surroundings.
- Realize that most students experience some stress readjusting to the American culture – you are not alone! Typically, the more you immersed yourself in the host culture, the more difficult you may find reentry. Find someone who can update you on the university, local and national changes that may have taken place while you were abroad.
- You may recognize that many of your values and beliefs have changed. Learn to incorporate this new way of thinking in your life.
- Understand that your friendships and relationships might change as a function of your new experiences. Explore new places and people with whom you can share your international experiences.

**Additional Resources on Reverse Cultural Adjustment**

- University of the Pacific: [What’s up with Culture?](#)
- [SIT Abroad study abroad returnee toolkit](#)

**Resources on Campus for Returning Students**

Office for International Programs:
- We here at [OIP](#) are more than happy to talk to you about your experience abroad. Many of us have studied and worked overseas and understand the complexities of the readjustment phase.

Loyola University Chicago Wellness Center:
- [The Wellness Center](#) provides high quality interdisciplinary medical, mental health, and health promotion services. You will find medical, mental health, and health education professionals committed to your well-being.

Student Diversity & Multicultural Affairs (SDMA):
- [SDMA](#) works will students of all races, sexes, gender identities, gender expressions, religions, ethnic backgrounds, socio-economic classes, sexual orientations, abilities, and residency statuses. They are available for you to talk about the intersectionality between various backgrounds and what it meant during your time abroad.

Campus Ministry:
While experiencing a different culture overseas, questions about faith, justice and social responsibility may come into question. Campus Ministry is available as a resource to discuss this and how global engagement is part of Jesuit education.