

Culture Shock - from an article by Thea Miller

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Some participants returning from extended international study find no one willing to relive those fascinating, cultural memories. Family and friends are waiting to greet you open arms, but not always with open eyes.

Facing the unbelievable "newness" of home and the unwillingness of friends to listen leaves returning participants feeling more like strangers in their own country.

According to Judith Martin, an associate professor of intercultural communication at the University of Minnesota, it is more difficult to come home. When you go abroad, she says, "you expect it to be different; when you come home, no one expects you to have changed."

Some universities have begun to offer classes to help students make sense out of their experiences abroad and recognize the impact it has on them. The differences between cultures and the changes you undergo will affect you the rest of your life, your future academic work, and your career.

Integrating the study-abroad experience into your life is the most important step to overcoming the culture shock. You sought international study to broaden your understanding of the world - now use it to help others achieve that understanding.

If you feel a need to work through some re-entry shock, or just want to share your foreign experiences with others, here are a few suggestions:

- Ask high school foreign language instructors if you can give short guest lectures, illustrated with photographs, slides, or videos.
- Many local civic and children's organizations enjoy speakers who share their foreign travel anecdotes. Audience members often add their own stories to the conversation.
- Kiwanis, Rotary clubs, Girl and Boy Scout troops may be able to utilize your experiences through presentations.

- Talk about your experiences with others who have recently traveled abroad and who may be experiencing the same feelings you're having. They may be able to share some tips with you on how they learned to deal with their feelings.

Solutions to re-entry shock are numerous and unique to each individual. Most important, remember that the time, energy and expense spent studying abroad was well spent.

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