



A GUIDE FOR RETURNING OIP STUDY ABROAD STUDENTS

Welcome back!

We hope your time away was a rich and exciting learning experience. Now that you have returned to the University of Michigan, we encourage you to build on your recent experiences and new knowledge. This guide has been prepared to help you think through several issues important to returnees, including:

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Readjusting to life on campus can be surprisingly challenging. However, successfully transitioning to life on campus and figuring out how to integrate effectively what you learned abroad into your (new?) life here can be very rewarding. Don't forget that you are not alone – most student sojourners feel a little strange, depressed and out-of-sorts when they return to their home institution. Luckily, the negative feelings fade with time.

REENTRY SHOCK: WHAT IS IT?

It is not uncommon for students to experience feelings and thoughts much like the ones they experienced when adjusting to the new culture at the beginning of their study abroad experience. When individuals spend a significant amount of time living, working, or studying abroad, they usually go through a period of cross-cultural adjustment upon returning to the culture they left. This phenomenon is commonly called “Reentry Shock” or “Reverse Culture Shock.” Reentry Shock is frequently more difficult than the initial culture shock because it is unexpected – who expects to feel like a foreigner in a familiar culture? Every individual experiences the readjustment to U.S. culture differently. Some common experiences include:

- Restlessness, uncertainty, confusion, boredom
- Sense of loss, apathy or loneliness
- Feelings of alienation, frustration or anger
- Desire to be alone
- Difficulty communicating in English-only language situations
- Reverse homesickness for the host country or family
- Negative feelings toward and criticism of U.S. culture, sometimes leading to rejection of it
- Perception that friends and family are not interested in their experience abroad
- Changed friendships, loss of friendships
- View that experiences abroad are not useful or important in the classroom
- Changed goals and priorities

STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH REENTRY SHOCK

There are many ways of dealing with the negative effects of reentry shock. The way that returnees generally deal with Reentry falls into three categories:

1. **Rejecting** the original culture, at least in part, in favor of the new culture
2. **Reverting** back to the “old” lifestyle and not admitting personal change
3. **Integrating** personal changes into life in the original culture, “expanding” their lifestyle

Integration is the most positive of these behaviors, but can be difficult to achieve. Every student experiences a different and personal process; here are some hints for coping with reentry shock and moving towards integration:

- **Stay in contact** with the friends you made in your host country. Stay current on events in your host country and subscribe to publications you read while there. (Websites can be invaluable.)
- **Make contact with other returnees** to share your experiences. Share your experiences, views, and difficulties with people who are having a similar experience.
- **Allow time to adjust** and reflect on your experience.
- **Keep a journal** – think about your experience, record your observations, and ask yourself questions. What have you learned about different cultures? What perspectives on U.S. culture have you gleaned from your experience? How you have changed as a result of living abroad? Consider how different cultural norms and behaviors affect daily life. How is academic learning different in different countries? Consider how your personal, academic and professional goals have changed. Brainstorm about how to integrate your experience into your life at U-M.
- Take care of your **mental well-being** – use reentry resources, [counseling services \(CAPS\)](#) and peer group support to talk through any difficulties you may have.
- Take care of your **physical well-being** – some people experience mild sickness when they return. If sickness persists or is serious, make an appointment with a physician. Maintain good health through diet, sleep, exercise, stress management, etc. If your sojourn was in a country where you may have been exposed to diseases and/or parasites, get tested upon returning.
- **Prepare yourself** to return to the pace of U-M academic life. Contact friends and faculty or advisors with whom you had a prior connection. Plan your academic schedule and plan time for fun.

- **Congratulate yourself** on successfully navigating academic, social and cultural life in another country.
- **Explore new ways** of sharing your experiences with others.

WHAT NEXT? HOW TO INTEGRATE YOUR STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE INTO YOUR LIFE

There are many opportunities for returnees to follow through with their international experience at the University of Michigan. Returnees are valuable members of the U-M community since they are knowledgeable about another culture and able to see issues of culture and world politics from a new perspective. These skills are valuable both inside and outside the classroom. Many times, occasions to contribute are not readily apparent and it is necessary to research opportunities and to be proactive. The following list of suggestions can help to get you started on using your study abroad experience to its full advantage here at the U-M. Have fun with it.

SOCIAL/PERSONAL

- Establish contact with your peers who have recently returned from abroad. Start an email or social networking group.
- Keep up any new language you learned by taking language classes, joining student language groups, becoming a language partner.
- Make contact with international student groups from your host country; participate in cultural or social groups from your host country.
- Introduce your friends to your host culture's cuisine, performing arts, film, etc.

ACADEMIC

- Take classes with an international focus.
- Incorporate your knowledge of a different country or culture into your academic coursework. **Speak with your instructors** about your experience and see if you can incorporate it into work on a research paper, thesis, or project.
- Use your knowledge of a different culture in classroom discussion. Bring alternative perspectives to the discussion.
- Attend Brown Bag seminars, lectures, and events hosted by area studies centers of the **International Institute**. Each Center has an email list that you can join to learn about lectures, social activities, classes, jobs and fellowship opportunities. Contact the Center associated with your host country to get on their email list. (See **Resources** below.)
- Get involved in language programs and other department events and opportunities.
- Make use of the many resources available at **Language Resource Center (LRC)** on the second floor of the MLB. See the [LRC's website](#) for more information.

WORK/VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

- Apply for an OIP Peer Advising position (there are 2-3 positions available each year to OIP alumni).
- Volunteer with the OIP to speak to prospective students about your host country. Email [Kelli Meadows](#) for more information.
- Work in the [International Center's Education Abroad Office](#) as a Peer Advisor. Email [Bill Nolting](#) for more information.
- Sign-up to receive International Center's Education Abroad Office email announcements to learn about international work, study, internship, volunteer and travel opportunities. Email [Bill Nolting](#) to be added to the email list.
- Research opportunities to volunteer around campus and in Ann Arbor to work with people or issues associated with your host country or region.
- Become an English language conversation partner to someone from your host country (contact [Family Housing](#) on North Campus).

CAREER

- ❑ Use your study abroad experience to your advantage after graduation. Make an appointment with a career counselor at [Career Planning and Placement](#) to learn how best to market your international experience.
- ❑ Visit the [Education Abroad Office](#) to learn about international career opportunities.

STRATEGIES TO MANAGE REENTRY SHOCK AND HEALTH ISSUES

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN RESOURCES

- ❑ [University of Michigan Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#)
 - 3100 Michigan Union
 - (734) 764-8312
- ❑ [University Health Service](#)
 - 207 Fletcher Street

NON-UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN RESOURCES

- ❑ [What's Up With Culture?](#)
 - Compiled by the University of the Pacific, University of Southern California, Payson, Department of Education's Fund for Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) and the U.S. Peace Corps
- ❑ [10 Tips for Re-Adjustment](#)
 - Provided by the University of Wisconsin-Madison
- ❑ [Reverse Culture Shock](#)
 - Provided by the University of Buffalo – The State University of New York

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

- ❑ [Career Planning and Placement](#)
3200 Student Activities Building
(734) 764-7460
- ❑ International Center's [Education Abroad Office](#)
603 East Madison
(734)764-9310
- ❑ [LS&A Academic Advising](#)
1255 Angell Hall
(734) 764-0332
- ❑ University of Michigan [International Institute \(II\)](#)
1080 South University
Suite 2660
(734)763-9200
 - [Center for International and Comparative Studies](#)
 - [American Studies Program \(ASP\)](#)
 - [China Data Center \(CDC\)](#)
 - [Center for Chinese Studies \(CCS\)](#)
 - [Center for European Studies \(CES\)](#)
 - [Center for Japanese Studies \(CJS\)](#)
 - [Center for Korean Studies \(CKS\)](#)
 - [Latin American and Caribbean Studies Program \(LACS\)](#)

- [Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies \(CMENAS\)](#)
 - [Center for Russian and East European Studies \(CREES\)](#)
 - [Center for South Asian Studies \(CSAS\)](#)
 - [Center for Southeast Asian Studies \(CSEAS\)](#)
 - [Summer Language Institute \(SLI\)](#)
 - [Center for World Performance Studies \(CWPS\)](#)
- [Center for International Business Education \(CIBE\)](#)
 Stephen M. Ross School of Business
 701 Tappan Street

A PARTIAL LIST OF LS&A DEPARTMENTS THAT OFFER INTERNATIONAL COURSEWORK

- [American Culture](#)
- [Department of Asian Languages and Cultures](#)
- [Interdepartmental Program in Classical Art and Archaeology](#)
- [Comparative Literature](#)
- [English language and Literature](#)
- [Germanic Languages and Literature](#)
- [Global Change Project](#)
- [History](#)
- [History of Art](#)
- [The Institute for the Humanities](#)
- [Judaic Studies](#)
- [Linguistics](#)
- [Near Eastern Studies](#)
- [Romance Language and Literature](#)
- [Slavic Languages and Literature](#)