

# Education Abroad Re-Entry Handbook



## **Returning Home After an Education Abroad Experience**

**Created by the Center for International Studies and Global Change (CISGC)**

Adapted from Study Abroad Re-Entry Handbook at the University of Buffalo, Vanderbilt University



We hope you have returned from an academic and culturally enriching experience that will be transformative for your life. It probably seems like only yesterday that you began this remarkable journey of learning and discovery. Now that you are back in the U.S., we hope the path of intellectual engagement will continue as you return with a broadened perspective and insight into new knowledge, ideas, cultures, and perspectives.

We realize that returning to the U.S. can be as challenging, if not more so, than your experiences abroad. In light of this, we have prepared this handbook to keep you informed of the intricacies of returning to a place no longer as familiar as it was to you when you left. We hope you find the content informative about the issues you will face as you re-acclimate yourself with life at Tougaloo College and in the U.S. Remember to be patient with yourself and others. Much like when you left for your host country, you now must also give yourself time to reconnect while keeping in mind that change is positive. Your travels and time abroad have given you greater awareness of world politics, cultures, and beliefs.

Again, welcome back to Mississippi and Tougaloo. The Center for International Studies & Global Change (CISGC) remains committed to helping you with your continued studies as they relate to international issues and interests. Please feel free to stop by and tell us about your experience, as we would love to be able to share your experience with the Tougaloo College community.

Sincerely,  
CISGC Staff

# Reverse Culture Shock or Re-Entry

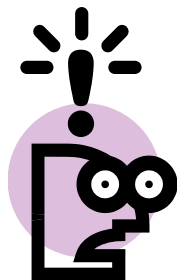


Reverse Culture Shock or Re-Entry is a term associated with a person returning to their home environment and having to make adjustments to reacquaint themselves with their surroundings which is similar to culture shock. Unlike culture shock, most do not anticipate feeling like a foreigner in their own home country. However, it should be expected. If you have made cultural adjustments while abroad, you will definitely have to readjust once you are back home.

**Experiencing reverse culture shock is extremely common and may include any to all of the following emotions:**

- Restlessness, rootlessness
- Reverse homesickness: missing people and places from abroad
- Boredom, insecurity, uncertainty, confusion, frustration
- Need for excessive sleep (Jet lag/time adjustment)
- Change in goals or priorities
- Feelings of alienation or withdrawal
- Negativity towards American behavior (e.g., cultural arrogance, over-consumption, material wastefulness, etc.)

- Feelings of resistance toward family and friends (e.g., do they really know the newly expanded you?)



## Stages of Reverse Culture Shock

### STAGE 1: DISENGAGEMENT /DEPARTURE

While you are still overseas, you begin to start thinking about moving back home and moving away from your experience and friends abroad.

### STAGE 2: EUPHORIA /THE HONEYMOON

You may be very excited to be back home and others may be equally delighted to have you back. You have the opportunity to do, eat, see, smell and visit with all of those things that you missed while you were away from home. 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, in your own country. Suddenly you 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. It is important to remember that the shock of returning home will eventually dissipate.

## Top Ten Re-Entry Frustrations

1. Boredom
2. "No one wants to hear about this"
3. It's hard to explain
4. Reverse homesickness
5. Previous relationships have changed
6. People see the "wrong" changes
7. People misunderstand if I adopt elements of my host culture; they misinterpret my behavior
8. Feelings of alienation; seeing home with critical eyes
9. Inability to apply new knowledge and skills
10. Fear of losing the experience





# Top Ten Re~Entry Solutions

1. **Come** visit the CISGC. We are travel people, too. We would love to see your photos, hear about your trip, and share similar experiences from our trips abroad.
2. **Become** a Peer~Advisor. Your experiences and perspectives are of great value to students contemplating an education abroad program. The peer~advising program is a fun way to keep your experience alive (looks great on a résumé~ one hour/week plus special events required).
3. **Start** a club for students who have studied abroad.
4. **Write** for the CISGC about your education abroad experience and working with us to get it published. If you are interested, please let us know. We would love to share your words with students interested in studying abroad and the wider campus community.
5. **Befriend** a newly arrived international student. You might remember how difficult it was when you first arrived in your host~country and how nice it would have been to have a ‘friend’ available to help. Ask us for details and a partner.



6. **Volunteer** at any of the CISGC or education abroad events that our office sponsors. We are constantly looking for energetic people to assist at the various events each semester.



7. **Look** into the various student clubs and organizations available at Tougaloo. Learn about the various activities that they sponsor. Get involved in working toward making Tougaloo more culturally and socially diverse!

8. **Share** your email address with students interested in studying in the same program or in the same country as you. Interested students love to email questions and hear first-hand experiences about overseas travel. Your emails and correspondence will be treasured!



9. **Make** a digital scrapbook of your travels. Include your memories along with photos and souvenirs. You will treasure the scrapbook for years to come!

10. **Education abroad** again!! If you have the itch to go abroad again, check with our staff about the various programs available. We are happy to help you explore additional international opportunities. (Links for programs abroad during the summer or after you finish



your education at Tougaloo, example:  
(<http://us.fulbrightonline.org> and [www.peacecorp.gov](http://www.peacecorp.gov)).



## Absorbing Reverse Culture Shock



All forms of culture shock require a normal adjustment period. The reassuring aspect of change is that it usually produces internal growth if handled correctly.

This is intended to acquaint you with some of the normal behavior patterns elicited by a return home from abroad. This won't make reverse culture shock disappear, but it will hopefully prepare you for what to expect and how to deal with it, so you can have a more positive returning experience.

The degree of shock experienced by each traveler may range from a jolt to an uncomfortable agitation. There are a number of factors that may determine how great or small your adjustment may be:

- THE LENGTH OF TIME YOU WERE AWAY
- WHETHER YOU HAD PREVIOUS TRAVEL EXPERIENCE TO THAT LOCATION
- HOW MUCH CONTACT YOU MAINTAINED WITH HOME WHILE YOU WERE AWAY
- AMOUNT OF PROIR TRAVEL EXPERIENCE
- WHETHER OR NOT YOU ENJOYED YOUR TIME ABROAD
- WHETHER YOU TRAVELED ALONE OR WITH OTHERS

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Help

### Common Frustrations/Anticipated Behaviors

#### **BOREDOM**

Life simply does not seem as exciting here in Jackson as it may have while you were overseas. The humdrum of going to classes, going home, going out and going to sleep (repeat) does not compare to your weekend excursions while you were away.

#### **NEGATIVISM**



All of a sudden your home environment doesn't measure up to that terrific mental picture you had of it before you left or while abroad. Many Americans become quite negative about society in the United States: labeling it too materialistic, too friendly (or too unfriendly) too backwards, too racist or too "something else". A common tendency is to withdraw, become defensive, or to daydream about the time you spent abroad. Be reassured that in time, you will be able to incorporate an appreciation for the positive aspects of both your home culture and that from abroad.

### **FEELINGS OF ALIENATION**

Change occurs within almost all overseas travelers. Sometimes, without even desiring it, you may find new beliefs; attitudes and patterns of behavior have now become part of your personality and life style. Somehow the person you used to be doesn't feel at home anymore. Transitions to home become more stressful when you perceive the changes as negative. Even positive changes can be stressful as you feel pressure from family and friends at home to revert to the "old you". Avoid the temptation of discarding your positive changes.

### **PERSONAL CHANGE**

Your insights have been broadened and your perspective is now different. Be aware that your emotional and mental climates have also changed. An attempt to go back to the "old you" will likely fail. Likely, the internal changes are positive ones and there will be no need for a reversion to the old. A key piece of advice here: try not to convert those around you. They haven't experienced what you have. Either they can't, aren't interested, or are unwilling to understand. They may even have a hard time understanding and appreciating the "new you" and all the changes you have gone through. And, they don't have to be converted anyway. What you have experienced and learned is something for you to hold onto and no one else's opinions need diminish or take that away.

It is probably unwise to impose your new perspectives and opinions on family and friends. Not many people enjoy being told

what the ‘proper’ way to eat is or the ‘civilized’ way to address others. Vent your frustrations in supportive atmospheres where there are others who have been abroad.

It may be difficult to adjust back to a former lifestyle without some struggle. A healthy solution may be to combine the positive aspects of the old and new you. The result should be a much richer and enjoyable lifestyle.

## **SOCIAL ADJUSTMENTS**

Social situations can be very challenging. Things like slang expressions, clothes, music, dancing and who’s who can change. You may feel like an outsider. Your friends may seem boring and close-minded. Your interests may have changed.

It is not uncommon for those returning from abroad to feel superior to others. It can be disconcerting when others do not recognize your “advanced status” or pay little attention to your return home. Former friends may have found new friendships and have priorities that are now different than yours.

Be patient. If the friendship is worth maintaining, adjustments can and will be made. If not, developing new friendships can be a way to develop your new perspectives.

**Expect Differences**—Unexpected alterations in life are often harder to deal with than expected changes. Use change as a tool and teacher. Look for the positives in each situation.

**Guard Your Health**—Expect some extra exhaustion, depression or anxiety, which are often normal accompaniments to long distance travel and retuning home stress. The condition is temporary and curable, especially when you know what to expect and how to cope.

**Getting It Back Together**—Identify your new options as soon as possible after arriving home. Try to make as many arrangements for

developing a lifestyle that will combine the best of the old with the best of the new. Be proud of everything you have accomplished by going abroad and start thinking about your next trip.

## Connecting Education Abroad to Your Career

Now that you've returned from a wonderful time overseas, it is important to understand how best to leverage your time abroad. Below are some ways to help package your experience and utilize your time abroad as an effective professional tool.

Begin by selecting 5 – 7 items from the list below that you feel will be useful to an employer in the field you wish to work. Recall and discuss a specific situation from your time abroad that demonstrates the skill or quality and frame it.



### SKILL

- ▶ Time management skills
- ▶ Communication skills/Communication despite barriers
- ▶ Creative problem-solving
- ▶ Achieve goals despite obstacles
- ▶ Accept responsibility
- ▶ Learn quickly
- ▶ Take initiative and risks
- ▶ Function with a high level of ambiguity
- ▶ Handle difficult situations
- ▶ Handle stress
- ▶ Manage/Organize
- ▶ Lead others in informal or formal groups
- ▶ Conduct research despite language and cultural differences
- ▶ Adapt to new environments
- ▶ Understand an organization's culture
- ▶ Learn through observing
- ▶ Active listening
- ▶ Perform in an environment with adverse conditions

### QUALITIES

- ▶ Self-reliant
- ▶ Driven/persistent
- ▶ Appreciation of diversity
- ▶ Flexibility & Adaptability
- ▶ Tolerance/open-mindedness
- ▶ Assertiveness
- ▶ Inquisitiveness
- ▶ Self-confidence
- ▶ Open to relocation
- ▶ Diplomatic