CULTURAL REENTRY STUDY PACKET

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SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS

You may utilize this self-study packet any time during your transition: before going home, on the plane flying home or after arriving home.
Dear International Students:

Congratulations on completing your studies at Dominican University of California! You are on your way to new adventures.

Here is some information that will help you to successfully make your transition to life back in your home country. Please feel free to read through this cultural reentry self-study packet.

These materials were edited into this booklet so that you may spend some time on your own to prepare for your return home.

You may utilize this self-study packet any time during your transition: before going home, on the plane flying home or after arriving home.

If you have any questions regarding the packet, please feel free to contact me at vstawierski@dominican.edu.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
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and may be used as is or modified for
use at Colleges or Universities in
NAFSA’s Region XII
PREPARING TO RETURN HOME

Quick Tips
By Dr. Bruce La Brack

Reentry into your home culture can be both as challenging and as frustrating as living overseas, mostly because our attitude toward going “home” is that it should be a simple matter of getting resettled, resuming your earlier routines, and reestablishing your relationships. However, worldwide research has shown that reentry has its own set of special social and psychological adjustments which can be facilitated by being aware of the reentry process and following some advice from those who have already returned. The following list is compiled from many sources, but all of the tips come from returnees who have offered these ideas in the hope of making your initial reentry easier for you and for those at home.

1. Prepare for the adjustment process.
The more you consider your alternatives, think about what is to come, and know about how returning home is both similar to and different from going abroad, the easier the transition will be. Anticipating is useful. As one psychologist put it: “Worrying helps.”

2. Allow yourself time.
Reentry is a process that will take time, just like adjusting to a new foreign culture. Give yourself time to relax and reflect upon what is going on around you, how you are reacting to it, and what you might like to change. Give yourself permission to ease into the transition.

3. Understand that the familiar will seem different.
You will have changed, home has changed, and you will be seeing familiar people, places, and behaviors from new perspectives. Some things will seem strange, perhaps even unsettling. Expect to have some new emotional and psychological responses to being home. Everyone does.

4. There will be much "cultural catching up" to do.
Some linguistic, social, political, economic, entertainment, and current event topics may be unfamiliar to you as new programs, slang, and even governmental forms may have emerged since you left. You may have some learning to do about your own culture. (Note: most returnees report that major insights into themselves and their home countries occur during reentry).
5. Reserve judgments
Just as you had to keep an open mind when first encountering the culture of a new foreign country, try to resist the natural impulse to make snap decisions and judgments about people and behaviors once back home. Mood swings are common at first, and your most valuable and valid analysis of events is likely to take place after allowing some time for thorough reflection.

6. Respond thoughtfully and slowly
Quick answers and impulsive reactions often characterize returnees. Frustration, disorientation, and boredom in the returnee can lead to behavior which is incomprehensible to family and friends. Take some time to rehearse what you want to say and how you will respond to predictable questions and situations; prepare to greet those that are less predictable with a calm, thoughtful approach.

7. Cultivate sensitivity
Showing an interest in what others have been doing while you have been on your adventure overseas is a sure way to reestablish rapport. Much frustration in returnees stems from what is perceived as disinterest by others in their experience and lack of opportunity to express their feelings and tell their stories. Being as good a listener as a talker is a key ingredient in mutual sharing.

8. Beware of comparisons
Making comparisons between cultures and nations is natural, particularly after residence abroad; however, a person must be careful not to be seen as too critical of home or too lavish in praise of things foreign. A balance of good and bad features is probably more accurate and certainly less threatening to others. The tendency to become an "instant expert" is to be avoided at all costs.

9. Remain flexible
Keeping as many options open as possible is an essential aspect of a successful return home. Attempting to re-socialize totally into old patterns and networks can be difficult, but remaining aloof is isolating and counterproductive. What you want to achieve is a balance between resuming and maintaining earlier patterns and enhancing your social and intellectual life with new friends and interests.

10. Seek support networks
There are lots of people back home who have gone through their own reentry and understand a returnee's concerns-academic faculty, exchange students, international development staff, diplomatic corps, military personnel, church officials, and businessmen and women. University study abroad and international student offices are just a few of the places where returnees can seek others who can offer support and country-specific advice.

Dr. Bruce La Brack, School of International Studies, University of the Pacific, found in Bruce La Brack and Margaret Pusch, Training for International Transitions, Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication, July 21-25, 2003.
Cross-Cultural Transitions: An Emotional Roller Coaster

The above graph was adapted from works by Margaret Pusch and others.

Welcome Back!

An overseas experience does not end when you have your passport stamped and board the plane home. There is a long period of remembering, analyzing, comparing and interpreting the experience following the return home. You have to reconcile two cultural beings within one body. This can take a long time, but is remarkably important and fruitful. It is at this stage where you
and the experience become one. As the following graph and text helps to indicate, returning home can be just as culturally challenging as going abroad.

"Home" has changed-- you may be coming back to a different environment than the one you left. Everyone responds to new situations in different ways. There are however, many similarities and stages which individuals pass through as they encounter and engage themselves in a new culture. We hope the following summary of different "stages" is helpful to you. Don’t be surprised if you went through these in a different way than described, or even "missed" a stage. There is nothing wrong. No matter how long you are away, your study abroad experience is short; even full year students often feel that they were not able to do as much as they wanted.

Anticipating Departure - Before going abroad, you may have been excited about going abroad. With this excitement came the formation of expectations and goals. At this stage there were inevitable fears and concerns as well.

Arrival Confusion - The first few days may have been very trying and disorienting. You met new friends or host "family," and were inundated with all kinds of new smells, noises, signs, people, languages, etc. which could have been overwhelming.

The Honeymoon - Upon arriving in-country, usually everything was new, exciting, different and fascinating. You may have responded by being on a cultural high, and feeling that where you were is absolutely wonderful. This stage can last from one to several weeks.

The Plunge - When the novelty of the new culture wore off, and you began to face the differences of a new culture without familiar reference points and support systems, you may have become quite frustrated, annoyed, and confused.

Initial Adjustment - As you developed your language and social skills, you became more self-confident. You may have felt at home with local systems, transportation, communication, finding your way around campus, and the like.
Confronting Deeper Issues - As you confronted cultural differences and personal issues at a deeper level, you may have become frustrated. This frustration can be intense, as you may have been questioning where you were from and where you were. You began to see a multitude of approaches, learn through experience what was socially acceptable, and question many deeper assumptions about the world. As a result, you may have felt boredom, isolation and a lack of motivation.

Adapting and Assimilating - As you began to feel more comfortable and at home in the host culture, the sense of isolation and boredom may have subsided. You began to identify with new ways of doing things, adopt new foods and ways of expressing yourself. A strong friendship with a local student may have developed, or you may have accepted that you were only a long-term visitor and would not have the time to develop a meaningful friendship. You may have an adapted-self, where you were comfortable with your home identity as well as the adaptations you had developed to function in the new culture.

Goin' Home - Now, the program is quickly winding down, term papers are due, and there are exams to be taken. You want to take a few more pictures, visit some places left for "later", say good-bye, and get ready to go home. Here, the stresses of separation from "the new home" coupled with the anticipation of going home are compounded with the "normal" stress of completing an academic semester. You may also be reflecting on what you've done and where you've been, overall this may be a very positive period. At this point, you should also be preparing for "reverse culture-shock".

Initial Excitement - You may be thrilled to be at home, eat that favorite food, see your friends and be with your family. Often you are excited about your experience, being home, and talk endlessly.

Judgmental Period - Quickly, what once was familiar and commonplace becomes strange, uncomfortable or boring. You may find fault in everything around you and feel "it was better there."

Realization Stage - You may have different interpretations of world events than the people back home.
Reverse 'Culture Shock' - You may become frustrated. You cannot use the skills, which are now second nature, perhaps you may feel isolated. Old friends "don't understand," and important new meaningful reference points are gone. The old reference points are mundane, or no longer viable.

Balanced Re-adaptation - You will be integrating the experience abroad into life at home. You will find a niche at home and feel comfortable expressing and enjoying important parts of your adapted-self, but you will find a more complete identity based on your home culture and the experiences gained abroad. You will probably make new friends or reconnect more effectively with old ones.

These various stages may seem daunting if not overwhelming. It is important to keep in mind that by facing these challenges you are growing, becoming more self-aware and self-confident. Everyone who embarks on a study abroad program or major life transition will face these or similar challenges.

http://www.iesabroad.org/welcomeback/welcome.htm
A TRANSITION CHECKLIST

1. TAKE YOUR TIME.

2. ARRANGE TEMPORARY STRUCTURES.

3. DON'T ACT FOR THE SAKE OF ACTING. BUT THEN, MAYBE THERE ARE TIMES FOR ACTION.

4. RECOGNIZE WHY YOU ARE UNCOMFORTABLE.

5. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF IN LITTLE WAYS.

6. EXPLORE THE OTHER SIDE OF CHANGE

7. FIND SOMEONE TO TALK WITH.

8. FIND WHAT IS WAITING IN THE WINGS OF YOUR LIFE.

9. USE THIS TIME OF TRANSITION AS A KIND OF LEARNING

10. RECOGNIZING THAT TRANSITION HAS A CHARACTERISTIC SHAPE

Home Country Employment

Getting Started, Planning, and Goal Setting
Thinking about the potential stumbling blocks prior to your return home can ease the transition between different cultures. The more carefully you anticipate and prepare for the personal pressure and reverse culture shock, the more your energy can be focused on a successful job search. Before you begin your job search, it is important to think through how you have changed, what your new goals are, and the various obstacles you anticipate facing. Spend time reflecting carefully on the following:

Self-Assessment:
1. How have you changed since coming to the U.S.?
2. How do you interact with others differently?
3. What different expectations do you have of yourself & others?
4. How will family & friends at home respond to new character developments?

Reentry/Culture Shock:
1. What values & traditions in your home country have you missed?
2. Which will be most frustrating to deal with?
3. Will your fellow nationals accept the changes you've undergone?
4. What cultural & social expectations will be placed upon you that may cause discomfort?

Career Goals & Expectations:
1. What knowledge & skills have you acquired that you would like to utilize in your home country? Is there a need for such skills?
2. How strong is the demand for individuals with your background?
3. What final courses/experiences might you pursue to make yourself more marketable?
4. Will you be seeking employment in the public, private, or non-profit sector?
5. What salary range will you be most satisfied with?
6. What is your time frame? Do you expect to work immediately upon return?
7. What steps can you take now to assure that you meet your goals?
JOB SEARCH STRATEGIES: BEFORE YOU RETURN HOME

Now that your process of self-assessment is underway, you are ready to explore the professional fields you are interested in. It may be helpful to break this into a two-phase process:

1. Research prospective organizations and make contact with influential and informative professionals.
2. Actively pursue specific job leads.

NETWORKING & INFORMATION GATHERING

Networking is the process of establishing contacts with individuals who might directly or indirectly assist you in your job search. The intent of networking should be to educate yourself about the needs and opportunities in your field and to make yourself known to influential individuals. A thorough, successful job search begins by developing a potentially helpful network of individuals and organizations and educate yourself about the current trends and developments in your home country before you depart. A few sources for networking are listed below.

Exercise: Make a list of contacts with whom you should follow-up.

FOLLOWING-UP

Friends, Classmates (from any level of school), Neighbors (current & past), Relatives, Host Family, Alumni (local, national, and international), Parents of Friends, Social Acquaintances (sports, clubs, coffee houses, etc.)

Service Providers (e.g., career development center)

Academic Advisor, Professors, Professional Associations, People you met at conventions, conferences, and workshops, Speakers at meetings you have attending, Internationals from your field who are currently working

Current and Former Employers/Supervisors, Chamber of Commerce, Leaders & Members of your religious organization, others

STEPS TO GOOD NETWORKING

1. Research options available to you, both the kinds of organizations and the types of positions.
2. Seek leads and contacts through campus connections, professionals associations, home country acquaintances, et cetera.
3. Request informational interviews. Attend interviews prepared with knowledgeable questions and concerns.
4. Send thank you letters.
5. Decide whether there is value in staying in touch with each contact
Seek assistance from the Career Development Center

The Career Development Center (CDC) offers a number of resources related to international employment. Members of the CDC staff are here to help you with your career search process. Resume writing, interviewing, strategies for conducting the job search, and networking represent only a few of the ways in which CDC staff can assist you. In addition, the CDC library contains a variety of informative books, directories, and other tools (e.g., computer).

Seek advice from your academic advisor & other faculty members

Besides providing academic advice, faculty members might be able to help you locate and initiate contact with professionals who share your academic and professional interests. Faculty can be key sources of information about conferences and seminars pertaining to your field. You should also be alert for faculty members who have connections with organizations from your home country. In addition to keeping you informed of the most recent projects and concerns within your country, they may also provide valuable contacts for you as you prepare to reenter into your home country job market.

Contact your consulate and/or embassy

The degree of assistance and information consulates and embassies provide varies greatly. At larger consulates you should contact the commercial or education officer. At smaller consulates feel free to contact your consul general directly. Ask for information related to current developments in your home country through a newsletter or other means (e.g., on-line publications). Ask to be put on their mailing list. Request a list of trade and commercial organizations with whom your home country is involved. Ask about upcoming events that might provide an opportunity to meet individuals with contacts in your home country, whether home country nationals are visiting the U.S. for either business or intellectual pursuits and suggest that you could be of assistance (e.g., translating), and the names of organizations that assist students with home country re-entry and employment.

Maintain communication with professionals in your field at home

It is important to maintain and promote professional contacts with former professors, employers, co-workers, et cetera from home. Request that they keep you informed of local developments in your mutual field of interest. Inform them of new directions in the field in the U.S. The maintenance of these connections with enable you to re-enter your field at home with greater ease.

Contact professional associations in your field of interest

Many professional organizations in the U.S. have international divisions and/or international membership. Lists of members are often published from which you can gather names of compatriots who have studied in the U.S. Students can often join for a moderate fee.
Contact the Chamber of Commerce in your area
The chamber has international divisions in many major U.S. cities and can provide helpful information. Ask for the names and addresses of key officers at the American Chamber of Commerce in your home country. When you plan your trip home, contact the key officers and ask for an informational interview to get their advice as you begin your job search. For general information about American Chambers of Commerce overseas, contact:

International Division
Chamber of commerce of the United States
1615 H Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20062

Contact other international, private sector or non-profit organizations that are active in your field

JOB SEARCH STRATEGIES: AFTER YOU RETURN HOME

Know the Hiring Rhythm of Your Country
In some countries hiring is done at a particular time of the year. Be sensitive to the difference and plan your return (or at least your search) to coincide with your country's hiring cycle.

Do Your Research
In every country, the job candidate who knows a lot about the hiring organization and its needs will do better than the uninformed candidate. When you get a job lead, find out what kind of services or products the organization provides. If you know nothing about the organization, obtain annual reports and other publicity materials.

Create Your Own Job
Naive job seekers assume they are looking for employment opportunities that have already been created. This is not necessarily so. The manager with whom you meet may have need of certain skills but may not yet have designed a position. In certain situations a job may be created because the right person with the right skills was looking for work at the right time. This person could be you.

Be Prepared to Interpret Your U.S. Education for Employers
Many people are unfamiliar with how training at an American institution prepares a student for employment back home. It is your responsibility to explain how your education and experiences helped you develop skills and knowledge that will be beneficial to local employers. Do not fail to emphasize functional skills such as English language proficiency, problem-solving, research, and intangible attributes such as intercultural adaptability and an international perspective on the issues in your field.
PREPARING TO RETURN HOME

Prepare for the adjustment process. Reentry into your home culture is not simply a matter of getting resettled or resuming your earlier routines and relationships. Be aware of the reentry process.

Allow yourself time. Adjusting to a new culture takes time. Give yourself permission to ease into the transition.

Understand that the Familiar will Seem Different. You will have changed, home has changed. Expect to have new emotional and psychological reactions to being home. Everyone does.

There will be Much "Cultural Catching Up" To Do. You may have some learning to do about your own culture (Note: most returnees report that major insights into themselves and their home countries occur during reentry).

Reserve Judgements. Try to resist the natural impulse to make snap decisions and judgements about people and behaviors once back home. Mood swings are common at first and your most valuable and valid analysis of events is likely to take place after allowing some time for thorough reflection.

Respond Thoughtfully and Slowly.

Cultivate Sensitivity. Showing interest in what others have been doing while you were away is an excellent way to reestablish rapport.

Beware of Comparisons. Making comparisons between cultures is natural. However, be careful not to be seen as too critical of home or too lavish in praise of things foreign. Avoid romanticizing the USA.

Remain Flexible. Keep as many options open as possible.

Seek Support Networks.

Comments and questions to cdc@macalester.edu

Macalester College Web page: http://www.macalester.edu/~cdc/jobsearchinthome.html, last updated 10/3/01.
TOP TEN IMMEDIATE REENTRY CHALLENGES
As Rated by University Students
Dr. Bruce La Brack

There are lots of reasons to look forward to going home, but there are also a number of psychological, social and cultural aspects which can prove difficult—often because they are unanticipated. The following list was generated by interviewing students like you who have been through the experience and survived nicely. However, they say you should take the process seriously by being realistic and thinking about it and your possible reactions. They offer the following thoughts on reentry for your consideration in the hope they will make your return both more enjoyable and productive.

1. Boredom
After all the newness and stimulation of your time abroad, a return to family, friends, and old routines (however nice and comforting) can seem very dull. It is natural to miss the excitement and challenges that characterize study in a foreign country, but it is up to you to find ways to overcome such negative reactions. Remember a bored person is also boring.

2. No One Wants to Hear
One thing you can count on upon your return: no one will be as interested in hearing about your adventures and triumphs as you will be in sharing those experiences. This is not a rejection of you or your achievements, but simply the fact that once they have heard the highlights, any further interest on your audience’s part is probably unlikely. Be realistic in your expectations of how fascinating your journey is going to be for everyone else. Be brief.

3. You Can’t Explain
Even when given a chance to explain all the sights you saw and feelings you had while studying abroad, it is likely to be at least a bit frustrating trying to relay them coherently. It is very difficult to convey this kind of experience to people who do not have similar frames of reference or travel backgrounds, no matter how sympathetic they are as listeners. You can tell people about your trip, but you may fail to make them understand exactly how or why you felt a particular way. It's okay.
4. Reverse "Homesickness"
Just as you probably missed home for a time after arriving overseas, it is just as natural to experience some reverse homesickness for the people, places, and things that you grew accustomed to as a student in America. To an extent it can be reduced by writing letters, telephoning, and generally keeping in contact, but feelings of loss are an integral part of international sojourns and must be anticipated and accepted as a natural result of study abroad.

5. Relationships Have Changed
It is inevitable that when you return you will notice that some relationships with friends and family will have changed. Just as you have altered some of your ideas and attitudes while abroad, the people at home are likely to have experienced some changes that are very important to them. These changes may be positive or negative, but expecting that no change will have occurred is unrealistic. The best preparation is flexibility, openness, minimal preconceptions, and tempered optimism.

6. People See the "Wrong" Changes
Sometimes people may concentrate on small alterations in your behavior or ideas and seem threatened or upset by them. Others may ascribe any "bad" traits to the influence of your time abroad. These incidents may be motivated by jealousy, fear, or feelings of superiority or inferiority. To avoid or minimize discomfort, it is necessary to monitor yourself and be aware of the reactions of those around you, especially in the first few weeks following your return. This phase normally passes quickly if you do nothing to confirm their stereotypes.

7. People Misunderstand
A few people will misinterpret your words or actions in such a way that communication becomes difficult. For example, what you may have come to think of as witty humor (particularly sarcasm, banter, etc.) and a way to show affection or establish a conversation may be considered aggression or "showing off." Offers to help in the kitchen can be seen as criticism of food preparation, new clothing styles as provocative, or inappropriate, references to the U.S. or use of English as boasting. Be aware of how you may look to others and how your behavior is likely to be interpreted.
8. Feelings of Alienation
Sometimes the reality of being back "home" is not as natural or enjoyable as the place you had constructed as your mental image. When actual daily life is less enjoyable or more demanding than you remembered, it is natural to feel some alienation, see faults in the society you never noticed before, or even become quite critical of everyone and everything for a time. This is no different than you first left home. Mental comparisons are fine, but keep them to yourself until you regain both your cultural balance and a balanced perspective.

9. Inability to Apply New Knowledge and Skills
Many returnees are frustrated by the lack of opportunity to apply newly gained social, linguistic, and practical coping skills that appear to be unnecessary or irrelevant at home. To avoid ongoing annoyance: adjust to reality as necessary, change what is possible, be creative, be patient, and above all, use all the cross-cultural adjustment skills you acquired abroad to assist your own reentry.

10. Loss/Compartmentalization of Experience
Being home, coupled with the pressures of job, family, friends, often combine to make returnees worried that they might somehow "lose" the experience; somehow becoming compartmentalized like souvenirs or photo albums kept in a box and only occasionally taken out and looked at. You do not have to let that happen. Maintain your contact. Talk to people who have had experiences similar to yours. Practice your skills. Remember and honor both your hard work and the fun you had while abroad.

Dr. Bruce La Brack, School of International Studies, University of the Pacific, found in Bruce La Brack and Margaret Pusch, Training for International Transitions, Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication, July 21-25, 2003.
Coping With Reverse Culture Shock

Living overseas for a year or more can change you in many unexpected ways. Just as you adjusted to life overseas years ago, you will have to get used to living back home, which may not be the same "home" that you remembered.

Going home involves two transitions – moving from the student world to the employment world, and moving from your second culture back to your home culture. If you are prepared from the beginning and know how to keep these changes in perspective, then returning home will be far less of a shock to you.

You are not the same person you were when you left home. Your behavior and communication patterns may have changed as well as your personal values. Therefore, anticipate where conflict is likely to occur with traditional home behavior, values and communication styles.

Prepare for leaving the U.S.  
Take time to say goodbye. Attend all the going-away parties and allow friends to see you off at the airport. Abruptly ending relationships and leaving a social and physical environment is much more stressful than slowly letting go.

Bring some of the U.S. home. Before leaving, remember to subscribe to journals in your field of study, join alumni associations, and be sure to have the addresses of the friends you are leaving. During your first few months back home, writing, emailing and phoning these friends will help you cope as much as letters, emails and phone calls from home helped you adjust when you first came to the U.S.

Use the coping strategies you developed while you were overseas. You will have learned many coping and survival skills during your stay in the U.S. – now apply this learning and those skills as you successfully complete your transition to life back home.

Realize that both culture shock and reverse culture shock are normal and beneficial. You are not alone. Most people return home more self confident, flexible, tolerant, creative, and with a widened world-view. The pain of adapting and readapting brings about enormous personal growth. In years to come you will look back on these transitions as periods of positive growth. Your experiences will have enabled you to understand your own culture better. You also will have developed the ability to be tolerant of cultural differences and will have become more flexible as an individual and as an employee.

Adapted from Weaver, G. Reverse Culture Shock, Aspire Newsletter, 1991, Washington, and Transitions: a guide for international students in their final semester, 1997, International Student Services, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, QLD.