Tips for Adjusting to a New City

Studying overseas or returning home can be a challenging transition. While leaving your home country to study elsewhere is an exciting time, it can also be a source of stress and anxiety. Additionally, returning home can be difficult because of changes in your perspective and community. Many people find that they experience a sense of culture shock, which is defined as “a sense of confusion and uncertainty sometimes with feelings of anxiety that may affect people exposed to an alien culture or environment.” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

Common Symptoms of Cultural Stress

- Exhaustion, fatigue, or changes to your appetite.
- Craving things from home (food, amenities, etc.) and homesickness.
- Major concern over small health problems.
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs.
- Strong desire to interact only with students in your program or non-locals.
- Fits of anger and frustration or depression alternating with elation.
- Superior attitude toward host nationals. You find yourself complaining about and criticizing everything.
- Feelings of rejection, isolation, and loneliness.
- Feeling like a child.

(http://www.northwestern.edu/studyabroad/)

Conversely, returning to your home country can be an equally stressful time. You may feel disconnected from the strong sense of community/family you experienced while overseas. It is not unusual to experience feelings of boredom, difficulty relating your experiences to others, a sense of alienation, and reverse homesickness during this initial re-entry period.

In both scenarios, there is often a distinct pattern of adjustment:

- **Honeymoon Stage:** During this initial phase everything feels exciting and new.

- **Culture Shock:** This is often where symptoms of cultural stress begin to show up. The novelty of the new culture has worn off and you begin to focus on the differences between the new culture and your home culture. Stress, irritation, and helplessness may become more pronounced. Homesickness is heightened during this phase.

- **Negotiation/Recovery:** During this stage, you learn more about the new culture, adapt to differences, and feel more comfortable.

- **Acceptance:** Finally, you enter the acceptance stage in which you successfully adapt to the new culture and develop an appreciation of differences and similarities between cultures. This is often the time when you are the most productive and happy.
Tips and Resources

- Be patient with yourself; adjusting takes time.
- Consider how you have successfully coped with stress and change in the past.
- Think positively ("I can do this." Remind yourself why you made the decision to study overseas.)
- Eat a healthy diet and get plenty of sleep.
- Don’t spend all of your time studying.
- Stay in touch with family.
- Make new friends.
- Engage in new social and academic activities.
- Find out what sports or social clubs are available in your SAIS community and get involved. See http://www.sais-jhu.edu/resources/student-life/student-organizations.
- Do something fun.
- Exercise.
- Consult with a professional.

➢ The Johns Hopkins Student Assistance Program (JHSAP) is available to provide counseling and additional resources. If you are in D.C., please call 443-287-7000 to schedule an appointment. If you are overseas, you may request a consultation by emailing jhsap@jhu.edu.

➢ There are several additional SAIS resources available to help you with this transition.

  o The Office of Student Life is here to help you. Stop by Nitze 504, email lisa.kahn@jhu.edu, or call 202-663-5705 to find out more.

  o The Student Government Association www.sais-jhu.edu/resources/student-life/student-government-association can also help you address your concerns and help you to get involved in the SAIS community.

  o If you have concerns about your academic requirements, please contact saisadvising@jhu.edu.

  o The English Writing Center can help you with language-related advice for your written assignments. See www.sais-jhu.edu/resources/languages-studies-english/english-writing-center for more information.

  o The SAIS Peer Support Program is a student-led mentoring service that provides you with private meetings with trained SAIS students. Email SAIS.Peer.2.Peer@gmail.com to learn more or set up a time to talk about any concerns you may have transitioning to SAIS.