

Preparing to Return to Your Home Country

Think back to your first few weeks in the U.S. Do you remember feeling excited, nervous, anxious or even a bit stressed? Perhaps you felt all of these things, but eventually you settled into a familiar routine.

- How did you feel in your first two weeks in the U.S?
- What changed?
- How do you feel now?

You are likely to experience similar emotional highs and lows now that it is time to prepare to return home. You may not expect to have a difficult time adjusting back to life in your home country, since you know the language and you will have support from your family and friends around you once again. However, it is expected and normal to experience some adjustments when you return to your home country after having lived abroad.

Some common feelings about returning home are:

- People at home have changed/grown.
- I have changed.
- Everyone in my country looks the same, where is the diversity?
- I miss the freedom and independence I enjoyed when I was in the U.S.
- Why doesn't anyone understand me?
- Why don't I feel good about being home?
- Why don't people realize that this transition is difficult for me?
- How will I tell my friends/family/colleagues what I have learned without hurting or offending them?
- Who can I talk to that will understand me?
- Will this ever get easier?

One of the best ways to cope successfully with the process of returning to your home country is to prepare yourself before your return trip. We recommend that you have realistic expectations and think through the process before experiencing it.

Coping with the Return Experience

The following are some helpful ways to turn your overseas experience into lifelong learning.

Personally:

- Make sure to take time to ask your family and friends what has happened in their lives while you were gone.
- Befriend other people who have had an intercultural/international experience.
- Keep in touch with your friends, professors, co-workers, advisor(s) and supervisor(s) from UNC Charlotte.
- Be patient with yourself and others.
- Be careful about generalizing about how Americans think and feel, and be clear about speaking from your own point of view.
- Understand that it is okay and natural to compare cultures, but try not to be too negative or boastful. Rather, focus on adopting positive aspects of both cultures for yourself.
- Remember that “home” is within yourself; there is always a choice which set of cultural values you will use in any given situation.
- Find creative ways to keep up with your English skills, such as watching American movies, and reading books, magazines or newspapers in English.
- Use your English skills in a helpful way with others.
- Meet with a career counselor to go over your resume and career options to include your international experience and your newly acquired skills in a culturally appropriate manner.
- Begin job hunting in your home country before you return home. You can try to find a job with a multinational company or a company that has opportunities for bilinguals.

In your community:

- Volunteer to give a presentation about your experience in the U.S. to a local school in your home country.
- Check with local study abroad recruitment services and/or universities to see how you can help recruit students to study at UNC Charlotte.
- Volunteer to help at a local university or UNC Charlotte students coming to your country on a study tour.
- Join an English club and/or befriend other English speakers.
- Volunteer to help teach English at a school or to family members and friends.
- Organize a gathering of fellow UNC Charlotte alumni.
- Volunteer to become a host family or language partner for an international student.
- Join a professional organization in your field.
- Join a local organization that advocates for a political or social cause you support.

Reflection Questions

Use the following questions to begin to reflect on your experience in the U.S., create reasonable expectations for yourself, and think about how you can turn your overseas experience into lifelong learning.

1. To what extent have I adopted new (American) values and behaviors (i.e., personal independence)? How do I expect this change to affect my interactions with my family and friends?
2. What kinds of expectations might there be for me to conform to certain values or behaviors at home (i.e., religion, family, elders, male and female relations, etc)?
3. In what ways do I think my family members and friends have changed? What significant events have occurred in their lives while I have been gone?
4. How will I create opportunities to meet others who have lived abroad and/or speak English?
5. What are some skill and qualities (i.e., flexibility, independence, open-mindedness, etc.) that I have gained through my experience in the U.S. that I can use in the future (professionally, educationally and in my community)?
6. What political, social and/or economic events have in my home country while I was gone? How do these changes affect me?

Additional Reflection Questions

1. To what extent has my need for diverse experience and friends changed?
2. To what extent have I adopted new verbal or non-verbal cues that my family or friends might not understand?
3. In what ways was my higher education experience different from studying in my home country (i.e., teaching methods, study skills, extracurricular activities, etc.)?
4. What are some aspects or issues that I learned about my field that I might not have learned if I had studied in my home country?
5. To what extent will my education and experience in the U.S. put me in a unique position professionally?
6. To what extent have I developed an interest in the political, social and/or economic events occurring around the world?
7. Do I know anyone in my home country who is working in the field that I am interested in working in? How can I contact this person?
8. What are some professional organizations in my home country that are related to my field?

Notes:

Going Home Checklist for International Students

University

- Inform ISS of your departure plans. Send Roopa a copy of your airline ticket.
- If you work on campus, check with your supervisor/employer about the office's departure procedure. You may need to return department keys and work files, cancel listserv subscriptions, etc.
- Pay any outstanding bills on your University account.
- Request an official transcript from the University.
- Request a copy of you (and dependant's) health and dental records. Check at the Health Services info desk to request a release of information.
- Update your mailing address in Infobear.
- Forward your BSU email to a personal email account.
- Join the BSU Alumni Association.

Travel

- Inform your family and friends back home or your arrival date.
- Check the airline's luggage weight/size regulations and cost for overweight/extra bags. These specifications can vary by airline and country of destination.
- Arrange transportation to the airport.
- Make sure to arrive at the airport at least 2 hours before the departure.
- Keep all old and new immigration documents together in a safe place.
- Check to make sure your passport is still valid. If expired, contact your home country consulate immediately.

Housing & Family

- Confirm the move out date from your housing (residence hall or renting lease).
- Inform your landlord of your move out date and set an inspection date. Make sure to speak to your landlord about the procedure to get your rental deposit returned. You might need to leave your home mailing address with your landlord.
- Pay any outstanding utility bills (electric, cable, internet, cell phone, water, garbage, etc).
- Arrange for your utilities to be disconnected by your move out date.

