Welcome back!
Please use this information as a guide to help you address common concerns that many returning students experience.

NIU Study Abroad Office
Williston Hall 417
(815) 753-0700
http://studyabroad.niu.edu
WELCOME to Life After Study Abroad

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Make the Most of your Experience

Dear Student,

You have undoubtedly learned a lot from your travels and academic term abroad. Now is the time to make the most of your experiences—that is what re-entry is all about.

Do you remember your first few days or weeks away? Do you remember feeling like a fish out of water, no matter how broad-minded you tried to be? Do you remember how you felt and thought? You probably wanted to return home. Now that you’re back, you may suffer temporarily from “re-entry shock.” Your insights have been broadened and your perspectives are different. Be aware that your emotional and mental climates have also changed. Temper your desires to consider those around you. They haven’t experienced what you have. Realize that you have changed culturally. It may be difficult to go back to your former lifestyle without some struggling. You may have become “different” after your stay away from home.

Remember as you begin the process of readjusting to the U.S. that you have had a unique experience abroad. The real key to re-entering your home culture is to realize that there may be frustrations with re-adjusting to life in the U.S. This is a valuable opportunity to reflect on your own culture in a different light. These frustrations are a normal part of the total learning process, and an ongoing part of your entire cross-cultural experience. Making the most of your time abroad involves a reflective and active process. In other words, thinking about re-entry is one thing, doing something about it is another. The following information suggests some ways to “do re-entry.” Certainly, these represent only a few of many possible suggestions; if you have additional ideas, please share them with fellow travelers, others on campus, and the Study Abroad Office.
Journals:
Journals are an excellent way to record your reactions to a new environment. Since coming home puts you in a familiar surrounding, it seems reasonable to stop writing your journal. However, as you may have already experienced, the familiar situations may be a little frustrating or challenging: Friends and families may not seem interested in your stories; your travel days may be over for the time being. Perhaps you even spent all your savings. Maybe you question what you actually learned while you were gone. Take time out of your busy schedule to write what you are now experiencing. This is a great way to reflect upon these and other issues.

Some possible questions to ask yourself are:

What did I learn about the host culture? About myself?

How can I apply what I learned to my life back in the U.S.?

Who will listen to my stories? Who could I meet with- - - campus organizations, the Study Abroad Office- - - to get more involved in international activities?

Do I think of the U.S. any differently now that I have returned? What do I like the most about my home culture? The least?

What advice would I give to those who are leaving tomorrow for my host culture? How did I learn these things?

How could I describe the "world" that now surrounds me? How does this differ from my view of the world before I left?

Please update your file in The Study Abroad Office. We want to hear about your experiences, look at your pictures—maybe use some for our library if you’re willing to share.
Here is where you can take the initiative to get involved:

- Look for courses where you can directly apply what you learned from your recent academic and travel experiences.
- Talk to your instructors about conducting projects that extend themes addressed in your study abroad experience.
- Look for opportunities on campus and in the community to talk about your experiences. People working in international activities are often overworked---we would love to hear that you would like to volunteer to do work with potential study abroad students!
- Become a Study Abroad Peer Adviser. Call the Study Abroad Office for more information.
- Join the International Relations Club. Call the International Student and Faculty Office at 753-1346.
- Meet international students who are studying at NIU. Remember how you felt during your first weeks overseas?
- Be a special host to an international student.
- Keep up your reading about international current events.

Please call the Study Abroad Office if you are free and willing to share your experiences with other returnees and interested students.

Welcome Back!

Sincerely,

Anne Seitzinger

Anne Seitzinger, Director
NIU Study Abroad Office
Program Evaluation

All students who participate in a study abroad program should fill out the program evaluation. We send these evaluations to you by e-mail. If you have not received one, please call our office at 753-0700. This evaluation will help our office, the program director or program provider, and future students. Please fill it out and send it back to our office.

The evaluation is completely voluntary and all responses are kept confidential.

As a study abroad returnee you are a valuable resource to future students in their efforts to make informed decisions about their study abroad choices.

Maybe you remember how confusing it was to decide between the large number of “qualified” programs. Did the program literature explain the program sufficiently?

This is your opportunity to help NIU students to make an informed decision about study abroad.

It’s also your opportunity to let the program director or program provider know your thoughts and impressions and possibly provide recommendations for future program planning.

To see a greater distance, one must move to higher ground.

~Wang Zhihuan, Tang Dynasty
Grades and Transcripts

At the end of your term abroad, the NIU program director or overseas center will submit grades to the NIU Study Abroad Office. These grades are then filed with the NIU Office of Registration and Records.

How will I know when my grades are in? You will be able to check your grades online through MyNIU. To request a transcript, send a written request and check or money order for $5 per copy to:

Registration and Records
Williston Hall, NIU
DeKalb, IL 60115
Phone: (815) 753-0689
Fax: (815) 753-0149
http://www.reg.niu.edu/regrec/transcripts/requesttranscripts.shtml

REMEMBER: The NIU Office of Registration and Records will issue transcripts upon your written request only. All encumbrances must be cleared before a transcript will be issued.

Whom to call with questions about grades? Questions about grades should be directed to the NIU Study Abroad Registrar at (815) 753-9529 or niuabroad@niu.edu.

At no time will the NIU Study Abroad Registrar or other staff members give grades over the phone or by email. You must come to the Study Abroad Office in person or submit a written and signed request (see above) in order to receive your grades.

All letter grades that you receive for your overseas academic work will be incorporated into your NIU grade point average.

Whom to call with questions about your program balance? To find out whether you have any outstanding balance, contact the International Programs business manager at (815) 753-9530 or prosenberg@niu.edu.
Re-Entry Shock

**RE-ENTRY Shock**
While most students expect to experience some form of culture shock when going abroad, many are caught by surprise by re-entry shock (also called reverse culture shock).

After a period abroad, you will have developed new attitudes, values and perceptions that may be “out of sync” with what you find when you return.

What can be so difficult about going home where everything will be familiar? Research has shown that re-entry shock is as common as the initial culture shock. It is, in fact, the final and inevitable part of a study abroad experience. Usually, several stages of the adjustment process are observed.

The **first stage** of re-entry starts while you are overseas. It is called “disengagement.” You begin to start thinking about moving back to the U.S., and moving away from your overseas experience and friends.

The **second stage** of re-entry entails feelings of excitement. You may be very pleased, even euphoric, to be back in your own country, and others may be equally delighted to have you back. After people express their pleasure at seeing you again, and listen politely to your stories for a few minutes, you may suddenly realize that they are not particularly interested in what happened to you and would prefer to talk about their own affairs.

"Reentry shock" was not identified until the late 1960's when Peace Corps and Vietnam veterans began to experience it when they returned to the United States.
In the **third stage**, you experience dampened euphoria. If you find yourself in this stage, you may begin to experience feelings of alienation, frustration, and anger. You may feel like an outsider—a foreigner 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 had hoped. Resentment, loneliness, disorientation, and even a sense of helplessness may pervade. The U.S. will be different from how you remembered it. The pollution may be worse. The pace is more hurried and hectic, etc. Some students have told us they were physically ill when they returned home. This could be attributed to a psychosomatic reaction to the loss of cultural equilibrium.

The **fourth stage** of re-entry includes a gradual readjustment to life at home. During this stage you will no longer be shocked by the variety you find on the supermarket shelves and be able to contain your comments about waste or other differences between your host and home culture that come to your attention. If you have had difficulty filtering out the foreign words in your conversation, you will find that your English-only conversational skills will improve during stage four.

It will be helpful for you to identify fellow returnees. They will be able to relate to your growing pains and can provide you with needed support as you readjust to living at home.

You will have learned so many new things. It can be difficult to find an outlet for this newfound knowledge at home. Ways to use your skills can be found, but it takes effort and patience.
The best immediate remedy for re-entry shock is to talk to others who have gone through a study abroad experience. They will be natural partners for communication. Communicating will reduce your sense of loneliness and frustration. Rest assured, you will eventually regain your balance and reach the fourth stage where your overseas experience becomes an integrated part of your life!

Unfortunately, we can’t cover every facet of re-entry shock in this brochure. You can and will continue to learn from your personal readjustment process and build upon what you learned abroad. Your experience will last a lifetime!

**Your Physical Health**
You may experience problems adjusting back to the local cuisine. Some students do experience bouts of diarrhea, colds, and other minor discomforts after returning.

If you do not feel well, or are returning from a developing country, please schedule a doctor’s appointment for a regular checkup.

**Your Emotional Health**
You may want to talk to someone, especially if you are experiencing any emotional stress or are having a difficult time readjusting. If you feel the need for individual counseling, please make an appointment with the NIU Counseling and Student Development Center on campus at 753-1206, or other qualified professional in your area.
Apply Your International Experience on Campus

Your international experience will make you a much more valued member of the campus community. The Study Abroad Office needs you. Please consider the following suggestions:

Volunteer to be a Study Abroad Peer Advisor. Share your experiences with students interested in study abroad.

Volunteer to help promote the programs on campus.

Get involved with international students and their activities. You now understand how valuable it is to have contact with native citizens of a country when you are abroad. NIU’s international students will also welcome this contact. Meet and help orient international exchange students to life at NIU.

Help organize and participate in NIU’s study abroad fair to interest students in study, travel, and work abroad.

WHO TO CALL TO GET INVOLVED AT NIU?
To volunteer as a Peer Advisor or to promote study-abroad programs on campus, please call 753-0700 or niuabroad@niu.edu.

To find out how to get involved in welcoming international students, please call the International Student and Faculty Office at 753-1346.
Apply Your International Experience to the Legislative Process

ACT is a team of advocates who want to communicate with their elected officials about important international education issues. The ACT Team serves as the grassroots core network for international education. Anyone who wants to promote federal policies to advance international educational exchange can join ACT.

WHY SHOULD YOU JOIN ACT?
You will . . .
- Help to promote the best legislation possible to further advance international education and exchange.
- Receive action alerts on legislation and policies that impact international educational exchange.
- Be able to quickly and easily send personalized letters to Members of Congress and the Administration on these issues.
- Receive updates on the advocacy campaigns in which you participated.
- Have access to advocacy tools and tips in order to better understand and influence the legislative process.

TO GET INVOLVED with ACT:
To learn more about or to get involved, please visit www.nafsa.org/actdescription. Questions can be sent via email to grassroots@nafsa.org.
WISDOM FROM PAST PARTICIPANTS

“Re-entry shock! It was much harder than I’d anticipated, much harder than had been the entry into Spanish culture. I felt like the proverbial fish out of water.”

“Help Northern send more students abroad. This also helps you in adapting again to the U.S.”

“Study abroad was the best experience in my life. Coming back to the U.S. was the hardest. Talk to students who have studied abroad. This helps.”

“Keep busy. Recognize that you have changed.”

“Organize dinners or parties with students who have studied abroad with you and students from the country where you studied. You can keep the experience alive through the food, music, and language. Be creative!”
FOR MORE INFORMATION ON NIU STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS:
NIU Study Abroad Office
Williston Hall 417
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, Illinois 60115
Phone: (815) 753-0700
Fax: (815) 753-0825
E-mail: niuabroad@niu.edu
http://studyabroad.niu.edu
"As the Spanish proverb says, "He who would bring home the wealth of the Indies, must carry the wealth of the Indies with him." So it is in traveling; a man must carry knowledge with him, if he would bring home knowledge."

~ Samuel Johnson ~