Reverse Culture Shock:
Re-entry after your study abroad program

Welcome Home! Hopefully you have just returned from one of the most exciting, rewarding, academic and culturally enriching experiences of your life. It doesn’t matter if you were abroad for just a few weeks or a semester or longer, the return home and process of integration is often not an easy one.

You may not realize the impact of your time abroad until after you return home. It is only then that you may realize the shortcomings the good old U.S.A. seems to have and how frustrating and annoying our habits can be. Overcoming this reverse culture shock is usually quicker, but it can be just as intense (you may find yourself wanting to be back in the host country!)

No matter how long you spend abroad, your experience will change you. Life has not only changed for you, but also for your family and friends. All of these changes may make you feel like a stranger in your own country. This uncomfortable feeling may be characterized as re-entry adjustment and you may need to be careful with your dissatisfaction with your own culture, because many won’t understand.

Reactions to re-entry may vary, and may include one or more of the following:

- Restlessness
- Depression
- Confusion
- Reverse homesickness: Missing the people, places, attitudes or lifestyle of your host country
- Changes in goals and priorities
- Boredom
- Uncertainty
- Isolation: Wanting to be alone
- Negativity or intolerance towards the U.S.: including American behavior, attitudes, customs and common social practice

This process is much like the cultural adjustment you had when you first went abroad, only in reverse. The coping skills and strategies that were successful when you went abroad will be just as helpful coming home: get involved, identify a support group of other study abroad students, suspend judgment until you understand a situation, and always, always keep a sense of humor!

Re-entry Tips:

- **Continue writing in your journal or start keeping a journal now.** This will help you keep your experiences fresh in your mind while keeping things in perspective. Remember that life is a continual learning experience… the journey doesn’t end by coming home.

- **Know that you aren’t alone in your discomfort.** Many students experience the discomforts of re-entry, although the degree of discomfort may differ from individual to individual.

- **Understand that you have changed and so have others.** You are not coming back to how everything was before you left. Likewise, you may have changed yourself and you’ll need to learn how to assimilate back into U.S. culture.

- **Share your experiences in small doses.** You may be very excited to share your experiences with others, but don’t forget that they also may have stories to share with you. Don’t forget to ask them about their lives while you were gone and let them know that you are interested in their lives as well.

- **Talk to former and future study abroad students.** These individuals can help your transition back to the U.S. go more smoothly. Your experiences can be a teaching tool not only for you, but also for others.

- **Get involved.** You can get involved with pre-departure orientations for future students going abroad, Study Abroad Fairs, and international students on your campus. You can also give presentations at local schools about your time abroad.

- **Stay in touch.** Stay in touch with the people you met while you were abroad; they are your best link and are only a phone call or email away.

- **Remember the adjustment period.** Your transition back to the U.S. may be just as difficult as it was when you arrived in your host country. Remembering how you dealt with it in the host country may help you out when you return.

- **Read about the re-entry process.** (See the reading list below.)
- *Culture Shock* by Adrian Furnham and Stephen Bochner
- *Cross-Cultural Re-entry: A book of Readings* by Clyde N. Austin
- *The Art of Crossing Cultures and The Art of Coming Home* by Craig Storti
- *Back in the USA* by Dawn Kepets
- *Students Abroad, Strangers at Home* by Norman L. Kauffman and Judith N. Martin

City College acknowledges International Studies Abroad in Austin, Texas for providing the basis for this document.