## **CULTURE SHOCK**

Culture shock is the normal process of adjusting to a new country and a new culture, which may be dramatically different from your own. You no longer see the familiar signs and faces of home. Climate, food, and landscapes, as well as people and their ways all seem strange to you. Your English may not be as good as you expected. You may find yourself suffering unexpectedly from the pressures of US academic life and the different pace of life.

If you feel this way, do not panic. As you become adjusted to US culture and attitudes and begin to know your way around, you will start to adapt to and understand your new surroundings and way of life. International students and scholars experience culture shock in varying degrees; some hardly notice it at all, while others find it terribly difficult to adapt. Below are explanations of the four stages of culture shock that you may experience. Not every person will experience culture shock in the same way, but no one escapes it completely and it is important to remember that you are not alone.

**FOUR STAGES OF CULTURE SHOCK**

**The "Honeymoon" Stage**

The first few weeks in your new home will be very exciting. Everything will be new and interesting, and you will likely be so busy getting settled and starting classes that you may hardly notice that you miss home.

**Irritability and Hostility**

As you begin to realize that you are not on vacation and that this is where you live, you might experience anger and hostility. Sometimes you may feel hostile toward Americans and their way of doing things, and even trivial irritations may cause hostility to flare.

**Understanding and Adjustment**

In time you will come to better understand your new environment and will find, maybe even unconsciously, that you are adjusting to your new home. You will experience less frequent feelings of hostility and irritability.

**Integration and Acceptance**

Finally, you will find that you have come to feel that, at least on some level, you consider your university or college and your new town, your home. You will have made friends and will feel that your community accepts you just as you have accepted it.

**COMMON SYMPTOMS OF CULTURE SHOCK**

Below are some common symptoms of culture shock, some keys to dealing with culture shock are at the top of the next page.

**Homesickness**you miss your homeland, your family, and your friends. You frequently think of home, call or write letters to your family and friends often, and maybe even cry a lot.

**Hostility**

Minor irritations make you unusually angry, and you feel life in the US is the cause of your problem. You feel your expectations have not been met. It takes time to get used to life in a foreign country and many things need to be relearned. Be patient and ask questions when you feel you do not understand.

**Dependence**

You become dependent on fellow nationals, friends, or your international student adviser and feel you cannot achieve anything by yourself. You may feel scared of doing things by yourself without somebody else's help or approval.

**Loss of self-confidence**

You may feel everything you do is wrong, that nobody understands you, and that you have trouble making friends. You may start to question the way you dress and think because you are afraid not to fit in.

**Values shock**

You might find yourself facing situations that are not accepted in your culture and have trouble getting accustomed to them. For example, relationships between men and women, the informality of American life, political or religious attitudes, or the social behavior of Americans may seem amoral or unacceptable to you.

Adapted from the following website:

<http://www.educationusa.state.gov/life/environment/culture.htm>

**Keys to surviving the first few weeks:**

* Remember that it is natural for you to experience culture shock.
* Get plenty of rest to deal with the stress and jet lag that you may experience
* Try to relax. Take a nap.
* Take time to think and/or talk through your feelings.
* Put little things that bother you in perspective. Is the problem really so bad?
* Make an effort to be optimistic, but not to the point of avoiding negatives that should be expressed.
* Make your new home environment as comfortable as possible.
* Make friends as quickly as possible. If there are others of your nationality on campus, get acquainted. It will give you a support system.
* Get in touch with a friend or family member at home.
* Find someone whom you can talk with in your native language.
* Keep a diary or journal. This is a great way to vent some of the frustration you might be too embarrassed to speak about. It may also be an interesting record of the changes that occur over time.
* Try not to compare and search out things like home. Things are different! Enjoy and explore those differences.
* Always, always keep an open mind and a sense of humor.
* Feel welcome to come to CIIP to talk with an adviser. CIIP is your home away from home.

(This is adapted from: Welles, Paddy S., “Coping with Culture Shock”, The Bridge, Vol. 6, No 4, Winter 1981, pp44-47).

## **FRIENDSHIP VERSUS FRIENDLINESS**

Americans seem so friendly. They say hello as you walk by; they ask about how you are doing...yet, do they take the time to listen to your answers? NO? Just how does one become friends with Americans? First we need to understand the difference between friendliness and friendship.

Friendliness can be seen as an openness, easiness, kindness, warmth and hospitality. Friendship is on a deeper level, there is closeness, familiarity, and an ease of conversing. The white in the circles below represents friendliness and the gray represents friendship.

 Other cultures

US Culture

As you can see in the representation of the “US Culture” there is a large amount of friendliness that one passes through before becoming a friend with most Americans. You can think of it as peeling away layers of an onion, except in this case the layers are that of friendliness. When you look at the representation of the “Other Cultures” you can see that there are much fewer layers of friendliness that one must go through in order to become friends. You are likely to feel these differences, sometimes be confused by them and find it difficult to understand. The first step is going up to an American and saying hello.

(Model borrowed from Dr. David D. Horner, Director Emeritus, Michigan State University)