



Re-Entry from Overseas

The end of your overseas experience can be a challenging time, especially when that experience may have been cut short in unexpected circumstances.

This handout aims to provide a number of resources to help support you in this time of transition, including resources for reflection and consideration of your time abroad, as well as local support systems in place at Western University to support your mental and physical wellbeing.

1 | Top 10 Re-Entry Challenges

2 | Western Resources for Health and Wellness

3 | Additional Links and Resources for Reflection

1 | Top 10 Re-Entry Challenges

There are many reasons to look forward to going home, but there are also a number of psychological, social, and cultural aspects, which can prove difficult – often because they are unanticipated. The following list was generated by interviewing students like you who have been through the experience and navigated it successfully. They recommend you take the process seriously by being realistic and thinking about it and your possible reactions. They also offer the following thoughts on re-entry for your consideration in the hope they will make your return both more enjoyable and productive.

1. Boredom

After all the newness and stimulation of your time abroad, a return to family, friends, and old routines (however nice and comforting) can seem very dull. It is natural to miss the excitement and challenges which characterize study in a foreign country, but it is up to you to find ways to overcome such negative reactions – remember a bored person is also boring.

2. “No One Wants to Hear”

One thing you can count on upon your return: no one will be as interested in hearing about your adventures and triumphs as you will be in sharing those experiences. This is not a rejection of you or your achievements, but simply the fact that once they have heard the highlights, any further interest on your audiences’ part is probably unlikely. Be realistic in your expectations of how fascinating your journey is going to be for everyone else. Be brief.

3. You Can’t Explain

Even when given a chance to explain all the sights you saw and feelings you had while studying abroad, it is likely to be at least a bit frustrating to relay them coherently. It is very difficult to convey this kind of experience to people who do not have similar frames of reference or travel backgrounds, no matter how sympathetic they are as listeners. You can tell people about your trip, but you may fail to make them understand exactly how or why you felt a particular way. It’s okay.

4. Reverse “Homesickness”

Just as you probably missed home for a time after leaving Canada, it is just as natural to experience some “reverse” homesickness for the people, places, and things that you grew accustomed to as a student overseas. To an extent it can be reduced by writing letters, telephoning, and generally keeping in contact, but feelings of loss are an integral part of international sojourn and must be anticipated and accepted as a natural result of study abroad.

5. Relationships Have Changed

It is inevitable that when you return you will notice that some relationships with friends and family will have changed. Just as you have altered some of your ideas and attitudes while abroad, the people at home are likely to have experienced some changes. These changes may be positive or negative, but expecting that no change will have occurred is unrealistic. The best preparation is flexibility, openness, minimal preconceptions, and tempered optimism.

6. People See “Wrong” Changes

Sometimes people may concentrate on small alterations in your behaviour or ideas and seem threatened or upset by them. Others may ascribe any “bad traits” to influences out of your control or a sense of inferiority. To avoid or minimize them, it is necessary to monitor yourself and be aware of the reactions of those around you, especially in the first few weeks following your return. This phase normally passes quickly if you do nothing to confirm their stereotypes.

7. People Misunderstand

A few people may misinterpret your words or actions in such a way that communication is difficult. For example, what you may have come to think of as humour (particularly sarcasm, banter, etc.) and ways to show affection or establish conversation may not be seen as wit, but aggression or “showing off.” Offers to help in the kitchen can be seen as criticism of food preparation, new clothing styles as provocative or inappropriate, references to Canada or use of English as boasting. Beware of how you may look to others and how your behaviour is likely to be interpreted.

8. Feelings of Alienation

Sometimes the reality of being back “home” is not as natural or enjoyable as the place you had constructed as your mental image. When real daily life is less enjoyable or more demanding than you remembered, it is natural to feel some alienation, see faults in the society you never noticed before, or even become critical of everyone and everything for a time. This is no different than when you first left home. Mental comparisons are fine, but keep to yourself until you regain both your cultural balance and a balanced perspective.

9. Inability to Apply New Knowledge and Skills

Many returnees are frustrated by the lack of opportunity to apply newly gained social, technical, linguistic, and practical coping skills that appear to be unnecessary or irrelevant at home. To avoid ongoing annoyance: adjust to reality as necessary, change what is possible, be creative, be patient, and above all use all the cross-cultural adjustments skills you acquired abroad to assist your own reentry.

10. Loss/Compartmentalization of Experience

Being home, coupled with the pressures of a job, family, and friends, often combine to make returnees worried that they will “lose” the experience and that it will somehow become compartmentalized, like souvenirs or photo albums kept in a box and only occasionally taken out and looked at. You do not have to let that happen. Maintain your contacts. Talk to people who have experiences similar to yours. Practice your skills. Remember and honour both your hard work and the fun you had while abroad.

2 | Western Resources & Support for Health and Wellness

Health & Wellness is continuing to provide mental health support via telephone counselling appointments.

Book an Appointment

- Send an email request to shappt@uwo.ca
- Be sure to use your Western email account and include your name, student #, and phone #
- If you wish, include a brief reason for the visit
- Staff will respond Monday-Friday 9 am-4 pm via phone

Get Help Immediately

Crisis supports are available through a number of different remote avenues (click the link above for a full list)

- [Good2Talk – Confidential Helpline Phone](#)
- [Reach Out 24/7](#)
- [Anova](#)
- [Telehealth Ontario](#)

Campus Recreation is offering online fitness classes and recommendations for workouts and healthy living from home.

uwo.ca/campusrec/news/2020/Stay_Active.html

Connect with other Western International students online!

- Join the [Western International Exchange Group](#) on Facebook
- Connect with international students through the [IESC's online social activities](#) throughout the summer

3 | Additional Links and Resources for Reflection



- [Canada Emergency Student Benefit \(CESB\)](#)
- [Dealing with Reverse Culture Shock & Mental Health During COVID-19](#)
- [How to Combat Loneliness After Studying Abroad](#)
- [Re-Entry Toolkit](#)
- [Navigating Uncertainty: Resources for Thoughtfully Processing your Time Abroad and your Return](#)