

General Preparation

Learn about your location

First, take the time to learn about the country that you will be living in *before* you depart. Locate several good guidebooks and maps (*Lonely Planet*, *Eyewitness*, *Frommer's*, *Rick Steves'*, and *Let's Go* travel guides have all been recommended by students).

Familiarize yourself with as many aspects of the country as you can. Read up on the country's history and speak with students and faculty who are familiar with your destination- especially those who have been on your specific program. Also, keep up with current events – the internet has a wealth of local resources that will have you feeling more like a native and less like a visitor. The International Programs office also has a collection of guides you may find useful.

Your specific study abroad programs (Syracuse, IES, etc.) will provide detailed orientation materials pertaining to each particular city. Be sure to read this material carefully - it contains the answers to many of your most pressing questions. These study abroad orientation packets also often contain info on travel discounts, rail passes and the like.

Prepare for differences in the educational system

Depending on the program and country, school abroad can be quite different from SCU. Classes may have less formal structure and instructors often place more responsibility on the students to organize their studies. At times, you may feel a little lost and wonder if the study hours you are racking up will translate into those credits needed at SCU (they will!). However, also remember that while your studies are very important (because grades *do* transfer), so are immersion in the culture, developing new relationships, and traveling to see new things. When you are confronted by these doubts about schoolwork or classes, remember that your intellectual growth, improved language skills, and international experience will increase competitiveness for graduate school or in the job market, as well as helping you become a "citizen of the world."

After the first few days some will agree with the student who wrote from France that "things here were a little difficult and confusing at first but it's all fitting into place now. I like all the classes and I'm learning a lot."

After only a few more days, students' initial doubts are usually replaced by another concern - "My only regret or complaint is the fact that I am unable to stay here longer!"

Culture Shock

When you leave home to head to a foreign country, you are essentially starting an entirely new life for yourself. This is obviously going to take a while to adjust to, as trying to adapt to a new environment will most likely take you some time.

Consider all of the things that you have come to take for granted here at Santa Clara. You know how to get from one place to another. You know where and how to do your laundry. You know where the cafeteria is to get food from, and you also know where a grocery store is, and how much a particular item of food is going to cost. You can speak the language fluently, and can understand the meanings that lie behind "slang" and jokes.

When you place yourself in a foreign environment, you throw all of these privileges out the window. You're going to have to relearn all of these seemingly mindless tasks that you had grown so comfortable doing and using. People are going to speak and act very differently than what you expect from your fellow Americans.

These sudden changes in environment can and most likely will bring about the dreaded phenomena of "culture shock." Not everyone experiences culture shock, especially those who have lived/studied abroad in the past. But culture shock can affect your life in a variety of ways: headaches, upset stomach, irritability, homesickness, and so on. If you experience any or all of these, don't worry - they are all completely normal reactions. Yes, they can be disorienting, but yes, they will go away with time.

Culture shock manifests itself in a series of stages. Will everyone go through all of these stages? Definitely not. Will everyone feel these stages at the same intensity? Again, no. We provide them here simply as possible answers for puzzling feelings and emotions that you may experience while overseas.

- **Initial Euphoria**

Hardly recovered from jet lag and travel fatigue, you will soon be busy with registration, interviews, orientation, tours, parties, and getting acquainted with your hosts and peers. Everything is new and exciting - possibly "quaint" - and students purposely set off to accomplish their goals. Reality, essentially, has not yet set in.

- **Irritability and/or Hostility**

As the differences become apparent and perhaps some difficulties are encountered, discomfort sets in and you may find yourself becoming irritable ("Haven't they ever heard of air conditioning?! Why is there NO ICE in my soda! Where can I do laundry?!") about certain aspects of your new country.

- **Gradual Adjustment**

As you begin to better understand lectures and textbooks, pass one or two quizzes, and start to correctly interpret some of the cultural cues that have been so confusing, there is a gradual - sometimes hardly perceptible - adjustment taking place. Gradually, things will seem less forbidding and more comfortable, and your sense of humor will begin to work again in your new environment. 😊

- **Adaptation**

You have adapted when you can fully function in two cultures, the new one and your old one. You will be able to handle with understanding any differences encountered, you'll be at ease with your college and peers, and find you can communicate more readily. In fact, you may find a great deal to enjoy, and relations with hosts and professors can deepen and mature.

*Did you know that culture shock also exists when returning home? Some students feel that reverse culture shock can actually be **harder** than going overseas. To learn more about the end of the cycle, please see page 40!*

Values Americans Live By

This section is "food for thought" as to which values Americans tend to hold and live by (generally speaking, of course). As you enter a new culture, the things they do and say, the values they hold may seem odd or different. Looking over these may help you to understand the contrast between another culture and the American culture you may be accustomed to.

Personal Control over the Environment: People can/should control nature, their own environment and destiny; Future is not left to fate

Change & Mobility: Change is seen as positive, good - meaning progress, improvement and growth.

Time and Its Control: Time is valuable - achievement of goals depends on productive use of time.

Equality/Egalitarianism: People have equal opportunities; people are important as individuals, for who they are not from what family they come. Little deference shown or status acknowledged.

Individualism, Independence, and Privacy: People are seen as separate individuals (not group members) with individual needs. People need time to be alone and be themselves.

Self-Help: Americans take great pride in their own accomplishments, not in name. Respect is given for achievements.

Competition and Free Enterprise: Americans believe competition brings out the best in people and free enterprise produces most progress and success.

Future Orientation/Optimism: Americans believe that, regardless of past or present, the future will be better, happier. Less value on past, constant looking ahead to tomorrow.

Action and Work Orientation: Americans believe that work is morally right; that it is immoral to waste time. More emphasis placed on "doing" rather than just "being."

Informality: Americans believe that formality is "un-American" and a show of arrogance and superiority. They demonstrate a casual, egalitarian attitude between people and their relationships.

Directness, Openness, and Honesty: One can only trust people who "look you in the eye," and "tell it like it is." Truth is a function of reality, not circumstance. People tend to tell the "truth" and not worry about saving the other person's "face" or "honor."

Practicality/Efficiency: Practicality is usually most important consideration when decisions are being made. Less emphasis on the subjunctive, aesthetic, or emotional factors in decisions.

Materialism/Acquisitiveness: Material goods are seen as just rewards of hard work.

(Adapted from: "The Values Americans Live By," L. Robert Kohl)

