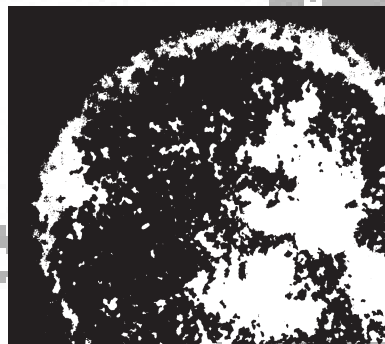




INTERNATIONAL
STUDENT AND
SCHOLAR SERVICES (ISSS)

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



International
Student
Handbook
2009-2010

4. Culture in the United States

U.S. cultural values

No doubt you already know a great deal about the U.S. and perhaps about U.S. Americans. Yet if you are new to studying in the U.S. there are probably a few things that may surprise you and possibly challenge you about some common U.S. values. We describe a few here so that you may be prepared for these values and how they differ (or don't) from your own cultural values.

The Importance of Time

In the United States, time is treated like a tangible asset and is used carefully and productively. Being “on time” (arriving at the stated time) for class or meeting with advisers, instructors, or even with friends is often very important.

The Work Ethic

Like people in many countries, U.S. Americans place a high value on hard work. However, they tend to feel personally responsible for their accomplishments and take personal credit for what they've done. It is believed that people achieve results on the basis of how hard they work, so they often judge others by how hard they work and how task-oriented they are.

Achievement

A very high value is placed on a person's accomplishments and productivity. Individuals evaluate themselves and are evaluated by others in terms of their achievements and accomplishments.

Individualism

U.S. Americans tend to view themselves first and foremost as individuals with both freedom and responsibility to manage their own lives, make their own decisions and accomplish their own goals. Families and friends are important, but individuals are expected to consider their own needs, desires, and values. U.S. Americans seem to be less comfortable being obligated to or dependent on others. People are also held individually accountable for things they have promised to do, and international students may find that they are expected to do more of their work independently than they are accustomed to at home.

Direct Communication and Problem-Solving Style

While this varies greatly by region and family background, people in the United States generally place a higher priority on clear, factual communication. This means that at times, U.S. Americans may choose to be direct even if it means possibly hurting or embarrassing another person.

Pragmatism

U.S. Americans can be pragmatic and oriented toward practical matters. They are attracted to things and ideas that are seen as “useful.” This goes together with the orientation toward work and achievement. There is a high value on being able to relate “theory” to “practice.”

Understanding these values can help you understand why things are as they are in the U.S. and help you to adjust to your new home.

Friendship and dating in the United States

You may find that people in the United States have very different ideas than you do about making friends.

Because of the value put on friendliness, U.S. Americans sometimes misread people from other countries who are reserved or formal as being cold or rude. In the U.S., saying “Good morning,” “Hi,” or “Hello,” with a smile will usually indicate that you do not have any bad feelings towards colleagues, faculty, or friends. Until you get used to it, this friendliness (smiling and being sociable and helpful) can be confused with an invitation for a friendship.

U.S. Americans are often much slower to form deep relationships than first impressions may indicate. They may shy away from

international students out of respect for your privacy or to avoid offense, so you may need to be the one to initiate friendships. Because U.S. Americans are “doers,” it is helpful when trying to make friends to ask someone to do something with you: go out for coffee, to a movie, shopping, bowling, etc. Another approach is to join a club or activity on the campus or in your community. Generally, dating among students is very casual due to the expense of going out. There are no set rules in terms of who asks for the date or who pays. In many cases the person who asks for the date will pay, but one should be prepared to cover their share of the expenses. Volunteering to cover some of the costs would be a nice gesture and probably appreciated by your date.

Adapted from American Ways by Gary Althen, University of Iowa

Protocol

PERSPECTIVES ON FRIENDSHIPS: U.S. AMERICAN AND CONTRASTING VIEWPOINTS

U.S. AMERICAN

- 1 A friend is anyone from a passing acquaintance to a lifetime intimate.
- 2 Friends are often limited to an area of common interest, such as work, school, or recreation.
- 3 Friends gather to enjoy an activity together.
- 4 If someone has a problem, it is acceptable to go to a professional (i.e., counselor) for help.
- 5 Friends may be “dropped” if they do not live up to our expectations or standards of behavior.
- 6 Friendships cross genders.
- 7 Friendships cross generations.
- 8 One schedules time to see friends.
- 9 Americans act friendly and informally with almost everyone.

CONTRASTING

- 1 A friend is someone with whom one is very close.
- 2 A friendship embraces the whole person.
- 3 Friends gather just to be together.
- 4 Some one with a problem goes to a friend or family member for help at any time.
- 5 One tolerates a lot from someone who is a friend.
- 6 Friendships are made only with the same gender.
- 7 Friendships are made with people of the same age.
- 8 Friends are available at any time.
- 9 People who don't know each other maintain a formal relationship.

Adapted from American Cultural Patterns: A Cross-Cultural Perspective, by E. C. Stewart.

FIRST NAMES AND TITLES

There are strong regional and cultural differences within the United States with regard to formality and the use of titles with names. These include “Mr.” (pronounced “Mister” and meaning male, married or single), “Ms.” (pronounced “Miz,” meaning female, married or single), “Mrs.” (pronounced “Missus,” meaning a married female), “Prof.” (short for “Professor,” meaning someone who has a faculty appointment or tenure at a college or university), or “Dr.” (short for “Doctor,” meaning a medical doctor or someone with a Ph.D.).

In the Midwest, people generally use first names when speaking. This can make addressing professors, teaching assistants (TAs), and staff very confusing for international students when they first arrive. Do you call a professor by a title such as “Professor Brown,” or do you call her by first name, “Judith,” as you may hear other students do? Sometimes it's one way, and sometimes it's another, so how can you tell when each is appropriate?

It is best when dealing with professors and TAs to err on the side of politeness and use their titles — Professor, Doctor, Mr., or Ms. Often instructors will tell you on the first day of class what they would like to be called. If you aren't sure, it is appropriate to ask them how they would like to be addressed. Graduate students, especially graduate assistants and TAs, are more likely than undergraduates to be on a first-name basis with their professors. And most professors are on a first-name basis with each other. Office staff,

receptionists, and secretaries are almost always on a first-name basis with students.

It is most important to remember that informality is not an indication of disrespect. It is simply a cultural habit that may indicate mutual respect, equality, and a willingness to engage in open dialogue and intellectual exchange.

APPROPRIATE DRESS

In the United States one's way of dressing is expected to suit the circumstance. As students, dressing casually (jeans, shorts, shirt, t-shirt) is acceptable. In the workplace or other professional settings, follow the norms of that particular place. Professional attire for men generally requires dress slacks, shirt and tie, or a suit. For women it may require a suit (with slacks or skirt), dress, or skirt and blouse. Be observant of what others are wearing or ask a supervisor before wearing casual clothes. Also note that because people are dressed casually doesn't mean it's an informal environment or that supervisors or professors are to be treated as equals.

DEALING WITH ORGANIZATIONS

We have all experienced frustration in dealing with organizations. This frustration is often worse in a foreign country. When it is combined with common misperceptions that many international students have about the roles and status of office personnel in their host country, there can be serious misunderstandings. This can lead to anger, hurt feelings, and even greater difficulties in getting what you need.

Guidelines for Getting Things Done

- There is a strong trend toward informality in the United States. In many countries, secretaries and receptionists are trained to use specific, formal behavior in order to serve people courteously, including set greetings such as, "Good morning, may I help you?" In the United States, especially the Midwest, the desire to be on "equal footing" with others tends to make people uncomfortable with this kind of formal behavior. You may encounter a very casual attitude from many of the University staff with whom you have business. In comparison with your background and experience, you may find this very helpful and courteous, or casual to the point of disrespect. Try not to take it personally!
- Be respectful of all employees. In the United States, secretaries and receptionists often have power to make decisions, and they may have the information you need.
- Remember that in the United States, many rules really are followed, and procedures often are not negotiable. Arguing or demanding to see someone "in charge" will not lead to success. It is more effective to explain exactly what you need and what kind of problem you have been having, and ask, "What do I do now?" or "Is there someone who could help me?" Even though employees usually can't "bend the rules", if they like you, they are more likely to put a little extra energy into problem solving.
- If you follow procedures and instructions carefully, a lot of time and energy can be saved. In the United States, many things are done over the phone, or through the mail, making a personal visit unnecessary. Take the names and phone numbers of people you talk to, in case some delay or complication does arise and you need further help.

Adapted from American Ways by Gary Althen, University of Iowa

Legal issues

While many internationals may expect the U.S. to be the "land of the free", it is often not long after arrival that sojourners realize this is a country of many rules and regulations. As you will see from the following description of some of the laws that may affect you, the rules and regulations are intended to protect the rights of the individual -the basis for our legal system.

ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO PRODUCTS

Smoking in public buildings is prohibited by the Minnesota Clean Air Act. Smoking is generally allowed outdoors and in one's home. Smoking is allowed in some bars and in designated smoking sections in some restaurants. However, the City of Minneapolis does not allow smoking in bars or restaurants and other cities have also banned or limited smoking. If you want to smoke, first look for "no smoking" signs or ask an employee to find out if smoking is allowed. When in someone else's home, you should step outside to smoke. Cigarettes and other tobacco products may not be purchased or used by people under the age of 18.

Alcohol use in the United States is also regulated by law. In Minnesota, alcohol may not be legally purchased or consumed by anyone under the age of 21, and it may not be consumed while in an automobile. Driving while intoxicated is considered a serious crime, punishable by large fines, jail sentences, and the loss of driving privileges. Bartenders and others who serve alcohol (such as hosts of parties) can be held legally responsible if a guest becomes intoxicated and injures another person. It is also a serious crime to offer or provide alcohol to anyone under the age of 21.

DRUGS AND MEDICATIONS

Street drugs, such as marijuana, cocaine, amphetamines, barbiturates, and other mood-altering substances that are not prescribed by a medical doctor, may not be possessed or sold legally in Minnesota. Strict laws and severe penalties apply. Medications prescribed by doctors may not be sold or used by anyone other than the patient.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND STALKING

Sexual harassment and stalking laws legally protect individuals from being victims of sexual and other harassment. These laws apply to all within the U.S. - citizens, residents, and visitors.

Sexual harassment is the misuse of power that has sexual overtones and generally falls under the following circumstances: as a condition of an individual's employment or academic advancement, or in a situation that unreasonably interferes with an individual's work or academic performance. Sexual harassment can be verbal or physical. As a result of sexual harassment laws, many U.S. Americans now avoid physical contact with acquaintances; an exception to this is the hand shake, which is a recognized form of greeting.

It is also illegal to "stalk" an individual by following the person, continually making unwanted phone calls or other unwelcome attempts to contact another person. If you force unwanted physical or verbal contact on another person, you may violate Minnesota law as well as social norms.

If you have questions about what sexual harassment is, or feel you are being harassed, you are encouraged to contact ISSS, the Aurora Center, or the University's Office of Equal Opportunity. If you believe you are being stalked, contact the police.

DOMESTIC ASSAULT

Minnesota law prohibits individuals from inflicting bodily harm on their spouse or partner and children. Police have the ability, under the law, to arrest and jail a person, even if the victim does not want to press criminal charges. Often police will proceed with such action.

U.S. CRIMINAL SEXUAL CONDUCT LAWS

It is important to have an understanding of U.S. law in the Criminal Sexual Conduct Code. Individuals have the right to stop sexual contact at any time. This means that when a person says "no" to any type of sexual contact, it violates the law if the partner attempts to emotionally or verbally coerce or physically force that person into continuing the sexual contact. Violation of the Criminal Sexual Conduct Code ranges from forced rape to improperly (without consent) touching the clothed or unclothed intimate body parts of another person. Violation of these Minnesota laws can result in a prison or jail term of one to forty years and/or a fine from \$3,000 to \$40,000.

If you become a sexual assault victim, contact the local police. The University's Aurora Center (612/626-2929) can also provide assistance. The Aurora Center's website is www.umn.edu/aurora.

SHOPLIFTING

You may find shopping here very different from what you are used to at home. Generally, merchandise is sold "self-service," and clerks are not close at hand. It is very important when shopping in U.S. stores, especially very large stores, to use a cart or basket provided by the store. Never put a piece of merchandise in your pocket, your purse, or a fold of your clothing. If you do, it may appear to a store employee that you intend to take it without paying for it. In the past, such misunderstandings have led to international students' arrests by the police on charges of "shoplifting." Stores often have devices attached to items to prevent shoplifting, and you may sometimes find you are being watched by an employee or a hidden camera. Shoplifting is a crime, and you can be taken to court, even over a misunderstanding.

LEGAL QUESTIONS

If you have paid the student services fee, you are eligible to use the Student Legal Service, which employs several lawyers to assist students in some legal matters. If you have questions about the Student Legal Service, call 612/624-1001. International Student & Scholar Services also has a legal intern, who is a University law student and can provide information and guidance, but cannot formally represent students in legal matters.

Personal safety

As a large urban area, the Twin Cities is not free from crime. However, you can take some simple precautions to keep yourself and your belongings safe while you are living here. Trust your instincts regarding people and places, and don't be afraid to ask for help. If you feel you are in danger, notify the police by calling 911. (See "Arrival Guide" section, page 20, for details on how 911 works.)

The University Police Department provides a free escort service 24 hours a day, every day, where an employee of the Police Department will walk with you to your destination on the Minneapolis or St. Paul campuses or surrounding areas. The number to call is 612/624-9255 or 624-WALK. There are also emergency phones and campus phones located around campus, which you can use to call 911 if you have an emergency. Here are some additional suggestions to protect yourself and your property:

- After dark, walk with someone else and stay on well-lit streets.
- Do not give your name, telephone number, home address or e-mail address to someone whom you do not know well. Ask the person for a contact number if you are interested in meeting again.
- You can suppress your personal information from the University web directory by going to www.onestop.umn.edu/onestop/registration.html, go to "change address" and then to "directory suppression."
- Learn that it is acceptable to say "no" directly. Anything else may be taken as "yes" or "maybe."
- Do not wear headphones, as they may decrease your ability to hear noises around you.
- When walking past people, looking at the ground or directly into someone's eyes may make you seem vulnerable. Experts advise focusing on the neck area.
- If you feel threatened or harassed, talk to an ISSS counselor. They are trained to help students in this situation.
- Wear bright or light colors to increase your visibility at night.
- Walk facing oncoming traffic if no sidewalk is available.
- Have your keys out and ready for use when approaching your building or car.
- Always carry enough change with you to make a phone call or take a bus or taxi.
- Do not leave any valuables—your backpack, purse, or books, unattended.
- When using an ATM machine, try to find one in a well-lit and busy area. Avoid counting your cash where other people can see you.
- Lock your room whenever you leave it, as well as at night when you are studying or sleeping.
- Do not let strangers into your home to use the phone, or for any other reason.
- Never give your credit card number or Social Security number on a telephone call you did not initiate.

More help on preventing crime is available on the University Police Department's web site: www.umn.edu/police/prevention.html

Health and hygiene

This section provides basic information about health concerns in the United States. Although this will not be new information to most international students, there are some students who find it very helpful.

CLEANLINESS

U.S. Americans place a strong emphasis on cleanliness. Daily bathing, use of a deodorant, and brushing one's teeth twice a day is recommended. Many people in the United States become uncomfortable when they are in close contact with someone who has noticeable body or mouth odor. Though U.S. Americans communicate directly on many topics, they will probably avoid that person rather than discuss the problem.

Personal care products such as soaps, deodorants, shampoos, toothpaste, mouthwash, and feminine hygiene products (tampons and pads) can be purchased in grocery, drug, or discount stores. Pharmacies are the best place to ask questions about specific product information. If the clerk is unable to help you, talk directly with the pharmacist.

PUBLIC RESTROOMS

Toilet facilities are known by many names. In Minnesota, you will be understood if you ask for the restroom, toilet, ladies' or men's room, or bathroom. Most public restrooms have two separate facilities, one for men and one for women, but some facilities may be "unisex," meaning they are used by both males and females. Women's restrooms often have a vending machine with tampons or sanitary napkins, as well as a container for disposing of used ones. Paper towels and feminine hygiene products should not be flushed down the toilet.

INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD SEX

Generally, U.S. Americans may seem very open about sex, but this openness does not necessarily mean that they are promiscuous or even sexually active. Because of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, as well as unplanned pregnancy, it is important that individuals share responsibility with their partner in having protected sex. "Safe sex" is highly promoted in the United States—you will see television, magazine, and newspaper ads for it. The use of a latex condom is regarded as essential to safe sex. Condoms can be purchased in drug stores or discount stores such as Target or Walgreens. Women as well as men may carry condoms.

CONTRACEPTIVES (BIRTH CONTROL)

Protection against unwanted pregnancy is available in both prescription and nonprescription form. The "ob/gyn" (obstetrics/gynecology) department in any clinic can provide information on the effectiveness of various birth control methods and help you determine what would best meet your needs. You will be required to have a pelvic exam before any prescription contraceptives, including the pill, diaphragm, or Norplant implants can be given. Nonprescription contraceptives include condoms and vaginal spermicides. All nonprescription contraceptives can be purchased in a pharmacy or in a discount store such as Target. Proper use of a contraceptive and knowledge of its effectiveness are important factors in preventing pregnancy. Abortion is legal, though controversial, in the United States. An abortion can be performed most easily within the first 13 weeks of pregnancy.

Living in a different culture

Living in a culture different from your own is an exciting and often challenging experience. Besides finding housing, registering for courses, and getting to know a new city, you will probably go through "cultural adjustment," the transition to a new culture. Most people will experience some "culture shock" as part of this process.

WHAT IS CULTURE SHOCK?

"Culture shock" is the name given to a feeling of disorientation or confusion that often occurs when a person leaves a familiar place and moves to an unfamiliar one. Coming to the Twin Cities from another country, you will encounter a multitude of new things—buildings, stores, and even the trees may look different. Food may not be the same, and people may look, speak, and act differently from people at home. Even the smells may be different. Your English might not serve you as well as you expected it would. You

might not be able to convey your full personality in English, with the result that you think other people are seeing you as a child. And your family and friends are far away. As a result of all this you may feel confused, unsure of yourself, and may have some doubts about the wisdom of your decision to come here.

SYMPTOMS

Some people are more affected by culture shock than others. People experiencing culture shock tend to become nervous and unusually tired. They may want to sleep a lot or may have difficulty sleeping. They may write many letters home. They may feel frustrated and hostile toward the local people. They may get excessively angry about minor irritations. It is not unusual to become very dependent on fellow nationals. All these feelings may make it difficult to deal with residents of the host country and use their language.

COPING WITH CULTURE SHOCK

Different people react differently to culture shock. Some become depressed, or even physically ill. Others are stimulated by the new experiences. Here are some ideas that might be helpful to you:

Please refer to the chart “A Curve of Cultural Adjustment” on page 34.

Maintain your perspective.

Try to remember that thousands of people have come to Minnesota from other countries and have survived (even when they arrived in the cold of winter).

Take some practical steps.

In *The Whole World Guide to Culture Learning*, J. Daniel Hess makes these suggestions for people who are experiencing the loneliness or distress of culture shock:

1. *Find people to interact with.* Ask them questions. As you take an interest in them, your feelings will have a focal point outside of yourself.
2. *Surround yourself with familiar things*—a favorite jacket, a photo, a CD. Make your environment pleasant and reinforcing.
3. *Slow down.* Simplify your daily tasks. Relax. Let your emotions catch up with the newness all around you.
4. *Develop patterns.* Follow the same routine each day so that you get a sense of returning to the familiar.
5. *Give expression to your feelings.* Cry. Laugh. Sing. Pray. Draw a picture.
6. *Revise your goals* to accommodate detours instead of scolding yourself for failures.
7. *Keep working on language skills.* Practice the American idiom, “If at first you don’t succeed, try try again.”
8. *Confide to friends*, and even your host family, that you are sad. Their support will warm you.
9. *Make a few small decisions and carry them out.* Your resolve in small things will increase your confidence. Be assured that, however stressful, culture shock passes if you are willing to let the process of cross-cultural adaptation take its course.

Be patient with yourself and with other people.

Adjustment is a gradual, day-by-day process. It normally takes some time—a few weeks, a few months, and maybe longer—for people to become comfortable in a new country.

Take care of yourself.

It is particularly important in times of stress to eat a balanced diet, get enough rest, and get regular physical exercise. Take breaks for recreation or socializing. Studying or working constantly, without taking care of yourself, may make yourself sick, and make your entire situation worse.

Realize that you may be treated as a stereotype.

On many occasions, international students will be responded to as “a foreign student” or “a student from country X.” Whether the stereotype is positive or negative depends on the person’s experience, not on anything about you personally. Try not to let this discourage you. Try to start some interesting conversations about the subject of stereotypes—what peoples’ stereotypes are, where

they came from, and so on. And remember that you probably have your own stereotypes about U.S. Americans.

Talk with experienced international students from your country and other countries.

Their observations and advice can help you. Ask them what things they have found most bothersome, most interesting, most perplexing. Ask them what sources of information and support have been most helpful.

Learn the local criteria for success.

Find out what is considered a good performance in studies, research, social relations, and other aspects of your life here. You can get information about this from teachers, native students, secretaries, neighbors, and many others.

Realize how the status of your role here compares to the status to which you are accustomed.

Different societies attach different importance to roles or positions; for example, in many countries, the role of “university student” or “professor” is accorded more respect or status than it is in the United States. It can be difficult to adjust to having a lower social status than you are accustomed to. It helps to recognize that you personally are not being downgraded, but that you happen to be in a society where respect is expressed differently than is the case at home.

Avoid being excessively influenced by dramatic events.

Newcomers to a society may have a particular, very noticeable experience from which they generalize about the new society and the people who live in it. In fact, the experience might be very unusual, not a safe basis for generalization. For example, a new male international student found that his residence hall roommate removed all of his clothes when he was in the room studying or relaxing. The new international student at first supposed this was what U.S. students customarily did, and wondered if he should do the same. He wisely asked around, though, and found that his roommate’s behavior was not typical. If you have a dramatic experience that influences your opinions or feelings about local people, discuss the experience with others and get an idea whether it is typical or unusual.

Do what you think is appropriate and explain if necessary.

This suggestion comes from Ju Daushen, a University of Iowa graduate student. He advises new students to act in the way they consider appropriate, and then, if the host responds in an unexpected way, to give an explanation of the culture and customs that led you to behave in the way you did.

Learn from the experience.

Moving into a new culture can be the most fascinating and educational experience of your life. It gives you the opportunity to explore an entirely new way of living and compare it to your own. Here are some questions that you might try to answer as you encounter the local people:

- How do they make friends?
- How do friends treat each other?
- Who respects whom, and how is respect shown?
- What attitudes do they have about their families?
- What is the relationship between males and females?
- How do people spend their time? Why?
- How do they deal with conflicts or disagreements?
- What do they talk about?
- What kind of evidence do they seek or use when evaluating an idea or trying to win an argument?

You can compare the answers you get to the answers you would get to the same questions in your country, and you can help yourself develop a better understanding of your own society and of the one where you are living now.

Visit ISSS.

A discussion with an ISSS adviser can help achieve a useful perspective on culture shock and insights into U.S. culture.

ADJUSTMENT FOR SPOUSES AND CHILDREN

Spouses and children of international students go through the same phases of cultural adjustment as the students themselves and can benefit from many of the suggestions above. But their initial attitudes and feelings may be different. A spouse may have left a job in the home country, may not have wanted to come to the United States, may have a lower level of English proficiency, and may have lost the support of family members with an active role in child care and household matters. If the family's economic status has changed, this can also lead to greater frustration for the spouse, especially if the spouse has been accustomed to help with cooking, cleaning, and child care. The spouse needs to adjust to a new country and new roles. During the initial period, the spouse may feel a loss of self-confidence and independence. He or she may feel very isolated and lonely. These feelings may be more severe if the student is deeply involved in studies and is often gone from home.



Children celebrate with the University mascot, Goldy Gopher

Spouses who have been in this position advise that the best way to overcome these difficulties is to go out and meet other people. This may seem frightening at first, but the new spouse will meet many others who feel the same frustrations, and talking with them can be quite helpful. A good way to meet other people around campus is through ISSS-sponsored events such as Small World Coffee Hour, dance workshops, and other cultural events. Another suggestion is to take as many English classes as possible, because the spouse's feelings of insecurity will decrease with easier communication. (ISSS has information on free or low-cost classes.) Additional advice: join some organizations or do volunteer work. In the Twin Cities there are many groups and volunteer opportunities. The Minnesota International Center (612/625-4421) is a good source of information on these activities.

The Twin Cities is home to people from all over the world; spouses can find cultural activities, religious assemblies, and ethnic markets, all of which are good opportunities to meet people with common interests. Many libraries, stores and restaurants carry free newspapers such as *Asian Pages* or *La Prensa* which advertise local events and businesses. For a listing of ethnic and speciality markets in the Twin Cities refer to http://www.international.umn.edu/directory/market%20guide%2009-2010_web.pdf

For information on finding child care or enrolling children in school, pick up the ISSS brochure "Children: Day Care and School". Children also need time to adjust to being in a new place. In general they learn English very quickly, but school, daycare, or babysitters may be frightening for them at first. Younger children may want a parent to be with them all the time, and older children may want their parents to stay with them for a short time at daycare or school. Talk with their teachers to see if this is possible. The teacher may also be a good source of information about other activities, such as sports, music, or art, in which your child can participate.

One key issue facing parents who are raising children in another culture is the degree to which they feel comfortable in seeing their children adopt the local ways. Some international students and scholars do not mind if their children seem "American", but others prefer for their children to behave according to the standards of the culture back home. Such parents want their children to do well in school here and to make friends, but may fear that the children are losing their native identity and are adopting inappropriate behaviors.

Children are observant and learn quickly. They may want an American first name and may learn attitudes about independence and choice (from school, friends, and the media) that you believe are not appropriate for your culture. Each family needs to decide how important it is to them to help their children retain their native culture. The importance of this will probably vary with the child's age and the length of the parents' planned stay in the United States. It may be helpful for you to talk with other parents to see how they deal with this perplexing issue.

"Living in a Different Culture" is used and adapted with permission from the Office of International Students and Scholars, University of Iowa.

UNDERSTANDING THIS MODEL OF CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

Predeparture anxiety

There's a lot to do before going to another country. People often become overwhelmed with details and are nervous about leaving family and friends for so long. Boarding the plane can bring enthusiasm back.

"The Honeymoon"

Just like with many new relationships, the first reaction to a new culture is often euphoric. You have finally arrived after months, maybe years, of planning. The differences in scenery, food, language, or customs can be exhilarating!

Initial culture shock

This is where the excitement of differences can often quickly turn to frustration. For many, the shock can come at the first meal when familiar foods are nowhere to be found. For others, it is the realization that speaking a second language all day is not only exhausting, it's frustrating to feel limited in your communication. For others, the initial shock is an accumulation of many factors, including the lack of familiar faces and cultural cues.

Surface adjustment

This can occur when you have settled into a new routine. Maybe you have successfully registered and made it to your classes. Perhaps you've met some people in your classes that seem like they will become friends.

Culture shock

This is a state of mind you reach when the deeper differences between cultures are experienced and the novelty of the difference decreases. There may be unresolved cultural conflicts in the classroom, with friends, or with the society in general.

Places of true culture learning

Moving out of culture shock and into adaptation and adjustment is not simply a matter of feeling better. Rather, it requires understanding the reasons behind culture shock and developing personal strategies for dealing with cultural differences. Most sojourners cannot do this process alone; get help from others with international experience or from ISSS staff to understand U.S. culture and appropriate coping strategies.

Adaptation and adjustment

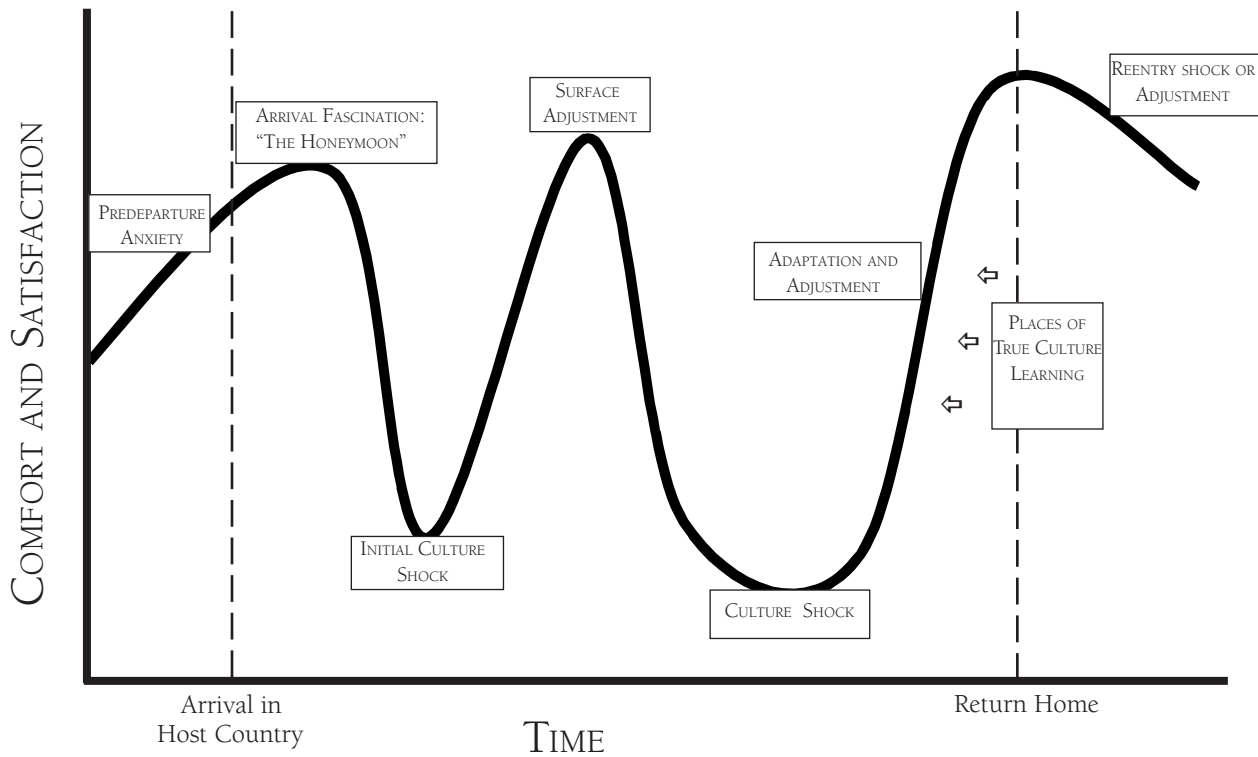
It takes time to adapt and adjust to your new environment. Skills you developed in previous transitions will help you when you encounter future intercultural challenges. Adjusting and adapting to a new culture requires the ability to know yourself well and to know the ways of the culture and its expectations of you.

Reentry shock or adjustment

The challenges of coming home can be many – the most significant can be that you did not expect it to be hard to come home. But it can be difficult, no matter how excited you are to see family and friends. Moreover, it can be hard to make sense of your experiences in the U.S., especially if you have to immediately find a job or return to your studies. With reentry, the goal is not to jump right back into everything – otherwise, why did you leave? You want to put your new found skills to good use: seeing things from another point of view, speaking another language, and learning of another area of the world. Staying connected with other international alumni is one strategy that can lessen the shock of reentry.

A CURVE OF CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

Model adapted from S.H. Rhinesmith (1975). *Bring the World Home.*



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Minnesota International Student Association (MISA)

MISA is the official student organization that represents the international student voice at the University of Minnesota. MISA leaders work closely with ISSS staff to help new students adjust to life at the University of Minnesota. They can provide information on housing and living in the Twin Cities. MISA is an advocate for international student concerns, and support programs that encourage students to get involved and make new friends both on and off campus. *International Student*, a magazine published by MISA, encourages international coverage and global perspectives.

The MISA office is located in room 201 Coffman Union, phone (612) 625-6119. Email: misa@umn.edu URL: www.tc.umn.edu/~misa

MISA also sponsors a welcome party, barbecues, organized sports groups, trips, a spring festival and bazaar, and educational programs on world issues. They encourage volunteers to help organize events and provide new ideas for activities and programs.

International and U.S. students can join MISA, and many nationality groups are represented in it. To become a member, sign up at ISOP or on-line.