

# Adjustment and Culture Shock Map



INTERNATIONAL CENTER  
HOME OF STUDY ABROAD AND  
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES



### *Introduction -*

Deciding to study abroad in the United States can be one of the biggest decisions of an international student's collegiate experience. From the moment a student decides to study abroad, pre-conceived notions as to how the experience will be start to form. These pre-arrival thoughts tend to romanticize a student's perception of study abroad, their host institution, and the United States in general.

While studying in the United States can be an incredibly exciting and transformative experience, it is important to keep in mind that there will be periods of adjustment and cultural differences that can affect an international student's time in their host country. The International Center hopes to provide helpful information for not simply coping with, but embracing the adjustment period, and recognizing signs of culture shock.

### *Adjusting to Flagler's Campus -*

The fact of the matter is that everyone placed in a new environment goes through an adjustment period. This includes international and exchange students studying in the United States. Regardless, of whether you have been to – or even studied in – the United States before, you will experience differences of culture, language, and environment towards the beginning of your time on Flagler's campus. However, it is important to remember that you have resources on campus that can help you adjust to these cultural differences.

One of the major sentiments students experience in a new setting is a **feeling of being overwhelmed**. From orientation, new roommates, new cultural landscape (both at Flagler and in the United States), a different language, different money system, different transportation systems, different classroom environments, different forms of communication (and that is just the beginning), students have a myriad of influencers competing for their attention. This can ultimately result with students feeling a sense of urgency to accept, process, and understand ALL of these areas in a short amount of time.

While this sense of being pulled in several directions is inevitable, Flagler College is dedicated to assisting international and exchange students during the adjustment period. Rest assured that you will make it through this period of uncertainty and the International Center is here if you wish to discuss your cultural adjustment. You can also reach out to our [Counseling Services](#) team. They provide free, confidential counseling sessions to all of Flagler's students.

### *Experiencing Culture Shock -*

Similar to the adjustment period, every international and exchange student studying at Flagler College will experience culture shock at some point during their time on campus. Put simply, culture shock is defined as the feeling of shock or insecurity an individual experiences while living in an environment that is different from one they are accustomed to.

Generally, individuals experience four (4) stages of culture shock:

1. Honeymoon

- Typically occurring at the beginning of students' time abroad, this phase is associated with an overall feeling of excitement. Students are generally happy and positive during this period because they are experiencing new things every day.

2. Anxiety

- This phase typically starts after something in the honeymoon phase does not go "to plan". Maybe a student did not perform well on a test, or a conflict with a roommate arose. Homesickness and excessiveness (e.g., over/under sleeping, over/under eating) are common indicators of the anxiety phase.

3. Adjustment

- Adjustment happens once a student starts to better understand differences between their own culture and that of their host country. By this time, students may have made some friends and are more comfortable in their new environment. Lastly, students have learned ways to address frustrating situations in a healthier manner.

4. Acceptance

- Opposite to stage one, where everything is picturesque and rose-tinted, the acceptance phase happens once a student understands both the positive and negatives of being abroad. Typically, students are able to objectively compare the intricacies of both their home country and host country. Students also tend to reflect on the previous stages of their culture shock.

While this list highlights some key stages of culture shock, it is important to remember that every individual experiences culture shock in a different way and at different times. While there may be moments when you feel like you are the only person experiencing culture shock, remember that we ALL have experienced it on a certain level<sup>1</sup>.

*Helpful Tips for Dealing with Adjustment and Culture Shock –*

The International Center realizes that everyone adjusts to and experiences environments differently. Therefore, we have provided you with a list of tips and strategies to help you recognize and embrace both of these multi-faceted topics.

- **Talk to someone when you are feeling overwhelmed.** It can be helpful processing what you are feeling by speaking with someone. Your listener can be

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<sup>1</sup> Information adapted from: <https://www.diversityabroad.com/guides/tips-for-living-abroad/navigating-culture-shock-abroad>

a friend (at Flagler or in your home country), a trusted professor, a fellow international or exchange student, or someone from the International Center.

- **Be prepared to feel homesick.** We all say it “won’t happen to me,” but the reality is we *all* experience homesickness sometimes. By acknowledging the fact that you will experience this, you can be prepared to embrace the feelings as they arise as opposed to suppressing them.
- **Bring something familiar from home to Flagler.** It may seem menial, but there is a lot of value in bringing a cherished photo, your favorite book, or a favorite recipe of yours from home. In moments when you feel down, you can refer to something familiar to help address your current feelings.
- **Express your emotions.** There will be times during your abroad experience when all you want to do is cry. Similarly, there will be moments when you laugh so hard your sides hurt. Regardless of the emotion, it is important to express whatever you are feeling when you are feeling it. Cry, laugh, shout, pray, create, do whatever you need to express yourself in the moment.
- **Keep an open-mind and ask questions when you don’t know or understand.** It is important to remember that you will not know everything about American politics, history, and cultural customs. It is ok to ask for clarification.
- **Set realistic goals for yourself.** At times, it may seem like you have too much on your plate. Instead of trying to complete grandiose tasks in one sitting, try to accomplish smaller manageable goals. However, do not be upset if you do not complete everything on your “to-do” list.
- **Make small decisions and see them through.** Accomplishing small tasks will help you regain confidence.
- **Do things that pique your interest.** Never lived near the beach? Then join the Flagler surf club! Want to volunteer in the St. Augustine community? Ask about Flagler College Volunteers! There are many different opportunities and resources (both on and off campus) in St. Augustine. Do your best to try something that interests you.
- **Slow down!** The tendency is to keep things moving quickly. This type of approach can become overwhelming in an incredibly short amount of time. Instead of speeding through the day, try to carve out sometime to slow down and relax. This can help you address the emotions you are experiencing.
- **Be realistic.** The reality is not everything will go according to plan! You will have good days and bad days, but the important thing to remember is nothing is infinite. Remind yourself that other international and exchange students have experienced similar feelings while studying at Flagler College.
- **HAVE FUN!** It can be easy to let negative situations dominate your conscious. However, remember, being abroad is an amazing experience. So enjoy it; do your best to not dwell on the negatives.....**and have fun!**