



# 2021 Re-Entry Guide



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## Returning Home

For many students, one of the most unexpected challenges of studying abroad is the process of returning home. Even if you have been abroad many times before, returning home can still be a challenge. While abroad, you likely encountered a multitude of new experiences, emotions, relationships, and newfound interests and perspectives. You will learn a lot about yourself as you reintegrate into your home community, and while this transition will be a great opportunity for growth and development, there will also be many highs and lows. This guide is designed to supplement our re-entry webinar, and to help you navigate and understand the re-entry process in the weeks and months following your summer with CLS.

### What is Re-Entry?

Re-entry is a term used to describe the process of coming back home after an experience abroad. Transitioning back to your home community can often be difficult and may lead to negative feelings about life in the US and nostalgia for your host country. Re-entry includes these emotional aspects of returning home (sometimes referred to as reverse culture shock), as well as the challenges of staying connected and involved, continuing your language learning, and incorporating your overseas experience into your professional and academic goals.

While the re-entry process is not the same for everyone, we hope that some or all of the resources in this handbook will help you readjust to life at home and work to integrate your experience abroad with your future goals. We also hope that you will revisit these resources in the coming months as you may find that they resonate with you in different ways as you continue to integrate your CLS experience into your life.

The model below is widely used by international educators to represent the highs and lows of cultural adjustment that occurs while abroad and when returning home. Though it plots positive and negative emotions (vertical) across time (horizontal), the degree and timing of these highs and lows will vary for everyone.



Image retrieved from <https://insights.missouri.edu/the-reality-of-studying-abroad/>

## Common Re-Entry Challenges

[Professor Bruce La Brack from the University of the Pacific](#) has compiled a list of ten common challenges students face upon re-entry from their time abroad. You may experience one or all of these challenges in the weeks and months after you return to the U.S.

**Boredom** – After spending time abroad in a new place with new things to experience every day, home might seem dull in comparison. You can work to overcome this feeling by looking for new activities and experiences in your community.

**No One Wants to Hear** – Unfortunately, it is unlikely that anyone will be as interested in hearing about your adventures as you will be in sharing them. 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 audience's part may be unlikely. Temper your expectations for others' interest in your experiences and consider how you may share them succinctly.

**You Can't Explain** – Relaying your experiences coherently or in a way that allows the listener to know how you truly felt will be difficult – if not impossible. It's ok if people don't understand your entire experience. Also, taking time to reflect on your experience will make it easier to articulate over time. To mitigate feelings of isolation, stay connected to friends you made on the program and seek out acquaintances at home who have had similar experiences, and may better understand what you've been through.



**Reverse "Homesickness"** – Just as you may have missed your home community while abroad, you will miss the people you met and the routine you grew accustomed to in your host country. Keeping in touch with your CLC contacts may help, but feelings of loss are an integral part of international experiences and must be anticipated and accepted as a natural result of study abroad.

**Relationships Have Changed** – It's important to remember that your friends' and family's lives did not stop while you were abroad, and that they have gone through changes as well. Make an effort to show that you are interested in them and their experiences if you want to maintain your relationships. Be flexible and try to maintain minimal preconceptions.

**People See the "Wrong" Changes** – Some changes in your behavior or worldviews may upset those around you and may be considered "bad" traits that you picked up while abroad. Often times these moments are motivated by jealousy or feelings of superiority or inferiority and pass quickly. Try to monitor yourself and be aware of the reactions of those around you.

**People Misunderstand** – People may misinterpret any new ways of speaking or acting that you picked up while abroad. Referring to foreign places or using phrases from the host language may be interpreted as showing off. A silence that was seen as simply polite overseas might be incorrectly interpreted at home as signaling

agreement or opposition. Be aware of how you may be perceived by others and how your behavior may be interpreted.

**Seeing with “Critical Eyes”** – Sometimes the reality of being back home is not as natural or enjoyable as you expect it to be. Many people, while adjusting to the host culture, develop a more critical view of U.S. society while abroad, and this can lead to becoming judgmental of those around them for a short time after coming home. Being critical is a symptom of culture shock, just as you may have experienced while abroad. Making comparisons is fine, but be aware of being overly-negative until you regain both your cultural balance and a balanced perspective.

**Inability to Apply New Knowledge and Skills** – Many students are frustrated by the lack of opportunity to apply new linguistic or social skills gained while abroad. Be creative and patient during this time; recognize that you will need to adapt as necessary and that the cross-cultural adjustment skills you acquired while abroad can help you adjust to life at home.

**Loss/Compartmentalization of Experience** – Being home, combined with the pressures of work, school, family, and friends, often conspires to make returnees worried that they might somehow “lose” the experience. Some fear that it will 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 abroad; seek out and talk to people who have had experiences similar to yours; practice your cross-cultural skills; continue language learning. With a little effort, you can integrate your overseas experience into your ongoing life and activities.

The strategies outlined in the following pages of this guide are provided to help you cope with these and other challenges you may face.

## Strategies for Successful Re-Entry

### Reflect on Your Experience

Be purposeful about taking time to reflect on your experiences abroad, what they mean to you, and how you can use them to shape your life moving forward. However you choose to process your experience – in writing, in conversations, or just in thought – reflection is an important and necessary step in re-entry. Taking the time to reflect will allow you to frame what you learned during your time abroad and decide how to move forward in a more meaningful way.

*Possible strategies for reflection:*

- Start or continue a journal for yourself
  - If you kept a journal during your time abroad, look back on it for inspiration



- Start or continue a blog to articulate your experience and how you are moving forward
- Curate a collection of photos from your time abroad that help you to express meaningful experiences and what you learned to share with others on social media or elsewhere
- Make a video or slideshow to tell a story about your experience
- Create a vision board to organize your goals
- Talk with other CLS or study abroad alumni about your experiences

There is room in the workbook section at the end of this guide to take notes on the following prompts for reflection. These can be used to develop longer journal entries or blog posts when you find yourself having more to say.

*What did you miss most about home? What did you miss least?*

*What do you miss most about your host country? What do you miss least?*

*How has your perception of the U.S. and the world changed?*

*What challenges did you overcome? What was your proudest accomplishment?*

*Have your perspectives or values changed? How?*

*What did you learn about yourself during the CLS experience?*

*What skills, other than language, did you gain from studying abroad?*

*Did you meet your goals? How has CLS influenced or changed your goals for the future?*

## Keep In Touch

Among the things you may miss most from your time abroad are the relationships you developed with others in your CLS cohort and in your host city. Reaching out to these contacts may be a good strategy when you want to talk to someone who has an understanding of your experience. Being part of the CLS alumni community means being part of a relatively small group of Americans who prioritize critical languages in their careers and academic pursuits. You never know how you may end up crossing paths and supporting each other over the coming years.

*Possible strategies for keeping in touch:*

- Schedule virtual chats
- Join [CLS Alumni Facebook group](#) and/or the [CLS Alumni LinkedIn group](#) and stay active in the CLS Facebook group for your language
- Plan a reunion with your CLS cohort
- Plan a virtual or local meeting or an event for any CLS alumni in your area
- Start an email chain or group chat with your CLS cohort
- Send a postcard or letter to people you connected with in your host community
- Attend re-entry conferences or events at your home institution or other organizations in your area

## Get Involved

As a part of the CLS alumni community, you now have access to a variety of programs and resources created specifically to help you share your experiences with future participants and strengthen the impact of your CLS summer. These options, available to CLS alumni are described in detail in the New Alumni Handbook.

- Join the [CLS Alumni Society](#)
- Participate in CLS Alumni Mentoring Circles
- Enter the Alumni Photo Contest
- Become an Alumni Ambassador
- Sign up for the Alumni Support Network
- Share experiences in your community
  - o Write about your experiences to share with a wider audience in a variety of publications
  - o Host [an information session](#) to help with outreach to CLS applicants
  - o Find and contact [CLS advisor on your campus](#) to find out how you can help recruit for study abroad

## Stay Internationally Engaged

Just because your time abroad has come to an end doesn't mean that you can't continue to be internationally engaged. The suggestions below are just a few of many ways you can continue learning beyond CLS.

### Stay Connected with the Culture

- Visit museums, concerts, and art exhibits
- Volunteer with cultural organizations
- Join international clubs and attend events
- Look for international restaurants and grocery stores in your community and the surrounding areas
- Keep in touch with contacts in your host community

### Continue Language Study

- Join or start a language club on your campus or in your community
- Connect with international students on your campus or in your community to engage in language exchange
- Sign up for a class on campus, at a language school, or online
- Set up virtual meetings with a fellow CLS participant or your language partner
- Read books, newspapers, and online stories in your target language
- Watch movies and listen to music and news radio in your target language
- Practice journaling or blogging in your target language

### Internationalize Your Studies

- Take elective courses in area studies
- Connect with staff and/or faculty who may be able to relate to your experience and help you connect it with your studies
- Do independent research to find out what your field of study is like in other cultures
- Consider another study abroad program: <https://studyabroad.state.gov/>

## Workbook Activities

The following pages contain activities designed to help you reflect on your experience abroad and articulate its value for various audiences, including potential employers.

### Reflection Activity

1. What did you miss most about home? What did you miss least?

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2. What do you miss most about your host country? What do you miss least?

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3. How has your perception of the U.S. and the world changed?

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4. What challenges did you overcome? What was your proudest accomplishment?

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5. Have your perspectives or values changed? How?

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6. What did you learn about yourself during the CLS experience?

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7. What skills, other than language, did you gain from studying abroad?

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8. Did you meet your goals? How has CLS influenced or changed your goals for the future?

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