

Stages of Cultural Adjustment

Honeymoon Stage

Characterized by exhilaration, anticipation, and excitement. The international student is fascinated with everything that is new. The students are embarking on their "dream come true," which is to study in the United States.

A student in the honeymoon stage will demonstrate an eagerness to please others, a spirit of cooperation, and an active interest in speakers from the U.S. But in their enthusiasm to please, students frequently nod or smile to indicate understanding when in fact they have not understood. When their misunderstandings mount up, the students are likely to experience the second stage of adjustment.

Hostility Stage

Characterized by frustration, anger, anxiety, and sometimes depression. Following the initial excitement is frustration with the college bureaucracy and weariness of speaking and listening in English every day. Sleep patterns may be disrupted. The student may suffer from indigestion and be unable to eat. Students are upset because, although they have studied English, they don't seem to understand anyone.

International students react to this frustration by rejecting the new environment in which they feel discomfort. The internal reasoning might be, "if I feel bad it's because of them." The student blames the external environment for the bad feelings. At this point, international students may display hostility toward the new frustrations, excessive fear and mistrust of U.S. Americans, frequent absenteeism, lack of interest, lack of motivation, and at worst, complete withdrawal. Many academic problems can begin during this stage.

Humor Stage

This stage follows when the new international student begins to relax in a new situation and begins to laugh at minor mistakes and misunderstandings which previously would have caused major headaches in the hostility stage. This more relaxed state of being occurs after the student has made some friends and is able to manage the size and complexity of the College, understands his or her studies, and begins to pass tests.

Home Stage

Occurs when the international student not only retains allegiance to his or her home culture, but also "feels at home" in the newly acquired culture. The student has successfully adjusted to the norms and standards of the College, and should be commended for the ability to live successfully in two cultures.

Homecoming Stage

This stage occurs when the international student returns to his or her country or culture. The student has changed and life in the home country most likely has changed. The student will go through some of the first four stages again as adjustment is made to life back home.