Ask a Cal Poly Student

What were some of the biggest surprises or challenges that you faced upon returning to the U.S., San Luis Obispo, or Cal Poly?

Coming back to my life that hadn’t really changed much when I had changed a lot

Trying to communicate new cultural ideas to my friends who have only experienced American culture

Feeling distant from friends

Getting used to my old responsibilities

Hearing English on a constant basis

Slower public transportation

Having a smart phone and everyone expecting me to be available at anytime

How conservative it is in San Luis Obispo and how friendly Americans are

Getting back into the quarter system and having very little free time

Missing traveling and the friends I made abroad

The lack of new, exciting, stimulating, adventurous things to do everyday

Adjusting to cultural norms such as voice volume and politeness

How did you overcome reverse culture shock?

Staying connected with the people I traveled abroad with and talking about our experiences

I reached out to people to set up time to get together to rekindle relationships

Slowly increased my responsibilities, especially with extracurricular activities

I incorporated customs and traditions that I learned abroad into my life

Relearned how to manage all my classes and to prioritize with scheduling

I talked a lot with my best friend from abroad and fostered all my relationships through a personal connection

I’ve slowed down my life and have tried to go with the flow

I started planning what my next trip was going to be, and I got more work hours, so I could gain money back

What is Reverse Culture Shock?

Most people are aware of culture shock when living in a new country for the first time, but many forget that the reverse may also happen upon returning to the United States. Reentry, or reverse, culture shock occurs after coming home from an extended stay in another country, such as a study abroad experience, internship, or extensive travel. It greatly varies between people as some find it more difficult than others to readjust to their old lives.

You may feel out of place in San Luis Obispo, at Cal Poly, or with your closest friends because your perspectives, values, and opinions have changed in both large and small ways that now contrast your friends’ or family’s views. You may also feel bored, isolated, or negative toward the U.S. or American ideals, traditions, or behaviors as well as a longing for friends, family, and the lifestyle from your host country.

Another typical experience after returning is your desire to share every moment abroad but few people who will actually listen. Unfortunately, once they hear the highlights about your time abroad, many people are uninterested in the details or may even forget where you had lived. Despite these family members or friends, there are many other clubs or groups at Cal Poly with people who have endured the same experiences that you are currently undergoing.

How did you overcome reverse culture shock?

Staying connected with the people I traveled abroad with and talking about our experiences

I reached out to people to set up time to get together to rekindle relationships

Slowly increased my responsibilities, especially with extracurricular activities

I incorporated customs and traditions that I learned abroad into my life

Relearned how to manage all my classes and to prioritize with scheduling

I talked a lot with my best friend from abroad and fostered all my relationships through a personal connection

I’ve slowed down my life and have tried to go with the flow

I started planning what my next trip was going to be, and I got more work hours, so I could gain money back
**Alumni Ambassadors**
Promote studying abroad around Cal Poly by sharing your experience and attending International Center events. Check with the International Center or your study abroad provider for available positions.

**Returnee Events**
*Unpacking Your Experience:* located in Student Services during winter quarter.
*Lessons from Abroad:* a countrywide conference for discussion and networking
Both help returning study abroad students apply their experience to future careers. Check with the International Center for quarterly events.

**Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) Certificate**
How can you go abroad again? Receive a TESL certificate and teach English in the United States or around the world. Contact Dr. John Battenburg for more information!

**International Peer Contact**
Help incoming international students adjust to Cal Poly while creating lasting friendships and participating in the International Club.
Applications are emailed to returning study abroad students during winter quarter and interviews are held during spring quarter. More information can be found online on the International Center webpage.