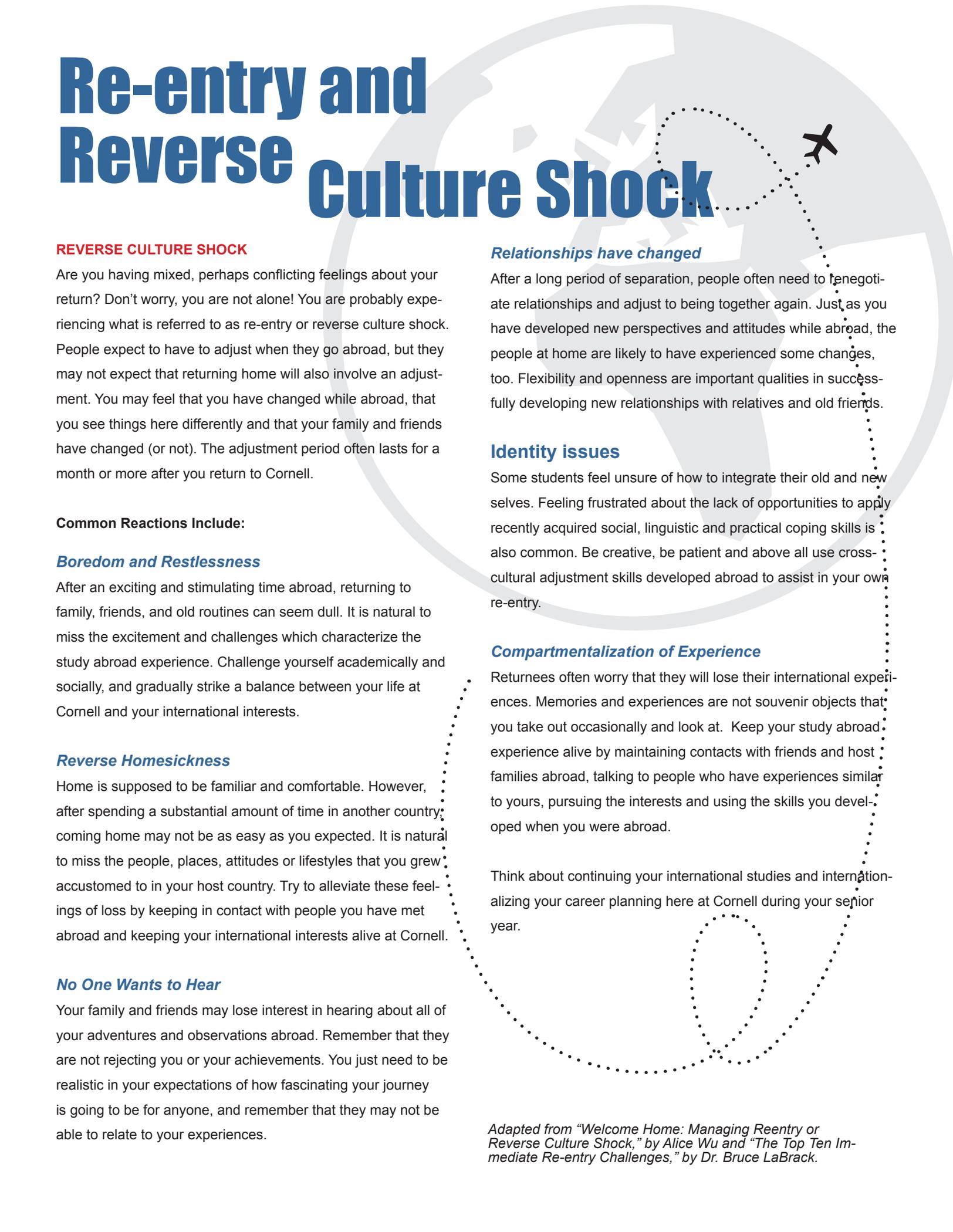


Re-entry and Reverse Culture Shock



REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

Are you having mixed, perhaps conflicting feelings about your return? Don't worry, you are not alone! You are probably experiencing what is referred to as re-entry or reverse culture shock. People expect to have to adjust when they go abroad, but they may not expect that returning home will also involve an adjustment. You may feel that you have changed while abroad, that you see things here differently and that your family and friends have changed (or not). The adjustment period often lasts for a month or more after you return to Cornell.

Common Reactions Include:

Boredom and Restlessness

After an exciting and stimulating time abroad, returning to family, friends, and old routines can seem dull. It is natural to miss the excitement and challenges which characterize the study abroad experience. Challenge yourself academically and socially, and gradually strike a balance between your life at Cornell and your international interests.

Reverse Homesickness

Home is supposed to be familiar and comfortable. However, after spending a substantial amount of time in another country, coming home may not be as easy as you expected. It is natural to miss the people, places, attitudes or lifestyles that you grew accustomed to in your host country. Try to alleviate these feelings of loss by keeping in contact with people you have met abroad and keeping your international interests alive at Cornell.

No One Wants to Hear

Your family and friends may lose interest in hearing about all of your adventures and observations abroad. Remember that they are not rejecting you or your achievements. You just need to be realistic in your expectations of how fascinating your journey is going to be for anyone, and remember that they may not be able to relate to your experiences.

Relationships have changed

After a long period of separation, people often need to renegotiate relationships and adjust to being together again. Just as you have developed new perspectives and attitudes while abroad, the people at home are likely to have experienced some changes, too. Flexibility and openness are important qualities in successfully developing new relationships with relatives and old friends.

Identity issues

Some students feel unsure of how to integrate their old and new selves. Feeling frustrated about the lack of opportunities to apply recently acquired social, linguistic and practical coping skills is also common. Be creative, be patient and above all use cross-cultural adjustment skills developed abroad to assist in your own re-entry.

Compartmentalization of Experience

Returnees often worry that they will lose their international experiences. Memories and experiences are not souvenir objects that you take out occasionally and look at. Keep your study abroad experience alive by maintaining contacts with friends and host families abroad, talking to people who have experiences similar to yours, pursuing the interests and using the skills you developed when you were abroad.

Think about continuing your international studies and internationalizing your career planning here at Cornell during your senior year.

Adapted from "Welcome Home: Managing Reentry or Reverse Culture Shock," by Alice Wu and "The Top Ten Immediate Re-entry Challenges," by Dr. Bruce LaBrack.