Stages of Reentry Adjustment

☑️ STAGE ONE: Leave-taking and departure begins some time before you actually leave the country and culture of your program. Ideally, it includes farewells and closure with people important to you during your study abroad experience. You may have feelings of anticipation, excitement, and ambivalence about your return home or to school. You may be looking forward to reconnecting but unsure of how it may go.

☑️ STAGE TWO: The honeymoon feels exhilarating during the first one or two weeks because you are the center of attention. You can do/eat/smell all the things you have missed (can occur first at home and again when you return to school).

☑️ STAGE THREE: Reverse culture shock usually sets in after you’ve made your initial visits and connections and now it’s time to settle down to regular life. You may feel judgmental about the U.S. and/or UNCG, overwhelmed by the obsessiveness about time, schedules, and class expectations, and doubtful about the wisdom of returning, majoring in a certain field, living on campus, etc. You may want to resist the pressures of family or of UNCG, not want to let go of your study abroad experience, may feel the urge to escape or withdraw, or feel downright depressed.

☑️ STAGE FOUR: Readjustment occurs when you begin to put your study abroad experience and views of the U.S. into perspective to achieve a balanced point of view. You will feel less anxious or doubtful as you become more relaxed and familiar with your surroundings. Recognize that your cross-cultural awareness does not require an either/or approach. You can integrate your study abroad experience into your own U.S./UNCG life and find that friends and family become more understanding as they slowly hear more stories and comprehend the complexity and richness of your experience.

The Special Challenge of Social and Cultural Adjustments
You may not be aware of how much the routines, norms, and values of your host country have become part of your expectations. Whether it’s driving on the left side of the road or speaking another language, you’ve gotten used to doing things a certain way, and now you are expected to pick up American habits again. Furthermore, after having been exposed to a different culture, some of the U.S. customs you never paid attention to before all of a sudden seem really odd. Some students commonly react to the abundance of material things in the U.S., the faster pace of life, and the favoring of individuality over sense of community. Most people can feel quite frustrated at first over these conflicting attitudes and values. You are fortunate to know two value systems now and have to figure out for yourself the parts of each by which you want to live your life. This may not come easily, but it is a privilege among traveling people and highly valued.

Adapted from Kalamazoo College’s “Welcome to ‘Life after Study Abroad’”