

Cultural differences causing problems

Did you or your parents grow up in a foreign country? Have you recently moved to the Netherlands or were you raised with the moral standards of another culture than the Dutch? Studying abroad is usually an exciting experience. Students often have very different motives for doing (part of) their study in another country, like studying at a world-leading university, learning a new language or culture, or simply residing in one of their favorite countries.

While all this can be very beneficial with regards to personal development and gaining international contacts, adjusting to a new culture takes energy as well. As all cultures differ in climate, habits, religion etcetera, studying abroad always means being separated from what is familiar and having to adjust to the local culture, language, food and other differences. In fact, migrating to another country generally makes people feel more aroused. Arousal can be positive and stimulating, especially in the first couple weeks (the 'honeymoon weeks'), but tends to be exhausting over time.

Therefore, homesickness, stress and feeling overwhelmed and panicky is not uncommon among international students. Some get confronted with norms or customs that are thought of as taboo in their own country. This might lead to confusing thoughts or mixed emotions. For some, studying abroad can feel like a lonely experience. All of these different feelings often increase feelings of homesickness and being out of place. Depressive thoughts and feelings are quite often a consequence.

QuickScan

- Do you experience trouble communicating with your peer students or professors?
- Do you feel stressed/sad when you try to keep up with the expectations of people in your home country?
- Do you feel overwhelmed or frustrated by the cultural differences you are experiencing?
- Do you feel homesick or lonely?
- Do you feel like you don't belong here?

Approach

What can you do yourself?

Keeping an active lifestyle with a regular day to day rhythm is often beneficial. Undertaking different activities helps in gaining new connections as well. Having one or more local friends or acquaintances often helps students to feel more connected to the host country and more comfortable while studying abroad. At the same time it is important to keep contact with friends and family at home and share your experiences with them. Talking to trusted people from your own culture as well as the host culture can help you deal with distressing thoughts or feelings. The more and earlier you share your feelings and experiences with others, the smaller the chance of becoming isolated.

What can we do for you?

We offer short-term individual consultation to help you learn dealing with the stress of studying abroad and adapting to a new culture. Visit <http://psychologists.tudelft.nl>. You can also ask for a StudyBuddy: students who have gone through an international experience and like to share that experience and their local knowledge with you. Visit <http://www.tudelft.nl/studybuddy>.

More information

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3wZhxqT38g>
- www.studentsabroad.com
- Studying abroad (D.J. Hess), ISBN13: 9781877864506
- Preparing to study abroad (S.T. Duke), ISBN13: 9781579229931

- Study abroad for dummies (E. Sullivan), ISBN13: 9780764554575
- Moving experience: complexities of acculturation (J. Koning), ISBN13: 9789086596065