**Resilience while abroad**

It takes a while to adapt to a new culture. After the initial excitement of meeting new friends, trying new foods, experiencing new academic settings, etc., it is common to experience culture shock and homesickness.

### Key challenges of living abroad

Most students will experience culture or homesickness while abroad.

You might be surprised at how homesick you feel in the first few weeks. *Homesickness is* ***normal****, it is part of the* ***journey*** *and it will pass.*

Homesickness can be due to a number of “stressors”, such as:

* Adjusting to new customs, food, language, people
* Challenges at host university (issues with administration, registration, timetable, etc)
* Accommodation issues
* Language issues (be patient and be prepared to repeat yourself!)
* Managing finances (budget!!)
* Missing relationships back home
* Absence of home comforts
* Feeling isolated
1. **Prepare for the stay abroad**

Before you go:

* Find out as much as possible about your destination
* Read student reports and get contact details of UL students who went to the same destination the year before, and see if they have any advice or contacts there.
* Make some contacts if possible before you go (e.g. use CampusConnect app to make contact with UL students going to the same destination)
* Keep on top of the paperwork to avoid last-minute stress and panic. Make sure you know what documents are required and do not leave form-filling exercises to the last minute.
* Identify things you’ve never done for yourself and work on them (washing, cleaning, cooking)
* Learn about how to live on a budget and make food cheaply (maybe you do already)
* Learn about the food, the culture, the nuances (if you can)
* Use Google maps to get familiar with surroundings
* Identify travel routes and transport
* Set up ways to contact others easily
* Plan what you’d like to achieve/ visit/ do whilst there – research the place
* Research climate and weather patterns throughout the year and pack accordingly!
* Bring mementos with you that remind you of home: photos, treats that you cannot get abroad, etc.

### Coping skills while abroad

It is important to keep a positive attitude and be open-minded about people, cultural differences and new experiences, and not to compare everything with Ireland. What seems strange at first will soon become familiar. There will be some advantages and some disadvantages, and people gradually adapt to new ways.

The following suggestions can help minimise

**culture shock**

* Give yourself time to adapt to the cultural differences.
* Keep an open mind and a positive attitude. Try not to compare with home. Be open to new ideas and new ways. Try to understand why something is done that way
* Set a bucket list and tick them off
* Be curious, explore, travel. Schedule trips to visit local sites/ new cities (you may not ever get an opportunity like this again)
* Share photos, videos, blogs, journals, scrapbooks, sketchbooks, memory boxes – record your adventures and share your experiences with your friends back home and fellow ERASMUS students
* Allow yourself to see the humour in misunderstandings and embarrassments.

**homesickness**

* Be prepared to feel up and down in the few weeks after arrival.
* Relationships - focus on the reunite not the separation
* Communicate regularly and show interest in what’s happening at home
* Home comforts – acknowledge and accept that you won’t have all that you do at home
* Do not dwell on what you miss from home. Identify things that you enjoy at your new location and indulge yourself!

**loneliness**

* Make the first move when meeting others. Introduce yourself. Smile.
* Accept that conversations may be difficult initially.
* Sign up for Buddy programmes, student associations such as ERASMUS Student network (ESN), etc where available.
* Go to events. Take advantage of cultural and social activities organised by your college, especially in the first few weeks. TALK TO PEOPLE!
* Develop a routine. Find things to do, especially at the weekend, and seek out people (Irish students, local and other international students) even if you think you might not have much in common.
* Set goals: One new thing a week; Talk to one new person a day; Go to one social event a week; Invite someone with you once a week. Staying proactive will help counteract isolation.
* Take a class, join an interest group or club. If you play sports, join a local sports club or find out if there is a GAA club in the area.
* Identify available local supports (church, local Irish community, LGBT group, etc)
* Make an effort and study the language daily to enhance your communication skills - this will help you integrate better.
* Sign up for a language tandem or *intercambio* programme to improve your language skills and get to know native speakers
* Connect with other international students from your own or other universities
* Maintain some connection with home but don’t rely on it. Research shows that those who spend longer on the phone home seem more lonely than those who spend less.
* Look after yourself - exercise and keep a healthy diet to reduce stress. Try and achieve a healthy balance between study, leisure and rest.

Take the Resilience quiz: <http://resiliencyquiz.com/index.shtml>

1. **Support available while abroad**
* Talk with someone in the International Office of the host University. Students can feel discouraged at times, but the staff at the host university will try to help you find a solution.
* UL International office

Get in touch with the International office in UL for assistance or if you consider dropping classes or withdrawing from ERASMUS

email: outgoing.erasmus@ul.ie

Phone: +353 61 202353

* UL Student Counselling

Email: counselling@ul.ie

Phone: 061-202327; 086-8115829

www.ul.ie/counselling

Skype sessions can be arranged