

Achievement, Action, Work and Materialism

Americans typically value accomplishing something that can be measured. They even take their leisure activities seriously and make plans to be active outside of school and/or work.

Directness and Assertiveness

Americans generally consider it important to be very frank and direct in their dealings with others. It is thought that it is not necessary to disguise their feelings. Even if their words are not open, facial expressions may be revealing. Being honest is often seen to be more important than preserving harmony in interpersonal relationships.

HELPFUL TIPS

- **It's OK to make mistakes.** Do not be angry when you make mistakes, everyone does, and no one fits in right away. Give yourself plenty of time to learn. Observe others and consider how you might want to fit in better. There is no need to imitate everything you see, but the more you adapt to the local way of life, the more you will enjoy your experience.
- **Participate in the culture.** Spend time outside of your room or apartment by going to shopping centers, parks, libraries, the beach and sporting events. Watch. Listen. Learn. Increasing your knowledge of the new culture makes it easier to understand.
- **Be active.** Your culture back home may or may not value physical activity, but research has shown numerous advantages to exercising regularly as an effective way to lessen worry and sadness. Try these: play sports (on your own or with a group), go for a walk or run, or go to the gym.
- **Join groups.** Adjustment will be easier if you participate in campus groups, clubs and organizations. Campus groups can give a sense of belonging that you may feel you have lost once you left your home country. Try different activities until you find some that are right for you.
- **Practice your English.** Listen to and ask about terms you don't understand. Most people will gladly explain words or terms that sound new to you. Don't hesitate to admit that you don't understand something, or ask people to speak slower. Never confuse your ability to speak the new language with your intelligence. Do not allow yourself to become discouraged if you are having trouble. It takes everyone some time to adjust and become comfortable with a new language. Improving your English will make your adjustment easier.

- **Family matters.** If you brought your spouse or family with you, remember they will be experiencing culture shock as well. It will help their transition if you can encourage them to take many of the same steps you might be taking, or taking these steps together. For loved ones you may have left behind, keep in touch with them by sharing your new experiences. Also, keep pictures around to remind you of and feel connected to home.
- **Be yourself.** Find your own pace of adjusting. Try not to force yourself to change too fast or to change too many things all at once. Seek out familiar customs locally, such as religious practice and foods. Hold on to what's important to you and find a good combination between old and new.
- **Be ready for anything.** You never know when you'll find yourself running into a local tradition that you were unaware of. Try to stay open to new experiences, but also keep your limits in mind. If you feel uncomfortable with some of the local customs, respectfully decline.
- **Talk to someone.** Find friends who are going through a similar process, call your family back home or check out the resources and support offered by International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS). If you feel you may need a professional to consult with, consider looking into the assistance offered by Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS).



Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS)

is the student counseling center on campus. CAPS has trained therapists from different cultural backgrounds and experiences who can help you through the difficult parts of cultural adaptation. In the U.S. it is very common to talk with a trained professional about problems or difficulties, and your discussion will be private and confidential. To schedule an appointment, please contact:

CAPS

150 W. University Blvd., Bldg. 264
Melbourne, FL 32901
Phone: (321) 674-8050

For additional information and resources,
visit www.fit.edu/caps

Hours (*subject to change*):

Monday–Thursday 8:30 a.m.–Noon and
1–5 p.m., Friday 8:30 a.m.–4 p.m.

International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS)

provides assistance with immigration matters and also coordinates cultural programs promoting intercultural exchange between students and the university community. You are encouraged to attend these events, as they will help you meet other students from around the world who are also getting accustomed to life in America. You will also be able to make new friends, practice your English, learn about other cultures and share your own culture.

For more information, please contact:

Office of International Student and Scholar Services

150 W. University Blvd.,
Florida Tech Commons, Room 334
Melbourne, FL 32901

Phone: (321) 674-8053 • Email: iss@fit.edu

For additional information and resources,
visit www.fit.edu/iss

Walk-in Hours (*subject to change*):

Monday–Friday 10 a.m.–3 p.m.



Florida Institute of Technology
High Tech with a Human Touch™

ADJUSTING TO LIFE IN AMERICA



Florida Institute of Technology is an international community with a mixture of cultures and languages from around the world. In fact, it has become one of the most diverse campuses in the country. Over 25% of our student population is international, representing over 100 different countries! In your studies here at Florida Tech, you can do more than just earn a degree. You can open the door into our global society by learning from other students and cultures to gain a broader understanding of the world and the people in it.

Counseling & Psychological Services
International Student and Scholar Services



ADJUSTING TO A NEW ENVIRONMENT MAY TAKE A LONG TIME.

Individuals who cross cultures usually are uncomfortable at first and may feel:

- Confused
- Discouraged
- Lonely
- Anxious or fearful
- Misunderstood

However, as they get more comfortable, many individuals find that learning in a new culture:

- Provides a more stimulating learning experience
- Feels like an exciting adventure
- Adds to feelings of fulfillment and achievement in life
- Increases feelings of confidence and capability

SO HOW CAN YOU MAKE THIS TRANSITION?

Your first task is to get settled in the campus community. Some things may seem very new for a while:

- Your daily routine
- Meeting people, hearing English words/expressions and communicating in ways you are not familiar with (including non-verbal communication, such as hand gestures and eye contact)
- Things may differ from your home country such as climate, health care practices, driving and other transportation systems, monetary systems and currency exchange

Try to think of all these new experiences as opportunities to grow and learn. The best way to take full advantage of them is to become involved in the



life of this university. Florida Tech recognizes this can be difficult. Let's talk about why it is a struggle for so many people and how this experience might feel.

CULTURE SHOCK

When you leave your home culture, you separate yourself from the people and surroundings that have defined your role in society. The first few weeks, or even months, may be hectic for you as you begin to adapt to the new culture. You may experience anxiety, disorientation, confusion and uncertainty. These feelings are often called "culture shock." Culture shock is not a clinical term or a medical condition. It is simply a common way to describe the confusion and nervous feelings a person may experience after leaving a familiar culture to live in a new and different culture. There are four phases of culture shock:

1. HONEYMOON PHASE: Students often see differences between the old and new cultures as wonderful and interesting. You may think to yourself:

"This is exciting! There are so many new things to try and to learn. It is different, but fun!"

But keep in mind, like all honeymoons, this exciting outlook on new things may not last forever.

2. NEGOTIATION PHASE: As students begin to see just how different their own culture is from the new one, feelings of anxiety, sadness or frustration may set in. This can create intense feelings of loyalty to your home country, cause withdrawal from people who are different from you and, perhaps, spark a desire to return home. Language barriers may be especially difficult during this phase. You may feel:

"Everything is TOO different here. I do not always feel like I fit in and sometimes I am uncertain of how to act in a situation. It makes me feel uncomfortable and worried. I miss home because I never had to feel this way there."

Try to remember that you are not alone—many students experience these thoughts and feelings. Happily, this stage will also pass.

3. ADJUSTMENT PHASE: After some time (which may take many months), students begin to understand the new culture and its customs. Routines and problem-solving skills for dealing with all the changes will develop, and you will begin to accept the new cultural ways with a positive attitude and have fewer negative experiences.

You might say:

"I have done and learned so many new things since I came here. This new culture is starting to make some sense, now that I am becoming familiar with the people and the customs. I have gone through a lot of changes since I first came, but life is finally starting to feel normal again."

Keep in mind adjustment is not the same for everyone as it comes at different times for different individuals. What is important to know is that if you keep working at it, this time will come for you too.

4. MASTERY PHASE (Biculturalism): Students participate fully and comfortably in the new culture and integrate their new experiences with their home country values. Students do not have to become a new person, but rather they integrate pieces of the new culture into their own. The transition is complete and these experiences are now a positive part of who you are and how you see the world.

If you are experiencing signs of culture shock, don't panic! You are not alone—these are normal reactions to adjusting to your educational experience. Sometimes it is hard to remember why you decided to leave home. You are on an adventure—a wonderful opportunity to grow and learn—but it does not always seem that way. There is no simple formula for coping with culture shock. We have gathered some tips to help make your transition easier. Do not stop at just one, as it may be more effective to try several of them. Some of these suggestions may even be useful for preventing the experience of culture shock, even before you notice any signs of it.

Adjusting to a new culture can be difficult and frustrating, but it can also be an exciting time of your life when you will grow as a person. Living in a foreign country will open new doors, introduce you to new ways of thinking and give you the opportunity to make

lifelong friends. Always remember, the key to moving past your culture shock is understanding the new culture and finding a way to live comfortably within it while keeping true to the parts of the culture you value.

GETTING TO KNOW AMERICANS

Even though Americans come from diverse backgrounds, they share some basic beliefs that characterize their culture. Knowing about these basic beliefs can be very helpful as you live and interact with Americans at Florida Tech. Keep in mind these are generalizations and may or may not fit the circumstances or people you encounter.

The following information is an adaptation of Appendix 5 of NAFSA's *International Student Handbook: A guide to University Study in the U.S.A.* published by AT&T™.

Individualism and Privacy

Perhaps the most important thing to understand about Americans is their devotion to individualism. It is important to be "your own person" and to stick up for your rights. Additionally, people highly value their privacy.

Equality

This American ideal is stated in our Declaration of Independence, "all men are created equal." America is known as the "land of opportunity." No matter what your position, with hard work and luck, you may rise to any height.

Informality

The idea of equality leads Americans to be fairly informal in their behavior and in their relationships with others.

The Future, Change and Progress

While history and traditions are respected, Americans believe that people can control their future, even their world, and make them both better through initiative and enterprise.

Time

You may hear the expression "Time is money." Americans view time, as a limited resource to be saved or spent for useful purpose. Americans may get impatient with lines that move slowly in supermarkets, banks or other locations. Americans will usually be on time for meetings and engagements and will keep a schedule of their activities and expect others to do the same. You should arrive on time, if not a little early, for meals and appointments with professors, doctors and other professionals.