International Students & Cultural Adjustment

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The Challenge of International Students: Managing Acculturative Stress

Acculturative Stress is that state of anxiety that arises from confusion about how to behave in a new/host culture during cross-cultural adjustment.
Sources of Acculturative Stress

• Lack of recognizable cues to help determine behavior.

• Absence of that which is familiar.

• Separation from family and friends.

• Lack of social supports in host/new culture.

• Spiritual/religious isolation.
Degree of impact of stress can be dependent upon these elements:

- Level of tolerance of new/host culture for ethnic diversity.
- Level of cultural sensitivity of new/host culture.
- Availability of religious/spiritual guidance and opportunity to worship in one’s own manner.
- Access to culturally appropriate social supports.
- Availability of employment.
This degree of impact can also be dependent upon:

- Proficiency with language of new/host culture.
- Self confidence and interest in meeting others.
- Differences between educational background and expectations of host/new culture.
- Attitudes toward acculturation and level of ethnocentrism.
- Prior knowledge of host/new culture and previous intercultural experiences.
- Ability to cope with racism.
- Social connectedness.
What helps manage acculturative stress?

- Language proficiency
- Make new friends
- Student Life activities
- Maintain contact with friends and family
- Keep up with studies
- Utilize student services
- Bicultural
Fatigue, headaches, stomach disturbance, body pain and sleep problems.

Worry, confusion, frustration, irritability, difficulty concentrating, and sadness.

Withdrawal from others and social isolation.

Inability to solve and resolve problems.

Scholastic difficulties.

Any and all of these symptoms can negatively impact one’s ability to have a productive and enjoyable educational and cultural experience.
UW Bothell Student Counseling Services can help:

- Assist with finding solutions for problems with relationships, sadness, worry, loneliness, insecurity, lack of confidence, homesickness and troubled sleep to name a few of the concerns for which help is sought.

- Provide guidance on cultural norms and help identify cultural conflicts.
- Provide a safe place to discuss experiences with racism and discrimination.
- Help reconcile expectations of family with the reality of the educational experience.
- Provide support to prevent acculturative stress from becoming cultural distress.
What can be expected of UW Bothell counselors?

- **Self awareness**: the counselor will understand how her/his personal cultural background impacts professional practice.

- **Knowledge**: the counselor will have a general understanding of the background, history and current socialization influences of cultural groups.

- **Skill**: non-judgmental, active listener, with expertise in appropriate counseling techniques.
What can be expected of UW Bothell counselors, cont.

- The counselor will be aware that decisions made in one cultural context can have a major impact upon roles and relationships as defined in another cultural context.

- The counselor will be effective at cultural inquiry asking such questions as:
  
  - How would this problem be understood in your culture?
  - How would you deal with this problem if you were in your home country?
  - Who would help you?
  - What do you think she/he would say and do?
Student Counseling Services

- Confidential.
- Free.
- Enrolled students.
- Six individual sessions per academic year.
- Appointments can be made in-person with Student Services reception:
  
  **UW1-173**

- Or by phone: **425-352-3183**

For more information visit: [www.uwb.edu/studentservices/counseling](http://www.uwb.edu/studentservices/counseling)
References


“Welcome to UW Bothell and thank you for your attendance.”

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