

Cross Cultural Adjustment

UCLA is a heterogeneous environment filled with many people who differ in race, gender, sexual orientation, culture, religion, socioeconomic status and citizenship. With so many different types of people living in such a small campus community, different people face different types of issues with regards to college adjustment.

College is a major transition in anyone's life. For many first-year and transfer students, the university may be their first experience living away from home for an extended period of time. The individual's usual sources of support are no longer present to facilitate adjustment to the unfamiliar environment. Some of the common issues faced by new UCLA students include an increase in personal freedom and responsibility, new demands on academic and personal time, differences in relationships with parents, peers, and instructors, and communicating with roommates. Living with roommates can present special, complex problems, including negotiating respect of personal property, personal space, sleep, and relaxation. These complexities can increase when roommates are of different ethnic/cultural backgrounds with different values and traditions.

There are additional issues that are specific to adjusting to college life from a cross cultural perspective. In growing up, most of us unconsciously integrate the practices, beliefs, attitudes, and values of those around us. Specifically, we become like the people in our home, school, church, and community. This is especially true for those reared in a close knit, stable, and homogeneous environment. As we leave our familiar environment and venture out into new communities, we may encounter people who navigate from similar points of view but we will certainly encounter other people with ideals and values that seem contradictory to our own. Some of the concrete ways these differences manifest include different languages, different political beliefs, different socioeconomic status, and different religious experiences.

A primary issue for students coming from different cultures is coming into an environment that appears insensitive to cultural

differences. Students may face an environment that appears to convey the message that people of different cultures must conform to institutional standards rather than be embraced by an institution with evolving standards more appropriate for the needs of a diversifying student population. Other challenges faced by students of different cultures can include hostile students, culturally ignorant students and faculty, limited and decreasing economic assistance, lack of faculty representing their cultural heritage, classroom and learning style differences, separation from family and friends, culture shock, limited social interactions, and cultural alienation and isolation.

Adjusting to college is a phenomenon that every individual who attends a college or university undergoes. The ways in which different people adjust to college stem from differences in cultural backgrounds as well as personality characteristics. One way to help make the adjustment to university life a smoother transition is to manage your time. It is important to establish your priorities early on and delineate a system for managing all the demands on your time. Another way is to use good study habits. Thirdly, learn to communicate your needs calmly, listen with respect, and be willing to compromise.

Adjusting to university life from a cross cultural perspective can also include other types of resources and ideas. There are probably meetings, functions, and workshops that center around or target your specific race and/or cultural background. Developing social networks and friendships with other students from your home country or cultural background may help you feel supported. Allowing yourself to become more aware of life here at UCLA can help you discover how you might participate in it. It's important to stay grounded while making the adjustment to a new environment, so stay in contact with family and friends from home via email, letters, or phone calls. Above all, do not isolate yourself.

There are a number of campus resources to facilitate your adjustment to UCLA. In addition to the hundreds of political, athletic, spiritual and special interest groups on campus, there are the Campus Clergy, the International Student Center, and various groups and organizations with members who comprise specific cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

The Counseling Center

Counseling and Psychological Services

John Wooden Center West

Monday - Friday, 8am-5pm

24-Hour Crisis Counseling Available

(310) 825-0768

<http://www.counseling.ucla.edu>