CULTURE SHOCK

Definition: "Culture shock" happens when you live in a new culture. Tucson is not like any place you have been before. The buildings look different, clothing is different; trees and plants are different. And, most importantly, the people are different. They speak a different language, have different values, different traditions, and different religions, and eat different food. It will take time for you to adjust to this new environment.

Symptoms Of Culture Shock: At first, you will be excited by the challenge of living in a new culture. It will seem like you are on vacation. As time goes by, however, you slowly realize you are not on vacation; you live here now. You may become depressed; you may not sleep well. You may have trouble concentrating. You may eat poorly. You think that no one understands how you feel. And you will want very badly to go home. These symptoms reinforce each other. Poor eating and sleeping habits will make you feel tired, and your depression will deepen. You may do poorly in classes, which will lower your self-esteem. All of these can contribute to your sense of loneliness. Do not let these feelings control you.

What Can You Do About Culture Shock? You must first realize that you are not alone; it happens to everyone. Every international student has some of these feelings when they come to live in a new country. Talk to other international students about your feelings. Culture shock is often the result of the difference between what you think will happen and what really happens. Sit down and list your expectations of the United States on paper. Analyze them one at a time and throw out the ones that seem unreasonable. If you narrow the gap between expectation and reality, your culture shock will diminish quickly.

It is also wise to be tolerant. You are in a foreign culture that has values, thought patterns, and behaviors quite different from those of your home country. Approach these values, thoughts and behaviors with an open mind. Do not constantly compare the United States to your own country. Instead, get involved with a variety of people in a variety of activities. Participate in CESL and University activities.

Here are some specific things anyone can do to feel better.
- Force yourself to eat and drink well; your body and mind will feel much better.
- Keep a regular sleep schedule; too little sleep (or too much!) makes depression worse.
- Give yourself a break. Adapting to a new culture is a difficult task, and taking time off from your responsibilities will make you feel better.

Feel free to talk about your feelings with the faculty and staff at CESL. If feelings of despair and dislocation do not improve within two or three weeks, go to the Campus Health Service. They have staff members who are trained to help students cope with a variety of problems, and adjustment to Tucson is one of them. Their services are free and private. The Health Service staff will not talk to anyone about your problems.