

# Going home to culture shock

By Sandy Johnstone  
Of the Emerald

Reverse culture shock has been pinpointed as a problem for foreign students returning home after going to school in the United States, according to University counselors.

Graduate student Natascha Affemann can attest to that. She went back to her native Germany during Christmas vacation after a year of school here and she was "ready to come back" when vacation was over.

"It wasn't so hard because I knew I was coming back," says the psychology graduate student. Affemann points out that since she was only home for three weeks she did not experience total reverse culture shock, but she did feel most of the symptoms.

"Certain things just hit me when I returned to Germany," she says. "I got used to a lot of space here (in the U.S.) and felt sort of claustrophobic. The people were unfriendly — cold, grumpy, short. It struck me how little helpful the people were around the airport, not so much for me but for older ladies. It was discouraging."

Affemann's feelings about her own people changed during her year in the United States. "The people are negative in Germany," she says. "All of Europe is resigned in terms of being able to change. They've given up the feeling that they can be effective."

The change in political structure caught her off guard when she returned. "It's a destructive-political atmosphere," she says about Germany. "I could not deal with the peer pressure in German universities to politicize in a destructive manner."

"What struck me most is that you have to give up a certain amount of personal freedom in dress and behavior, and start fitting in again."

International studies counselors at the University try to focus students' attention on their probable reverse culture shock experience through workshops and individual counseling so that problems like Affemann's can be lessened. An estimated 300 foreign students return home from the University each year.

"We are giving them reality therapy," says Peter Briggs, international studies adviser. "A lot of them want to stay here but they are going to have to go back. They need to think realistically about what it will be like."

The students who adjusted

easily to American customs have the most difficult time at home, Briggs says.

"Having been away for so long, you lose touch. All there really is, is your family," she says. "It makes you lonely."

Affemann recommends that students "identify behavior you've learned to value — both routines and habits — and see if they're appropriate in the home country. Prior to going back find ways to continue some of them and find out which ones are really important."

Students should become aware of how stress usually affects them so that they can identify the problem as soon as they notice the symptoms, Affemann says. She suggests thinking of possible ways to alleviate stress before going back and to make sure to do those activities.

Two of Affemann's German friends have experienced reverse culture shock and she says it is interesting to note their different reactions.

One man moved back in with his parents and found the situation "impossible" but has not made an effort to move out. He is going to the University in his home town, but since most of his old friends have moved away and his girlfriend found another man, he feels "very unhappy," she says.

If students encounter alienation when they return home, Briggs recommends getting in touch with other people who have been to the United States to share their feelings.

"In a lot of other cultures people are not willing to share their feelings because it is a sign of weakness," he says. This can pose a problem for those who have learned to share their feelings while they were here, he says.

Another friend of Affemann's is "getting back into" the culture and seems to be reverting to his life before he came to the United States. "He's not very introspective," Affemann says, adding that he usually just adapts to whatever culture he is in.

"Being multi-national is not really fitting in anywhere and having a global perspective," she says. It means feeling comfortable in a lot of different cultures, but not feeling completely at home in any one culture.

Affemann says she is afraid she will act more like an alienated person when she returns home.

"(Traveling) gives you a kind

of schizophrenic look on life," she says. "I'm not sure I want to live in Germany and I'm not sure I want to live here. So where do I go?"

The only way she was able to deal with the problem was to

come back to the United States, she says.

Although she acknowledges that she eventually will have to return to Germany, she wants to take her time. "I'm just too happy here."

**CASH**

For Textbooks  
Mon.-Fri.

Smith Family  
Bookstore

768 E. 13th  
1 Bl. From Campus  
Ph. 345-1551

# 20%

# OFF

(almost)  
everything  
in the  
bookstore

# June 1-5

Everything, yes almost everything, at the University Bookstore will be 20% less, for five days only.

Exceptions...(yes, always exceptions) are textbooks, tobacco products, film and processing, sales merchandise and class rings.

This sale is the best deal of the year. Take advantage and come in today!

**UO**  
BOOKSTORE

13th & Kincaid  
Mon-Fri 7:30-5:30  
Sat 10:00-3:00

Textbooks 686-3520 • General Books 686-3510 • Supplies 686-4331

**emu** Food Service

**SALAD BAR**  
(By the oz.)



Served from 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. M-F