

# CROSS CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

## U-Curve Theory by Oberg

### CULTURE SHOCK

To the student who has decided to explore the world:

You went through a number of preparations in order to come to UGA: making sure that you were academically prepared; securing necessary finances; saying goodbye to the comfort of family, friends, and familiar surroundings; booking travel arrangements; and acquiring language skills, to name a few. Once you are abroad, things should go smoothly, right? You should immediately fit into your new routine in a totally new education and living environment, right? If that actually happens, then you are among a rare group of individuals, indeed! Most people who move between cultures (for study, work, tourism, or to take up a new permanent residence) experience a period of adjustment as they establish themselves in their new environment. The adjustment period may be accompanied by dramatic manifestations of symptoms such as anxiety, headaches, digestive problems, and sleep disorders, or may bring less severe symptoms such as discomfort and a more volatile temperament. Research shows that most people who travel outside their home culture experience cultural adjustment in similar ways which, when charted, have come to be known as The U-Curve of Cultural Adaptation. It is called a “U-Curve” because people generally start at a high point, then experience a decline, or depression, before a leveling off period, then go through a critical “recovery” stage and end up more or less balanced, where they began. When charted, it looks something like this:

**Cultural Adaptation Curve**



*If you should experience any of the difficulties of learning to live in a new culture, it is important to recognize that you are not alone!*

### CULTURAL ADAPTATION IS A NATURAL PROCESS

Your worth as a person, your strength, your stamina and your flexibility are not in question. You are not lessened by the cultural adaptation process; it is simply a natural phase in the overall cross-cultural experience.

### CULTURAL ADAPTATION IS AN INDIVIDUAL PROCESS

You may not experience the adjustment process in exactly the same way as your peers. Each person's experience is shaped by what they bring to it. In the same fashion, the rapidity with which you go through the adaptation is highly individual. For some, it is a question of weeks; for others, months. And some experience the process more than once during their experience abroad!

Some people find cultural differences interesting and stimulating, and they want more! Others, when experiencing discomfort or confusion, have a tendency to judge or evaluate other people and to reach negative conclusions.

