

Coping with College Series

Negotiating a New Culture

by Sonia Beck
Student Counseling Services

Here you are, in the middle of the American continent, a new international student at Illinois State University. You have managed to go through the college application process; pass the test of English fluency; have all of your transcripts and recommendation letters translated; fill out all the necessary immigration paperwork and obtain a visa; prove that you have enough finances to support yourself abroad; raise the money to pay for out-of-state tuition, room, board, expenses, and international air fare. You have also been able to say goodbye to family and friends, home, hometown, pets, loved ones; and stuff your most important belongings inside a few suitcases. After all that, you had to get to an American airport, pass through immigration, find your luggage, travel to Illinois State, find your residence hall, and then your room. Not to mention that English may not be your primary language and that much of the culture could be very different from what you are used to, depending on where you are coming from.

Now what happens?

Depending on a variety of factors, your experiences can fall anywhere on a continuum that ranges from terrible to excellent. Some of these factors you have control of, while others are out of your hands. There are a lot of things that are under your control: making an effort to get to know other students, participating in social events, getting to know the town and surrounding areas, attending all your classes, keeping up with your school work, staying in touch with people back home, finding out the right places to go to get the help you need, etc... But how about the factors that are out of your control?

First, it will be important to learn what is and what is not under your control. Feeling like you are responsible for something that you are not can be a very frustrating experience. You can be left with a sense of helplessness, hopelessness, poor self-esteem and even depression.

It is also critical to remember that although you may not have control over some things, you do have control over yourself. The way you think, feel, and behave in the face of these factors can make a big difference in how they affect you. You also have control over how you interpret what happens to you.

Finally, it's important to know that whatever you are struggling with, you do not have to suffer all by yourself. Having someone you can trust to talk to can prove to be a very healing experience. If you do not yet have a strong support system, or don't want to share your personal problems with the people you know, the Student Counseling Services has support that is available to you. Consider visiting the Counseling Center for a confidential session where we have trained professionals who can assist you. Just call for an appointment at 438-3655.

Welcome, and the best of luck to you in this new and exciting adventure!