“I WANT TO GO HOME!”
TIPS FOR BATTLING HOMESICKNESS
WHEN STUDYING ABROAD

This handout has been adapted from our general handout on managing homesickness.

In our conversations with people struggling to overcome homesickness, we often hear about ways they’ve discovered of making things better for themselves. Below are list of suggestions from students and counselling staff. We hope you’ll find these tips for battling homesickness helpful.

- Throw away any preformed ideas of what to expect once you are there. Be open-minded and curious. Be active in engaging with the place you’ve come to, including the tourist activities.

- Remember that travel is not always easy. Times of feeling low are part of the normal adjustment to living in a new culture. (The ‘curve of adjustment’ model suggests we often feel initially happy, then go through a period of feeling lonely and unhappy before feeling settled, confident and content.)

- Make some connections with people from your own culture, if possible.

- Keep active. Physical activity often lifts our mood.

- Eat well and allow time to recover from jetlag. You may find you need more sleep than usual.

- Read something inspiring or light hearted.

- Keep in touch with friends and family.

- Remember you may need to make more of an effort socially and not rely on it all just falling into place.

- If you feel the need, talk to a counsellor about your feelings – they will listen objectively and be in your corner. (There may be a counselling service at your university or resources in the local community.)

- Break up the study year into smaller parts by getting a year planner or calendar so that you can mark off the days until next holidays, first assignment due date, etc. This helps the time go faster.

- Keep busy – check out what extra-curricular activities are available.
• Pick and choose which social events to participate in – you don’t have to go to all of them, but it is helpful to go to one or two. Some activities may put less pressure on you to talk, e.g. sports or games.

• Establish some kind of routine so that life takes on a sense of normalcy.

• Don’t pressure yourself into making friends immediately; make acquaintances instead so that you don’t box yourself into friendships.

• Write down or remind yourself of why you made the decision to study abroad in the first place – what made this an attractive option, what got you thinking this was the place for you, etc.

• If you sometimes find it’s hard work to overcome homesickness, think about what will make this hard work worthwhile in the long term – e.g. how this will take you on to the next phase of life, better employment prospects, etc. If you’re having trouble thinking about this, ask others who support your decision to study abroad about why it’s worthwhile in their opinion.

• Make a list of the positive things about being away from home (e.g. freedom, etc.)

• Make your room your own! Create an environment that’s comfortable and familiar.

• Make a conscious effort to notice better times – times when homesickness is even a little less strong. What’s different at those times? Does this give you some clues about what you’re already doing to make things better for yourself?

• “Fake it ‘til you make it” – go through the motions of being involved even if your heart’s not in it yet.

• Send photos home so that your friends and family have can get a good understanding of your current life.

• Be safe in using alcohol as being in an unfamiliar environment may place you at greater risk. It is wise not to use drugs as this can lead to an increase in psychological symptoms such as feeling low, unmotivated or paranoid. Also, some countries carry the death penalty for importing, exporting or possession of drugs.

• Cut out some funny cartoons and pin them up. Read a humorous book or rent a funny video.

• Daydream about a positive future – in as much detail as you can.

• Listen to upbeat music.

• Be kind to yourself –living abroad is a big step and needs some time to adjust to.
If it's relevant, think about other times you've been away from home and what helped you get through.