All new students’ first days are ones of adjustment. However, for international students this is even more true. You will be experiencing many different changes when entering college. There are usually four phases that you may experience.

**Phases of Culture Shock:**

1. **Honeymoon:** Everything is great, nothing is wrong; you’re having a wonderful time.
2. **Shock:** There are so many differences in this country that you don’t know how to deal with them. You didn’t think things would be like this.
3. **Negotiation:** You learn to deal with the problems set before you and try to integrate them with your own beliefs.
4. **Acceptance:** You are able to live well in the environment with the differences you are experiencing.
5. **Reverse Culture Shock:** The changes you experience within yourself and your home culture upon returning home.

**Some cultural differences you may experience due to change in customs are:**

1. **Friendship:** Most people you will come in contact with will be friendly. They will talk about current events, politics, hobbies, and sports. However, personal matters are often not spoken about such as financial or family problems.
2. **Dress:** The attire worn is usually informal, unless otherwise told to wear formal clothing. It is not necessary to wear Western-style clothing. Clothing you have brought from home is acceptable.
3. **Greetings:** When Americans greet each other, whether male or female, a handshake is gender ally the custom. Spatial distance is a very important aspect of nonverbal communication. Most Americans stand 3 feet apart when talking.
4. **Schedules:** Americans place a high priority on being punctual. The phrase “time is money” is very common. You will be expected to be on time to events that have specific starting times, such as class, dinner arrangements, appointments, etc.
5. **Professors:** The relationship between student and professor is usually open and informal. Most professors want their students to talk directly to them about any questions they have, in order to resolve them quickly.

**Symptoms of Culture Shock:**

1. Feeling very angry over minor inconveniences; Irritability
2. Withdrawal from people who are different from you
3. Extreme homesickness
4. Overeating or loss of appetite; not being able to sleep or sleeping too much
5. Boredom
6. Headaches; Upset stomach; feeling sick much of the time
7. Small pains that really hurt
8. Depression; crying all the time for no reason
9. Loss of ability to work or study effectively
10. Marital or relationship stress
11. Exaggerated cleanliness
In order to have culture shock, you need not have every symptom on the list. It is possible that only a few may apply to you. These symptoms may also appear at any given time. However, those such as headache and upset stomach should be checked by a physician before you decide it’s only culture shock (Health Services, 737-WELL).

Solutions for Dealing with Culture Shock:

Even though some people may not be able to eliminate culture shock, there are ways to ease the stress. Some of these activities are listed below:

1. **Keep Active.** By getting out of your room or outside of your apartment, you are able to experience first-hand what Americans are doing. If you visit public places, such as a shopping mall or sporting events, you will be able to watch and learn how American customs are practiced.
2. **Make American Friends.** By having friends you can talk to, you are able to ask them questions about what you do not understand.
3. **Keep Your Old Friends Too.** Keep in touch with your friends and family back home on a regular basis.
4. **Read.** Read to gain more knowledge of the culture you are being introduced to. Accessing the Internet is of no cost to you if used on campus.
5. **Take Care of Yourself & Exercise.** Get enough sleep, eat properly and do things you enjoy. By finding an activity that you can enjoy, you will be able to reduce stress and depression. Americans like to run and walk on paths. They also like organized games. Check out the Dodge Fitness Center to find out what programs are available: [http://www.dodgefitnesscenter.com/?DB_OEM_ID=9600](http://www.dodgefitnesscenter.com/?DB_OEM_ID=9600)
6. **Community Activities.** Talk with your Resident Assistant, classmates, or other Americans about community activities, religious services, or volunteer opportunities to help you become a member of the community while you are here.
7. **Work on Your English.** This is an extremely important concept. It is much easier to understand a culture when you can understand the language being used. Don’t worry if you sometimes make mistakes! Ask about any slang terms that you do not understand.
8. **Introduce Yourself to Other International Students.** Other international students may be experiencing the same problems that you are. By talking to them, you may be able to find out ways they are coping with problems.
9. **Try to Look for Logic in Situations.** Looking for the logical reasons why things happen may help you view your host culture in a more positive light.
10. **Try Not to Dwell on the Negatives.** Do not focus too much on the negative aspects of your host culture and stay away from people who do.
11. **Set Realistic Goals.** Do not expect too much from yourself and try to set reasonable standards as high expectations are difficult to meet.
12. **Use Humor.** This helps to reduce stress and helps you laugh at yourself!
13. **BE PATIENT.** Many international students experience culture shock in some way while they are here. Just recognize the problem and give yourself time to get over it. If you need to, keep reminding yourself that this is not permanent. If culture shock continues, you may International Students & Scholars Office (ISSO) at (212) 854-3587 and/or CPS-Counseling & Psychological Services at (212) 854-2878.

Based On Information From:  
[http://www.uwec.edu/Counsel/pubs/shock.htm](http://www.uwec.edu/Counsel/pubs/shock.htm)  
Some Reading Suggestions:  
[http://www.worldwide.edu/travel_planner/culture_shock.html](http://www.worldwide.edu/travel_planner/culture_shock.html)  
[http://international.ouc.bc.ca/cultureshock/1cltshk1.htm](http://international.ouc.bc.ca/cultureshock/1cltshk1.htm)
Tips for Building New Friendships

1. **Initiate** - Friendships don't just happen. Although one person may start a friendship, both partners will need to contribute to the building process. You can initiate a friendship by moving toward a prospective friend and starting a conversation. You will probably have very few friends if you wait for them to come to you.

2. **Be Genuine** - The important thing for you to remember in meeting new people is to be yourself.

3. **Involvement** - The best way to meet people is to put yourself in places where there are likely to be other people who share your interests and values: classes, ticket lines at sporting or cultural events, cashier lines at stores and restaurants, and join an organization! Check out the Student Organizations on campus ([http://www.columbia.edu/content/student-organizations.html](http://www.columbia.edu/content/student-organizations.html)) for information on groups based on religion, athletics, academics, political/special interests, ethnicity/culture, and service or charity.
   a. Once you're with people, initiate a conversation by: asking a question, commenting on the situation, asking for or offering an opinion, expressing some interest, showing some concern, or offering or requesting help.
   b. Once you've engaged someone in conversation, let him or her know you're listening and interested. Make eye contact, adopt an open posture, reflect the feelings you hear, paraphrase what he or she is saying, and ask for clarification if you don't understand.

   **Remember** -
   a. No risks, no gains. Don't be discouraged if you and the other person don’t "click" first and every time.
   b. Involvement includes both COMMUNICATION and LISTENING.
   c. Share feelings, ideas, opinions and activities, and listen - listening to both the speaker's words and feelings conveys your interest.

4. **Non-Verbal Communication** - Send friendly, non-shy signals to others - It helps both you and them loosen up. Remember the word “SOFTEN”
   a. **Smile** - It shows you're friendly and would enjoy the other person's company.
   b. **Open Your Posture** - Uncross your arms and legs; you'll look more relaxed.
   c. **Forward** - Lean toward the person, or move closer to show you're attentive to what he or she is saying.
   d. **Touch** - A hand on another person's arm may be a welcome gesture (make sure the other person is open to this, that you don't touch too much, and you stop if the person says no – this may be used more in familiar relationships.)
   e. **Eye Contact** - This shows that you don't want to miss what's being said.
   f. **Nod** - A nod communicates that you understand what's being said and you're interested in keeping the conversation going.
Academic Environment

Possible Cultural Differences Experienced by International Students:

1. The classroom environment may be completely different.
   a. You do not need permission to leave the classroom (i.e., to go to the restroom etc.)
   b. You can eat/drink in the classroom.
   c. You are expected to participate in classroom discussions (participation is often part of the grade), which includes asking questions if you do not understand something (you will not be marked down for this).
   d. Sometimes Americans may expect you to be the cultural ambassador for your country. You can let them know that your thoughts do not always represent your whole country’s views or beliefs.
   e. There may also be a role transition from being a professional or an expert in a particular field to a student in a new academic environment who is learning a new set of skills. Financial strain could also be an added stressor since books in the United States are often very high priced as are various other aspects of living (i.e. food, housing, etc.).
   f. Cheating and plagiarism may be viewed differently and may have more severe repercussions.

2. The relationship between Professors and students is more informal.
   a. Professors may expect you to come to them if you are having trouble with the class. If you do not feel comfortable discussing your troubles in-person initially, you could rely on emailing them to let them know that you are having difficulties.
   b. It is usually the custom that you call each other by first names (unless otherwise told), however most professors will not mind if you prefer to call them by their surnames, such as Dr. Nagra or Mrs. Ribeiro.

3. Language barriers.
   a. This may lead to a hesitation to participate in class discussions due to lack of confidence in English.
   b. You may worry about being judged all the time.
   c. This may cause some difficulties in carrying out presentations in class which may be part of the grade.
   d. Communicating with professors may be challenging as it may be unacceptable to question and interrupt professors in your native culture.
   e. You may have trouble understanding your text books.
   f. You may experience difficulty in taking notes and keeping up with your professors in the classrooms.
   g. You may have trouble completing essay exams.
   h. You may not understand certain idioms or slang terms.

4. Pressure to maintain high grades (family expectations)

Solutions to Dealing and Understanding this New Academic Environment:

ASK QUESTIONS.

a. Ask people that have studied here previously and understand this system better.
b. Talk to the staff at the International Students & Scholars Office (ISSO) at (212) 854-3587
   c. Approach the Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) at 212-854-2878 for your concerns.
   d. Learn time management skills.
   e. Recognize you are a SUCCESS already for leaving your country and coming to the U.S. to study. Have self-confidence that with some support you will adjust to this new academic experience and do GREAT!