

Tips for Adjusting to Life @ MIT and Boston

Cultural adjustment is a natural part of living and working in a new country. Even if you have lived in the U.S. before, life in a new city or school can create cultural “stress” for even the most experienced foreign visitor. Below is a guide explaining cultural adjustment and providing suggestions for making the process easier.

Stages of Cultural Adjustment

Generally speaking, many people experience four stages of culture adjustment, and each stage lasts a different length of time for every individual who experiences it:

Stage 1: During the first stage, foreign scholars often feel excited. The new country is interesting, the people are friendly and helpful, and the future looks promising.

Stage 2: Problems! Work, language, shopping—everything is difficult. Things that were simple back home require more effort in the U.S. It seems hard to make friends, and at this point, scholars may begin to believe that the local people are unfriendly. Homesickness begins, and along with it complaints about the new country. This is the stage that is referred to as “culture shock.”

Stage 3: Recovery. The foreign scholar begins to use the language more fluently, so communication with locals becomes easier. Customs and traditions become clearer, and slowly the situation passes from impossible to hopeful. Minor misunderstandings which were stressful in Stage 2 become manageable.

Stage 4: Stability. Eventually, scholars begin to feel more at home in the U.S. What they dislike about their new country no longer makes them so dissatisfied and unhappy. Life has settled down, and they are now able to find humor in the situations in which they find themselves.

Tips for Surviving the Adjustment Process

- Be receptive to new experiences. Your culture shock will be less severe if, instead of measuring U.S. culture against your own, you visualize and understand that you are now in a different environment. You can then share, enjoy, and—most importantly—adapt to new situations easily. You will not feel as homesick if you focus your attention on studying this new culture instead of dwelling on what you left behind.
- Get involved! MIT and the Cambridge/Boston area offer many activities. Find organizations and clubs—religious, athletic, social or professional—that share your interests. Joining clubs is a great way to meet people, make friends, and relieve stress. See the ISchO's *Meeting People at and around MIT*.
- Speak English as much as possible. If you are having difficulty living daily life in English, it is tempting to speak your native language frequently and only speak English when absolutely necessary. However, this will actually make the adjustment process longer and more difficult. Consider taking an English class at MIT or at an area language school.
- Ask people to speak more slowly and write down what they say. Do not be afraid to ask someone to slow down! It may seem rude, but actually Americans frequently do not realize how fast they speak. If you are asking for directions or are having more trouble than usual understanding something, ask the person to write it down.
- Speak up if you need help! If you are having any difficulties with your work, life in the U.S., or at MIT, or if you are feeling very unhappy all the time, many people can help. If you are not sure where to go for help with your problem, visit the ISchO and someone will direct you to the appropriate person or department.

About Boston

Boston's Back Bay streets are in alphabetical order: Arlington, Berkeley, Clarendon, Dartmouth, etc. So are South Boston streets: A, B, C, D, etc. If the streets are named after trees (e.g. Walnut, Chestnut, Cedar), you are probably on Beacon Hill.

The colored lights on top of the short Hancock building with the spire on top tell the weather:

-“Solid blue, clear view...”

-“Flashing blue, clouds due...”

-“Solid red, rain ahead...”

-“Flashing red, snow instead...” (Except in summer, when flashing red means the Red Sox game is “rained out.”)

A section of Route 128 is also I-95 South and I-93 North!

Important Vocabulary for Boston

Visitors Call It...

Massachusetts Avenue
Commonwealth Avenue
The subway
South Boston
Jamaica Plain
Patriots (American football team)
Red Sox (Baseball team)

But Locals Call It...

Mass Ave.
Comm Ave.
The “T”
Southie
J.P.
The Pats
The Sox

Important Vocabulary for MIT

Athena...The MIT computing environment

Beaver...The MIT mascot, engineer of the animal kingdom

Brass Rat...Name for the MIT class ring some students and alumni wear on their finger.

Hack...A trick or prank; for example, having a balloon pop out of the field in the middle of the Harvard-Yale football game.

Smoot...A unit of length equal to the height of Oliver Smoot (class of 1962), most commonly used for the Harvard Bridge.

Harvard Bridge...The Mass Ave. bridge from MIT to Boston, which measures 364.4 Smoots +1 ear in length.

Infinite Corridor...A quarter-mile hallway through the heart of MIT; at one time the longest continuous straight corridor in the world.

BONUS! *In mid-November and late January every year, the circular path of the sun crosses the axis of the infinite corridor. When this happens the setting sun can be seen from the far end of the corridor (as viewed from a stationary point on the earth, the path of the sun through the sky is roughly a circle which moves north and south as the seasons go by). The arrangement of the infinite corridor so as to capture the setting sun at a particular moment is sometimes called MIThenge by analogy with Stonehenge.*