

THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA



STUDY ABROAD ORIENTATION HANDBOOK

Prepared by the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia
Office of International Education - Atlanta, GA
<http://www.usg.edu/oie>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREPARATIONS FOR DEPARTURE..... 2

- Passports, Visas, International Student Identity Card, International Calling, Mail and E-mail, Transportation, Travel Arrangements, Packing, Immunizations, Your Health While Abroad, Medical Insurance Coverage, Electricity, Conversions

ACADEMIC AND FINANCIAL AID

MATTERS..... 8

- Academic Issues, Course Registration, Credit Approval, Registering from Abroad, Financial Aid for Study Abroad

HEALTHCARE ISSUES ABROAD..... 9

- Study Abroad Health Information, AIDS & Infectious Diseases, Food Safety, Alcohol and Drugs, Arrival, After Your Trip

SAFETY AND LEGAL MATTERS.....11

- Security, Safe Travel, Women’s Issues, Racial and Ethnic Concerns, Being Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgendered Abroad, Legal Matters, Customs, VAT Refunds, Your Responsibilities as a Study Abroad Participant

MANAGING YOUR MONEY.....15

- Money, Credit Cards, Traveler’s Checks, ATMs, Bank Transfers, Cash Advances, Budgeting Tips

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN

“AMERICAN”17

- Why it is Important to Recognize your “Americanism,” American Cultural Patterns, How to Handle Anti-American Criticism

CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT.....20

- The Importance of Defining Culture, The Implications of Cultural Adjustment, Culture Shock

PLANNING YOUR RETURN HOME.....23

- Making Arrangements, Preparing for Reverse Culture Shock, Levels of Readjustment, Length of Readjustment Period, Coping Strategies

APPENDIX.....27

PREPARATIONS FOR DEPARTURE

Congratulations on your decision to study abroad! We hope this handbook will assist you in making many of the necessary preparations for a terrific experience abroad. Your study abroad program director should be your first source of information about your study abroad program- this handbook is intended to complement other sources of information about your study abroad program and may not contain all the information that directly pertains to your specific study abroad program.

PASSPORTS

A passport is an official government document that certifies your identity and citizenship. With a few exceptions, U.S. citizens need passports to enter other countries. You will need to apply for a new passport if you have never had one before, if your passport was issued before your 16th birthday, or if your passport has expired. The cost is \$85 for a new passport and \$55 for a renewal. Passport information is available online at:

http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html.

Applications are available at county clerk's offices, some post offices, public libraries, and other state, county, township, and municipal government offices. To search for a passport application location nearest you, visit <http://iafdb.travel.state.gov/>.

If you are applying for a passport for the first time, you must apply in person. You will need to provide valid proof of citizenship (certified copy of your birth certificate), proof of identity (valid driver's license and social security card), and two recent passport-size (2' x 2') photos. Your passport should arrive within approximately 6 weeks, but this is not guaranteed. For a fee, you may expedite the passport application process and receive your passport within approximately 2 weeks (not guaranteed).

You may apply for renewal of your passport by mail as long as you satisfy certain conditions. Check the passport Web site for details.

http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/get/renew/renew_833.html.

Be sure to make a copy of the identity page of your passport to give to your parent/guardian, and have an extra copy to keep in a location that is different from

where you store your passport. You should also provide a copy to your study abroad program director or advisor.

STUDENT VISAS

If you plan to be abroad for more than ninety days, most countries require a student visa before allowing you to enter. These regulations vary by country, so check with your program sponsor or the embassy or consulate regarding specific visa requirements.

Embassy information is available online at:

<http://embassy.org/>.

There is almost always a fee for obtaining your visa. The visa application process can take several weeks, so don't wait until the last minute! Delays in obtaining a visa may prevent you from departing the U.S. in time for the start of your program.

Standard items usually required for the visa application are:

- visa application form
- a current, valid passport
- one or more passport-style photographs
- visa application fee
- letter of acceptance from the host institution
- proof of medical insurance and/or a physical from a medical doctor and evidence of financial support during the period of time you will be studying abroad

ISIC CARD

Apply for an ISIC (International Student Identity Card) if it is not included as part of your study abroad program. This card entitles you to certain discounts on airfare, entrance fees, accommodations, area attractions, and some very basic medical insurance and baggage delay reimbursement. For details and an application, go to <http://www.isicus.com/MyISIC/>.

INTERNATIONAL CALLING

Nearly all U.S. long-distance telephone service providers require an access code in order to place a call from an overseas location. You should obtain the access code of your long distance provider prior to departure as it is very difficult to get this information while abroad. The access code will allow you to connect to an English-speaking operator of the long

distance company. There is usually no charge for accessing this number.

Calling collect is expensive, and using your calling card may not be the best option either. Contact your long-distance carrier for information on placing international calls. Be sure to compare calling card rates, as companies are competitive and may negotiate international rates.

Also consider purchasing a pre-paid phone card. Cards can be purchased once you arrive in country and are easy to use from both pay phones and standard phones. These cards can be purchased in various denominations and can be used for local or international calls. Depending on the length of your stay overseas, you might also consider purchasing or renting a mobile phone. In some countries, cell phones are more convenient and less expensive than placing traditional international calls. For country code and international calling information, please see:

http://www.embassyworld.com/directories/global_telephone.html.

*Tip: Place your international call, and have people in the U.S. call you back.

MAIL AND E-MAIL

Check with your program director about the address you should use to receive mail overseas. If you don't know your address abroad, American Express offers customers a mail holding service; mail can be sent to you in care of the appropriate office.

In many countries, stamps are sold at post offices, tobacco shops, in hotels, and in stationary stores. "Aerograms" (lightweight airmail stationery that folds itself into an envelope) are available in post offices and are the cheapest way to send mail.

Although your current e-mail account may be accessible from abroad, you may prefer to open a new email account. To do this, access a free e-mail provider such as www.hotmail.com or www.yahoo.com and create a new account. Internet cafés allow you to access your account for free, but you pay for the amount of time you use the Internet service and computer.

EUROPEAN RAIL PASSES

Since traveling is an integral part of the study abroad experience, it is important to research the most cost-effective way to travel. One option you may want to

consider, especially for travel in Europe, is the train system. Some rail passes cannot be purchased once you are abroad, so it is necessary to plan ahead. Student travel agencies sell rail passes, and students under 26 may be eligible for discounted fares.

Eurail Passes are the most common railroad passes in Europe. A wide variety of options enable you to travel to as many European countries as you like, in whatever time frame you desire. Passes range from the 17-country pass to individual country passes, and from 7 days to 3 months. Having a Eurail Pass eliminates the need to wait in long lines to purchase tickets and can be more economical than buying individual train tickets from one specific city to another. In addition, the pass provides discounted fares on Eurostar - the channel tunnel (chunnel) train between Paris and London or Brussels and London - as well as free or discounted travel on select ferries, lake steamers, boats, and buses. A complete list of bonuses is included on the complimentary Eurail map you will receive with your pass. For more information, see <http://www.studentpasses.com/>.

*Tip: Think about your travel plans before buying a railpass. There are a variety of pass options, and what you select should depend on your travel plans.

TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

You should make flight arrangements as soon as you know the date you are expected to arrive in your host country to start your study abroad program. Keep in mind that some programs have pre-arranged travel plans which are included in the program costs, and some allow you to make your own travel arrangements. In addition to contacting a travel agent about transportation, always compare prices with student travel agencies, and ask about student fares or consolidator fares. If you plan to travel at the end of your program, you may want to consider buying an open-ended return ticket, which usually carries a one-year limit.

The sponsoring organization or host university can assist you with information about your arrival, including the distance from the airport to the campus/hotel and the best means of transportation to your destination. In some cases, your director may meet you at the airport or may require that you get around on your own at first. To avoid panic when your plane lands, make sure you have a transportation plan already in place.

*Tip: Sign up for a frequent flyer program for the airline you'll be flying.

PACKING

It is impractical and impossible to pack everything. The trick is to pack what is essential and what you can carry.

Assume you will over-pack

Consider buying a backpack or rolling luggage - many students find backpacks to be ideal because they leave both hands free. If you are participating on a short-term program, one rolling suitcase and one small carry-on should suffice. Test your ability to manage your luggage. Pack your bags and carry them around the block and up and down some stairs to test whether they are manageable. If not, unpack items until you feel comfortable carrying both your bags with ease.

Make sure to use a luggage tag and also write your name and address (U.S. and host country) inside your suitcase. Be aware that airlines have greatly increased their screening procedures and may require you to open and search checked luggage as well as carry-on luggage. Do not bring items of value that cannot be replaced if lost or damaged. Ask friends and family not to pack 'surprise packages' in your luggage.

Be sure your important documents are in your carry-on luggage, not your checked bag, and that copies of your documents are stored separately (perhaps in your checked baggage). It might be a good idea to carry a change or two of clothing, plus toiletries, medication, irreplaceable items, and any items you may need on the plane in your carry-on luggage.

*Tip: Never leave your bags unattended!

Clothing

Take interchangeable clothing that can be layered. In many cases, people in other countries dress up more than most Americans, so take clothing that can be "dressed up" if necessary. Be sure to bring a good pair of comfortable, sturdy walking shoes as well as one or two pairs of long pants or jeans.

Plan to dress on the conservative side. While tank tops, midriff-baring t-shirts, and short skirts may be normal attire for you to wear on campus, these kinds of outfits may be inappropriate in some countries. Keep in mind that colors and styles are more understated in many countries, so you won't be seeing a lot of plaid, stripes, or bright colors. Avoid clothing with logos, English writing and Greek letters as well as baseball caps, expensive jewelry, tennis shoes, and flip flops - you will instantly stick out as

an American and will have no chance of blending in with locals!

It's important to spend some time trying to learn about how people dress in your host country. Consider buying a few inexpensive outfits once you arrive in your host country so that your clothes will blend in with locals' attire.

Toiletries

Travel-sized items are ideal for shorter study abroad trips and can save on space when packing. Certain brands may be very expensive or unavailable in many areas, so if you must, bring an adequate supply of the product with you. Otherwise, purchase your items once you are in the host country.

Important documents

Passports and other important documents, money, credit cards, and traveler's checks should be carried with you, not packed. These items should be secure but readily accessible for inspection at airports and customs. Consider purchasing a small travel pack or money belt that may be worn underneath your clothing, and keep all valuable items in this pack at all times.

Make a few copies of your passport, visa, airline tickets, credit card, and insurance card. Store them in a safe place separate from where you are carrying the actual items. Leave a copy at home with your emergency contact. If your passport gets lost or stolen, report it to local police, get a written confirmation of the theft or loss, and take the report plus the copy of your passport to the nearest U.S. consulate.

Assessing your health and health-related practices

Before you travel abroad, it is worthwhile to take a close look at the many factors that contribute to your physical and emotional well-being. A trip abroad will almost certainly affect your health since so many factors are related to your lifestyle and environment. Likewise, the state of your health will have a significant impact on the success and enjoyment of your trip. Going abroad is not a magical "geographic cure" for concerns and problems at home. Both physical and emotional health issues will follow you wherever you go.

In particular, if you are concerned about your use of alcohol or drugs, or if you have an emotional health concern, make an honest assessment of your ability to study abroad. Contrary to many people's assumptions, travel does not minimize these problems; in fact, being away from home and your

normal routine often exacerbates problems to a crisis stage. In many countries, resources for drug and alcohol addiction are available. Contact Narcotics Anonymous <http://www.na.org/> or Alcoholics Anonymous <http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org/> for information about NA and AA services abroad.

Disabilities

Students interested in receiving accommodation for a disability during a study abroad program should speak with their director before going abroad. The earlier the request is made, the more likely measures can be taken to provide reasonable accommodations in the host country. Please note that "reasonable accommodations" at the home campus may differ significantly from the host country.

Identify your health needs

Be clear about your health needs when applying for a program. Thoroughly and honestly describe serious allergies, illnesses, disabilities, psychological treatments, dietary requirements, and medical needs to your program director. Keep in mind that resources and services vary widely by country and region - if you have a disability or special need, understand ahead of time exactly what accommodations can and cannot be made. Try to identify medical resources before you leave.

Remember to ask questions, such as:

- What illnesses are endemic to the region?
- What medications should be taken to prevent these illnesses?
- What precautions are recommended for health practices?
- What are the laws governing the importation of medications, medical supplies, and contraceptives?
- What are the customs, beliefs, and laws in the host country concerning sexual behavior and the use of alcohol and drugs?
- What is the quality of water and food?
- What kind of insurance is necessary and how much coverage is needed?

Sources for information include:

- Family physician
- Campus health service or public health department
- National Mental Health Association (<http://www.nmha.org>)
- US Department of Health and Human Services (<http://www.healthfinder.org>)
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (<http://www.cdc.gov>)
- US Department of State (<http://state.gov/travel>)
- Mobility International (<http://www.miusa.org/>)

See your health care practitioners

It is recommended that all students get a thorough physical examination before participating in a study abroad experience. Discuss with your physician your intent to study abroad and get advice for managing your physical and emotional health while in another country. Discuss your health (allergies, disabilities, illnesses, psychological treatment, dietary requirements, and medical needs) with your physician, and seriously consider the appropriateness of your participation in study abroad in your chosen host country. In addition to your general practitioner, a visit to your specialist, gynecologist, and dentist will insure that you are in good health before you leave and may prevent emergencies from occurring while abroad.

While you are at the doctor, be sure to update your health records. If you expect to need regular medical care abroad, get a letter of introduction from your physician at home which provides details on your medical conditions, necessary care, and specific needs. Make copies of all medical records, prescriptions (in generic form), eyeglasses/contact lens prescriptions, and other pertinent information to take with you. Carry these with you in your carry-on luggage and secure them in a safe place upon arrival at your destination.

Medications and contact lenses

If you are taking a prescription medication (allergy medicine, asthma inhalers, birth control pills, antidepressants, etc.), check to be sure the medication is legal and available in your host country as prescribed. The amount of medication you bring with you should last you throughout your stay if possible. Medication sent from the U.S. may be rejected at customs, and while pharmacies in other countries will be able to fill many prescriptions, the medication may be slightly different and could cause abnormal side effects. Keep in mind that your insurance may not cover prescriptions filled outside the U.S.

You'll need a physician's prescription for medication and medical supplies you carry with you in order to pass through customs. If you wear contact lenses, take an extra set of contacts, an ample supply of solution, your written eye prescription, and an extra pair of glasses.

If you have diabetes, you should discuss with your physician any adjustments of insulin doses and timing that may be necessary, especially if you will be traveling across several time zones. Syringes can be construed as drug paraphernalia – if you need to carry needles and syringes with you, be sure to have a

letter of explanation from your doctor to show to customs officers.

*Tip: Be careful with your insulin. Do not store it in a car or other vehicle since insulin may deteriorate if it is frozen or exposed to temperatures of 100°F or higher. The best way to transport insulin on international trips is to carry it with you in a specially designed insulin insulator pack, which is sold at most pharmacies. Once you arrive at your destination, promptly refrigerate your insulin. Consult with your program director prior to departure to ensure adequate access to refrigeration/storage.

Pack a medical kit

It is a good idea to have some basic supplies with you during your study abroad experience. Useful items to pack might include: adhesive bandages, sunscreen, anti-diarrhea medication, antibacterial ointment, disinfectant, tweezers, and pain reliever. You may also want to include water purification tablets, salt tablets, skin moisturizers, and insect repellent. In addition to a medical kit and your prescription medications, you may also wish to pack contraceptives, feminine hygiene products, and any other products you think might be unavailable in the host country. Check the expiration dates of all medications before you leave.

Immunizations

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has an International Traveler's Hotline (404-332-4559) and Web site <http://www.cdc.gov> which allows you to access recorded information on recommended vaccinations and current health conditions in your host country. Many countries do not require specific immunizations. However, there are recommended vaccinations for almost all locations. If you are going to a developing country or to remote areas of your host country, consult the CDC Traveler's Hotline several months in advance of your departure as they may suggest vaccinations as early as six months in advance.

Mental health

Not all countries have mental health support services similar to what we are accustomed to in the U.S. Whether students have utilized mental health services in the past or not, it is important for students to know the availability of services in their host country.

Actions:

- All students should be prepared for cultural adjustment before studying abroad. Although advanced reading and preparation will not prevent students from experiencing cultural adjustment

problems, it will prepare them for the symptoms, the cycle of adjustment, and some helpful advice for a successful adjustment.

- Students who are currently using/have utilized mental health services in the past should contact their campus mental health clinic or physician before going abroad in case a telephone consultation is required while abroad.
- Students under the supervision of a mental health care practitioner should seriously discuss the advisability of participating in study abroad and issues related to cultural adjustment.

MEDICAL INSURANCE COVERAGE

Check with any current domestic policy that you may have for out-of-country coverage, and check into the policy payments and claims procedure. If you need to file a claim from overseas, expect to pay for medical services up front and file for reimbursement from your insurance company.

You should check with your program director to determine what coverage may be provided or required. The International Student Identity Card (ISIC) provides some very basic insurance coverage, but you should have comprehensive insurance that provides coverage for all major medical concerns.

CISI offers insurance coverage for University System of Georgia study abroad participants. Information about the USG CISI insurance policy can be found at: <http://www.culturalinsurance.com/>. Your program director will need to enroll you in this plan and can help you understand what kind of additional insurance coverage (trip interruption and cancellation insurance) you may need.

Available resources in your host country

Learn how to get medical help, whether routine or emergency, before the need arises. Determine how to access emergency services in the host country. Ask the program director for specific information on emergency protocols in all types of emergency situations. Find out about the host country's emergency services access number (911 in the U.S.) and the services it can access (fire, police, hospital).

*Tips:

- Investigate the health issues present in your host country.
- Be sure you are adequately prepared to manage all your health care needs while abroad.
- Be familiar with your insurance coverage and procedures for filing claims.
- Inform your program director of all medical needs.

ELECTRICITY

U.S. outlets, along with most of North and South America, the Caribbean and Japan, use 110-voltage electricity; most countries in Europe and other parts of the world use 220-volt electrical outlets. If you try to use an American appliance in a 220-volt outlet, the appliance will overheat and could shock you or start a fire. Verify the current and voltage of the outlets in the country you will be visiting, as well as the type of plug used.

To use an American appliance in different voltage/current/outlets, you will need a transformer and a plug converter. For a hair dryer, travel iron, or similar appliance, you will need a 50-1600-watt transformer. If an outlet is labeled "for shavers only," only use an appliance that operates at 15 to 20 watts. For more information on electricity and plugs abroad, please see Franklin Electric's World Electric Power Guide at <http://www.fele.com/empd/tech/fe-power.html>.

Keep in mind that it may be simpler to buy one or two small appliances overseas. Some students have reported that their American appliances did not work well with a transformer.

CONVERSIONS

Length

1 inch (in)	=	2.54 centimeters (cm)
1 foot (ft)	=	.3 meters (m)
1 yard (yd)	=	.91 m
1 mile (mi)	=	1.61 kilometers (km)

1 cm	=	.39 in
1 m	=	3.28 ft and 1.09 yd
1 km	=	.62 mi

Temperature

30° Fahrenheit (F)	=	-1.1° Celcius (C)
40° F	=	4.4°C
50° F	=	10°C
60° F	=	15.5°C
70° F	=	21.1°C
80° F	=	26.7°C
90° F	=	32.2°C
100° F	=	37.8°C

5°C	=	41°F
10°C	=	50°F
15°C	=	59°F
20°C	=	68°F
25°C	=	77°F
30°C	=	86°F
35°C	=	95°F
40°C	=	104°F
50 °C	=	122°F
100°C	=	212°F

Weight

1 ounce (oz)	=	28.3 grams (g)
1 pound (lb)	=	.45 kilograms (kg)

1 g	=	.04 oz
1 kg	=	2.2 lb

Volume

1 teaspoon (tsp)	=	4.9 millileters (ml)
1 tablespoon (Tbsp)	=	14.8 ml
1 fluid ounce (fl oz)	=	29.6 (ml)
1 cup (c)	=	236.6 ml
1 pint (pt)	=	.47 liters (l)
1 quart (qt)	=	.94 l
1 gallon (gal)	=	3.78 l

1 liter	=	1.06 qt
1 liter	=	1.76 pt
1 liter	=	.26 gal

ACADEMIC AND FINANCIAL AID MATTERS

ACADEMIC ISSUES

There are a number of important academic matters that must be taken care of before you leave to study abroad as well as when you return. Please review this section regarding procedures and consult your program director and/or home campus study abroad advisor if you have any questions.

COURSE REGISTRATION

Check with your program director about the correct procedure to register for the courses you will take while abroad. Follow his/her instructions and be sure to ask questions if you are not clear about the process.

CREDIT APPROVAL

Every college or university has its own policies regarding the transfer of credit. If your study abroad program is not through your home campus, check with home campus officials to determine how the transfer credit process works. It is likely that you will need to get prior approval to transfer your study abroad credits back to your home campus.

It is important to also find out where to send your study abroad program transcript so that you do receive academic credit for your study abroad experience. Make arrangements with your program director and/or sponsoring organization to have an official transcript sent back to the appropriate office at your home institution.

REGISTERING FROM ABROAD

Make arrangements to register for your next semester's courses before you go. Speak with your academic advisor about this process. Keep a copy of all names, phone numbers, postal and e-mail addresses of campus staff that you MIGHT need to contact during your time away. Declare your major if you have not already done so. Clear all registration flags and make sure all outstanding balances are paid.

FINANCIAL AID FOR STUDY ABROAD

It is likely that you can utilize most, if not all, of the same financial aid that you would qualify for while on campus. Check with your financial aid office as soon as possible to determine how to use your financial aid for study abroad. Examples include: federal financial aid, state financial aid (including the HOPE Scholarship), institutional scholarships, and most external scholarships. The financial aid office at your school should reassess your need, based on the actual cost of studying abroad, and will make appropriate adjustments to your financial aid package.

STUDY ABROAD SCHOLARSHIPS & LOANS

There are some scholarships available for study abroad. The USG Office of International Education has compiled a comprehensive list of study abroad scholarships, and there are several publications about financial aid, grants, and scholarships for study abroad. Information about these scholarships can be found in your campus study abroad office. Some helpful financial aid Web sites on the USG Office of International Education Web site can be accessed at: http://www.usg.edu/oie/study_abroad/fin_aid.phtml. It is important to note, however, that most scholarship deadlines are much earlier than study abroad program deadlines, so be sure to check out financial aid options early.

The International Education Finance Corporation (IEFC) offers loan programs to help participants pay for their study abroad experience. For more information, see: <http://www.iefc.com>.

HEALTHCARE ISSUES ABROAD

Adjusting to life in a new country means excitement, challenges, and the unexpected. Since you are not a citizen of the host country, you are not usually given the same medical care benefits as its citizens.

Arranging and paying for medical care while abroad is your responsibility.

STUDY ABROAD HEALTH INFORMATION

Medical facilities and services

Medical facilities and services will not be the same in every country. It is important to understand as much as possible about the facilities and services in your host country before you need them. Be sure you know where to go for minor illnesses and major medical emergencies, and learn how to say a few key phrases in the local language to describe your medical needs.

Notify proper authority of your medical needs

If you require regular medical care for any condition you have, tell those in your host country who can be of assistance. Make sure to notify the program coordinator, resident advisor, host family, or proper program supervisors of your disabilities and special needs.

CONCERNS ABOUT AIDS, HEPATITIS, AND OTHER INFECTIOUS DISEASES

The AIDS virus and the hepatitis virus are primarily transmitted through blood or body fluids. AIDS and HIV infections cases have been reported worldwide. Because AIDS cases exist worldwide, risk of infection is determined not by location, but by risky behavior on the part of the traveler. To avoid AIDS and hepatitis infection, employ appropriate preventive measures. If at all possible, avoid injections, dental procedures, tattoos, acupuncture, or skin-piercing procedures. If injected medications are necessary, insist that all needles, syringes, and IVs be individually wrapped and disposable.

In developing countries, it is best to avoid blood transfusions. Unfortunately, this may not be possible if you are in a serious accident. However, in some cases, a safe plasma expander may be used instead of blood products to stabilize trauma victims until an evacuation service can bring in safe supplies or transport the victim to safely equipped facilities.

Abstinence from any sexual activity (homosexual or heterosexual) is the best way to prevent AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. If you do engage in sexual contact, it is imperative that you use latex condoms. Be advised that the use of latex condoms does not entirely eliminate the risk of HIV/AIDS transmission, nor of other sexually transmitted diseases. For more information on AIDS, STDs, and other infectious diseases, see <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/dhap.htm>.

Some countries now require incoming foreigners to take the HIV antibody test. This requirement would typically be disclosed during the visa application process. Check with the nearest embassy or consulate for your destination country about HIV testing regulations.

Water-borne illnesses and diseases

Swimming in non-chlorinated water puts you at risk of contracting certain illnesses and diseases, especially in tropical areas. Infections such as hepatitis, cholera, and other skin, ear, or respiratory infections can result from swimming in warm, stagnant water or water contaminated by sewage or waste-water runoff. Be sure to obey posted “no swimming” signs.

Food and beverage contamination

Watch what you eat while abroad. Travel brings your body in contact with different bacteria, and this change can upset your stomach and digestive tract. Water, ice, unpasteurized milk or juices, raw cheeses, and other raw fruits and vegetables can make you ill. Also watch for contaminated foods due to poor refrigeration or unsanitary preparation methods.

**Note to vegetarians and vegans*

It may be extremely difficult, or even impossible, to maintain a vegetarian or vegan diet while abroad, and refusal to eat meat or other “delicacies” may be perceived as highly offensive in your host country. Develop strategies to deal with this possibility, especially if you will be living with a host family. You may also wish to bring with you dietary supplements, protein powder, or vitamins to supplement your diet while abroad. Be sure to leave all supplements in their original packaging.

ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

Study abroad accidents and injuries are often related to the use of alcohol and drugs. Many study abroad participants will be in countries where they will be of legal age to consume alcohol. Resisting social and cultural pressures to drink may be difficult for some students. If you find that your drinking habits have changed, ask yourself why. Make yourself aware of the impact drinking or use of drugs has on yourself and others. If you find that your drinking or drug use has led to unpleasant or embarrassing situations, this may be a telling sign. Establish rules for yourself to guide your drinking habits, such as setting a personal limit or deciding to drink only with meals. Seek out Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous organizations if you need help.

Some cultures do not consume alcohol in the way Americans do. Public drunkenness is not acceptable behavior in many countries. Remember you are an ambassador for your U.S. college or university. Behave in a way that is respectful of others, and encourage others to do the same.

Last year, over 30% of Americans arrested abroad were arrested for the use, possession, purchase, sale or transport of illegally banned substances. Some drugs may be legal in some countries but not in others. Violation of drug laws abroad may result in very serious consequences, including consequences as serious as the death penalty. Don't take the risk.

WHEN YOU ARRIVE

Jet lag

Depending on where you fly, you may experience jet lag or traveler's stress. Some helpful ways to counteract jet lag include: getting plenty of rest, eating healthy food, drinking plenty of fluids (particularly non-carbonated juice and water), avoiding caffeine and alcohol, and wearing loose, comfortable clothing.

Calling home

Call home when you arrive to reassure family and friends that you arrived safely. While it is a good idea to keep family and friends informed, it is important to keep in mind that you should avoid calling home when you are upset or feeling homesick. If something is bothering you, discuss your problem or concern with your program director, but hold off on calling home until the next day. Often you will discover that the situation has improved with time, and you will have successfully avoided upsetting your parents/guardians or friends unnecessarily.

Discover new lifestyles

Lifestyles in your host country may be different from those at home. Many of the experiences and everyday practices you might take for granted in the United States may be perceived and accepted differently in your host country. Find out how this new culture views relationships, dating, leisure time, holidays, and other customs. An exciting world awaits you.

AFTER YOUR TRIP

Sometimes the onset of an illness picked up during international travel does not occur until weeks or even months after returning home. Symptoms may not surface for as long as 180 days after some infections. Keep this in mind after you return.

SAFETY AND LEGAL MATTERS

Campus life in other countries is different than it is in the United States, especially in urban areas. Traveling may give you a new sense of freedom and a false sense of security. It is very important to be aware of your environment and take necessary measures to ensure your safety at all times.

SECURITY

No matter how safe your campus and community appear to be, you should acquaint yourself with your new environment by reading information provided by your home campus or host institution once you arrive on-site. Explore your new neighborhood and campus during the day and become familiar with areas around you. Ask fellow students or staff members about risky areas you should avoid, especially those to avoid at night.

Be cautious

- Exercise the same precautions you would in any U.S. city; in unfamiliar surroundings, you may not be aware of safety concerns.
- Always carry your local address and telephone number with you.
- Do not give out your name or address to unknown people.
- Meet guests in the lobby of your hotel.
- Know where the nearest police station and hospital are and keep emergency numbers handy.
- When traveling, avoid a late-night arrival, especially if you have not made arrangements for lodging beforehand.
- Always let someone know your whereabouts, and try to avoid going out alone.
- Take the same precautions you would at home, and follow your instincts- if something makes you uneasy, there is a reason.

Stay informed

- Before you go, learn about the issues and news in your host country. Ask your program director for the names of newspapers that provide good international coverage and analysis of local issues.
- Once in your host country, continue to keep up with local and regional news.
- Become familiar with common laws and customs of the host country.

Be alert

- Be aware of your surroundings. Watch for unknown individuals loitering in/around your building or any unusual activity occurring nearby.
- Don't allow yourself to be distracted while reading street signs, bus schedules, or while talking on a pay phone on the street.
- If you must consult a map, do so before venturing out, or duck into a store to read it and get your bearings.
- Walk briskly, with confidence and a sure stride, even if you are lost.
- Try to ask for directions from a police officer, bus driver, store clerk, or some other individual rather than just someone random on the street.
- When carrying your camera, be discreet, and never leave it unattended in a bus, train, or taxi.

Personal safety

- Do not go into unsafe or unknown areas alone, especially after dark.
- Do not take shortcuts through alleys or poorly-lit areas.
- Take a cab or walk with a friend.
- Do not accept food or drink from strangers, and don't leave your drink unattended.
- Avoid public demonstrations or protests.
- Know how to use a pay phone.
- Learn a few key phrases in the local language so that you could ask for help if necessary.

Safety of your belongings

- Keep your eye on your luggage at all times- many thieves pose as porters or taxi drivers.
- Use money belts or a concealed neck pouch for your passport, visa, money, credit cards, and other documents.
- If possible, avoid carrying a handbag or purse – it advertises that you are carrying money or valuables. If you must carry a purse or bag, be sure it is of sturdy fabric that cannot be ripped or cut, and keep it tucked under your arm, with your hand on the zipper or closure. If it has a shoulder strap, wear the strap over one shoulder and across your body instead of allowing the bag to dangle off your shoulder.
- If you must carry a wallet, carry it in your front pocket with a rubber band wrapped around it, or use an empty “decoy” wallet for your back pocket. Only use authorized money-changing agents (bank or exchange kiosk).
- Use the hotel safe.

- Don't leave your luggage unattended in an unlocked area. If you want to explore a new city, leave your belongings in lockers or a secure "checked luggage" area at a train or bus station.

Emergency protocol

The majority of students participating in study abroad never experience an emergency while abroad.

However, any emergency is less traumatic when you are prepared to deal with it effectively and efficiently. It will make you feel more comfortable if you take the time to prepare an emergency protocol when you arrive at your host location.

Actions:

Carry some form of identification with you at all times (your name, your host country address, host country phone number, passport and visa number).

- Carry emergency numbers and contacts with you:
 - local police
 - program coordinator in host country
 - parent/guardian/emergency contact at home
 - home campus police and international office contact information
 - U.S. embassy in host country
 - insurance contact information
 - physician and mental health practitioner at home
- Know where the local hospitals and police stations are located and how to get there.

TRAVELING SAFELY

Travelers are often victims of crime because they are unfamiliar with their surroundings, may not speak the local language, are traveling with valuables, and stand out as foreigners. To ensure your safety while traveling, follow these tips:

- Do not display money, wallet or other valuables.
- If you travel independently, leave your travel itinerary with the host coordinator.
- Use a money belt or neck pouch to carry your passport and money.
- Never leave any luggage or bags unattended or unlocked.
- Beware of pickpockets and purse-snatchers in overcrowded areas; thieves tend to bump into you casually and take what they can while you are distracted.
- Do not stand on the edge of a train or subway platform.
- Be careful on overnight trains. Choose a car or compartment in a train or subway in which others are riding. Lock your compartment while you sleep. Keep your valuables on your person.

- Note the location of emergency equipment and exits.
- If someone is bothering you, inform the driver or train operator.
- Avoid unwanted attention and confrontations.

International driving permit

If you intend to drive while abroad, you should apply for an international driver's license through the American Automobile Association (AAA). For information about the international driver's license go to http://www.aaasouth.com/travel_drivers.asp. Some host countries require this license, while others will accept your U.S. license. We do not recommend that you drive while abroad, and the use of scooters, motorcycles, and mopeds should be avoided. Motorists in many countries drive on the opposite side of the road than in the U.S., and traffic laws, patterns and driving conditions also vary significantly. Most automobile insurance policies will not cover accidents in a foreign country.

WOMEN'S ISSUES

Some female students in certain overseas locations have a hard time adjusting to attitudes they encounter in both public and private interactions between men and women. Eye contact between strangers or a smile at someone passing in the street, which is not uncommon in the States, may result in totally unexpected and unwanted attention. Men in some countries openly demonstrate their appraisal of women in ways that American women may find to be offensive. It is not uncommon to be honked at, stared at, verbally appraised, or actively noticed. Sometimes the attention can be flattering. However, it may be very annoying or unsettling. The best advice is to steadfastly ignore and refuse to acknowledge this attention.

To determine strategies to manage this attention, take cues from the women in your host country. Watch how they dress, speak, and behave. You will have to learn the unwritten rules about what you can and cannot do or wear while abroad. Learn the customs or norms for your destination.

American women are sometimes stereotyped, and sometimes cultural misunderstandings can occur as a result. Be careful about the implicit messages you may be unintentionally communicating. Try to keep in mind that these experiences are part of the growth of cultural understanding - one of the important reasons you are studying abroad. Do not allow yourself to be judgmental. Instead, try to prepare

yourself for the likelihood that this may happen, and don't be surprised by it when it does.

RACIAL AND ETHNIC CONCERNS

No two students studying abroad ever have quite the same experience. Reports from past participants vary—some students feel exhilarated by being free from the American context of race relations; others report varying degrees of ‘innocent’ curiosity about their ethnicity; and some feel they met both familiar and new kinds of prejudice and had to develop new coping strategies. Very few minority students conclude that racial or ethnic problems encountered in other countries represent sufficient reasons for not going abroad. Remember, you will probably be viewed primarily as “American” regardless of your racial or ethnic heritage.

BEING LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL OR TRANSGENDERED ABROAD

It is important to be aware of the laws pertaining to homosexuality in other countries, as well as the general attitudes toward gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered members of the community. Country-specific information is often available from campus offices, personnel and student groups. You should certainly talk with other students who have been abroad to your destination. You also may want to consult publications available in bookstores and libraries. For a comprehensive list of resources, including travel guides, Web links, and other information for GLBT students, see: <http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/student.htm>.

LEGAL MATTERS

There are a number of common legal matters you should be aware of, regardless of your host country. The most important thing to remember is that you, as a foreign visitor to your host country, are subject to the host country's laws and judicial systems. The American legal and judicial systems do not have any jurisdiction in foreign countries. Once travelers leave U.S. jurisdiction, U.S. laws or U.S. constitutional rights do not apply. Adhere to local laws strictly—do not assume that what is legal in the United States is also legal in other countries.

Registering

Some countries require international students to register with the local police. Your host coordinator will likely advise you if you need to do this. It is also a smart idea to register with the U.S. consulate or

embassy once you arrive in the country. Registering helps you to stay informed during times of crisis.

Working abroad and work permits

Since you will be participating in an academic program, you should take full advantage of the opportunity to study and travel. If you would like to work abroad after the completion of your program or at a later point in time, you can get information on work abroad opportunities from the Internet or the campus international office. Keep in mind that most countries require visitors to obtain a special work permit or work visa in order to be legally employed. Working illegally or “under the table” can result in imprisonment or deportation.

Illegal drugs

DO NOT travel with any illegal drugs. Not only will you jeopardize your experience abroad by taking such a risk, you will also be dismissed from your study abroad program if you are caught using drugs. The U.S. government can assume no responsibility if you are arrested for drug use. Even in places where the use of drugs by local citizens is grudgingly accepted by authorities, foreign students are dealt with very differently from locals. If approached by someone selling drugs, walk away. Do not respond, because a conversation with a suspected narcotics dealer is seen as an act of intent to purchase in some countries. Penalties in most countries are much more severe than in the U.S., and the U.S. embassy will be powerless to intervene on your behalf. Legal systems and civil rights are vastly different in some countries; many countries do not offer the possibility of bail, a jury trial, or an English-speaking attorney.

Arrests abroad

What U.S. consular officers CAN do:

- Insofar as it is possible, ensure that the detainee's rights under local law are fully observed and that humane treatment is accorded under international standards.
- Visit the U.S. citizen as soon as possible after the foreign government has notified the U.S. embassy or consulate of the arrest.
- Provide the detainee with a list of local attorneys from which to select defense counsel.
- Contact family and/or friends for financial or medical aid and food if requested to do so by the detainee.

What U.S. consular officers CANNOT do:

- Demand the release of a U.S. citizen.
- Represent the detainee at trial, give legal counsel, or pay legal fees or other related expenses with U.S. government funds.
- Intervene in a foreign country's court system or judicial process to obtain special treatment.

Customs

If your laptop computer, watch, camera, camcorder, or similar device was made outside the U.S., you should probably register the item with U.S. Customs before you depart to avoid having to pay a duty on it when you return to the United States. Documents that fully describe the item - for example, sales receipts, insurance policies, or jeweler's appraisals - are acceptable forms of proof that you owned the item prior to your trip abroad. Take the items to the nearest Customs Office and request a Certificate of Registration (Customs Form 4457).

You will be required to go through Customs Inspection and Immigration Control upon arriving in your host country. Be prepared to show your passport and visa as well as any prescriptions for medications you are carrying.

Power of attorney

If your signature will be needed for any official or legal document during your absence, you should make arrangements for "power of attorney" to be held by an appropriate person to act on your behalf. You can do this by writing out in detail the specific duties that the person you choose will execute. Take this to a notary public and have it notarized.

Your responsibilities as a study abroad participant

Keep in mind that study abroad programs impose inherent risks, and neither the University System of Georgia nor your sponsoring university or host university can guarantee your safety or eliminate all potential risks. While every effort has been made to ensure your safety, the USG cannot monitor or control all activities and behaviors of participants nor can it assure U.S. standards in all situations. It is up to program participants to accept a higher level of responsibility for their behavior, safety, and actions. The decisions made by study abroad participants and their behavior and actions impact health and safety issues of themselves and other program participants. Just as program sponsors have a responsibility to program participants, participants themselves have several responsibilities related to participation and behavior while on the study abroad program.

Be familiar with matters relating to health concerns, legal issues, safety, and political conditions in the host country or countries you will visit. You have an obligation to prepare yourself and participate fully in program orientations. It is your responsibility to maintain adequate health insurance coverage while abroad. You must disclose personal information that may be necessary to ensure a safe and pleasant study abroad experience, and this may include providing accurate and complete physical and mental health information. You are required to comply with the program's terms of participation, codes of conduct, and emergency procedures; and you should express any health or safety concerns that you may have to the program director. Finally, you should respect the rights and well being of others, and encourage others to behave in a similar manner.

MANAGING YOUR MONEY

Managing your finances is one of the most important and challenging aspects of a successful and enjoyable academic experience abroad. Dealing with a new currency and cost of living are just the beginning of the challenge. Before you leave home, know the exchange rate between the U.S. dollar and your host country's currency. Become familiar with the local currency and its dollar value equivalent, and bring with you a pocket calculator to help with the conversion.

HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

It is very difficult to make recommendations on the amount of money you will need while abroad, but it is likely that you will spend as much as you take. Since items included in your program fee will vary, make sure you know how much money you will require beyond what you pay for the program fee. The amount you will need for incidental expenses will depend on your lifestyle as well as local costs. Take a close look at your expenses and prepare a budget for yourself based on the estimated expenses you identify.

MONEY

Local currency

It may be wise to have some cash in the host country's currency before leaving for your trip abroad. You may purchase foreign currency in most banks in the U.S., but it is advisable to wait until you are in your host country to change larger amounts of money. Always change money at an official money exchange kiosk or bank; never change money on the street. If you do carry cash, do not keep it all in one place. Never carry your wallet in an outside pocket of your backpack or purse or in your back pocket.

Traveler's checks

Traveler's checks are a convenient and safe way to carry money. In addition to being easy to cash, they are accepted for payment of goods and services at many establishments and are usually treated like cash. (Keep in mind however that not all countries accept traveler's checks, so to be sure to check before you go.) Keep the receipt of the traveler's check numbers separate from your checks. If the traveler's checks are lost or stolen, they can be replaced as long as you have a record of the serial numbers of the lost or stolen checks. Traveler's checks can be purchased

at just about any bank in the United States, usually at the rate of one percent more than the value of the checks you are buying. American Express also issues traveler's checks, and American Express has offices in major cities around the world. If you are a member of AAA, you can get American Express traveler's checks without any surcharge. Traveler's checks issued in dollars can be exchanged for local currency at banks and money changing houses overseas for a small fee. Keep in mind that you will need your passport as identification to cash or change traveler's checks.

Credit cards

Credit cards are useful for store purchases, emergencies and cash advances (though higher interest rates are often charged for cash advances). Most major credit cards are honored abroad, but American Express, Visa and MasterCard are the most universally accepted. Be aware that credit cards are not accepted in some developing countries. Before departure, be sure to determine whether or not payment by credit card is universal and common in your host country, and do not rely on a credit card as your sole source of funding while abroad. If credit cards are universally accepted and used, they are often a good way to make purchases as they tend to offer the best exchange rate. Be aware that credit card purchases do add up, and the interest charged on an outstanding balance adds up quickly. If you are abroad for more than four weeks, you should make arrangements to have someone pay your monthly credit card bill to avoid late-payment charges. To safeguard your credit card, know the customer service number, and keep a photocopy of your actual credit card in case it is lost or stolen.

Debit/ATM card

ATM machines are available in major cities and are a fast, commission-free way to obtain foreign currency. A debit or checking card is excellent for international travel because it allows you to withdraw money from your bank account in the United States in the currency of the host country. Debit cards with Visa, MasterCard, Cirrus or Plus symbols are the most widely accepted cards. Any transaction will automatically debit the money from your checking account in the United States at that day's exchange rate. There may be a small transaction fee for using ATMs abroad, so be sure to check the fees charged per each transaction. Be sure that you (and someone

trustworthy back home) know your PIN (personal identification number).

Advances/check cashing

Cashing personal checks is typically not a convenient or efficient way to obtain local currency. While it is becoming easier to transfer money from a home account to a bank overseas for withdrawal, these advances are often treated as loans, so you can only obtain an advance that is equal to your line of credit. A high interest rate is also charged. Any bank that honors your type of credit card will help you draw funds in foreign currency as a cash advance. Consider using American Express- any American Express office will cash personal checks from a U.S. bank account at no charge for American Express customers.

Wire transfers/bank drafts

If you think you might need to use bank transfers or have funds sent to you in the form of a bank draft, visit your bank before you leave and ask them for a list of the corresponding banks in your host city. Let them know who is authorized to initiate cable transfers for you. Once abroad, you can contact your home bank and usually receive the money within 48 hours. Be advised that you will probably have to pay the cabling charges both ways in addition to a commission charged by the host bank. Money can also be wire transferred from home through American Express; this type of transfer will take two to five days and the charge varies according to how much money is sent. Alternatively, you can notify your home bank and request that a bank draft in your name be mailed to you, but keep in mind that this may be less reliable than a wire transfer.

BUDGETING

When formulating a budget, consider length of stay, your spending habits, style of living, amount and method of travel, and academic costs. Think about any expensive souvenirs you hope to buy and any gifts you will want to purchase. It is recommended that you take approximately 20% more money than you think you'll need. Your best resource is to talk to other students who have been on the same or similar programs and then factor in your personal spending habits and needs while abroad.

Things to consider when creating a budget

- plane ticket and airport departure tax (if not included in the program price)
- travel within host country or continent (rail, plane, boat, ferry, bus, car, etc.)
- local travel (train, bus, subway, taxi, etc.)
- passport
- insurance (if not included in the program fee)
- student ID card
- shipping
- travel books
- food
- entry fees for museums/attractions
- school supplies, textbooks
- entertainment costs
- film
- Internet/email/phone charges
- stamps/mailing supplies
- gifts
- souvenirs
- laundry, personal expenses

Tips from students

- Don't develop your film overseas.
- Always present your ISIC or other student ID card for discounts.
- Bypass expensive restaurants during the day – opt for fruit or bread at local markets.
- Try some local favorite dishes or specialties.
- Call your nation's tourist board for information about student discounts.
- Don't waste money on "junk" souvenirs.
- Take overnight trains to save the cost of overnight accommodations.
- Remember that spending a little bit of money will be worth the experiences and memories; don't skimp on museums, must-see attractions, or travel opportunities just to save a few bucks.
- Never sacrifice your safety or health to save money.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AMERICAN

Are you Swedish-American, Mexican-American, African-American, or just American? How do you identify yourself? Whoever you are, however you define yourself, you will bring some "cultural baggage" with you wherever you go. Cultural baggage can be defined as the assumptions you have about yourself, your family, friends, and the world based on your own experience. Cultural baggage can weigh you down at times, but it can also be used as a resource to help you through uncomfortable situations. Understanding your own cultural baggage will help you in the quest to understand someone else's.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE YOUR "AMERICANISM"

Meeting people from other places is exciting. It is a shock when you are met with negative feedback because you are an American. When faced with negative reactions, it may feel as though you are being attacked personally and criticized for being American.

As you spend more and more time in your host country, you will begin to recognize several cultural patterns that are quite different from your own. These cultural patterns include differences in style, assumptions, values, cultural norms, perception, motivation, forms of achievement, etc. Although these differences are just the tip of the iceberg, it is still important to recognize your own "American" patterns and what they mean to you.

AMERICAN CULTURAL PATTERNS

Dr. L. Robert Kohls, Director of International Programs at San Francisco State University, is a renowned literary contributor to the research on cultural patterns. He has developed a list of 13 commonly held values that help explain to first-time visitors to the United States why Americans act the way they do. As an American, do you recognize these traits in yourself? Whether you are willing to accept these generalizations about Americans or not, it is important to recognize that these stereotypes exist.

Personal control over one's environment

Americans do not believe in the power of fate. In the American context, to be "fatalistic" is to be superstitious, lazy or unwilling to take the initiative.

Americans believe that everyone should have control over his or her own environment and think that problems stem from laziness and unwillingness to take responsibility - not from fate or bad luck.

Change is seen as natural and positive

In the American mind, change is seen as indisputably good, leading to development, improvement, and progress. Many older, more traditional cultures consider change to be disruptive and destructive; they value stability, continuity, tradition and a rich and ancient heritage - none of which tend to be highly valued in the United States.

Time

Time is of utmost importance to most Americans. Americans are more concerned with getting things accomplished on time than they are with developing interpersonal relations. This philosophy has enabled Americans to be extremely productive, and productivity is highly valued in the U.S.

Equality/fairness

Americans believe that all people are "created equal" and that all should have an equal opportunity to succeed. This concept of equality is strange to many people of the world; status, rank and authority are more important.

Individualism and independence

Americans view themselves as highly individualistic in their thoughts and actions. In the U.S., you will find people freely expressing a variety of opinions anywhere and anytime. Individualism leads to privacy, which Americans see as desirable. The word "privacy" does not exist in many non-Western languages. If it does, it is likely to have a negative connotation, suggesting loneliness or forced isolation.

Self-help and initiative

Americans take credit only for what they accomplish as individuals. They take pride in climbing the ladder of success. Americans view the "self-made" man or woman with very high regard.

Competition

Americans believe that competition brings out the best. Value is reflected in the economic system of "free enterprise" and it is applied in the U.S. in all areas - medicine, business, education and sports.

The future

Americans value the future and the improvements the future will surely bring. They tend to devalue the past and, to a large extent, the present. Since Americans believe that humans, not fate, can and should control the environment, they are good at planning short-term projects and value what the future will bring.

Work ethic

Most Americans routinely schedule an extremely active day. The United States may be one of the few countries in the world where people speak about the "dignity of human labor." Such a "no-nonsense" attitude toward work has created a class of people known as workaholics - people addicted to, and often wholly identified with, their profession. The first question people often ask when they meet each other in the U.S. is related to work: "What do you do?" or "Where do you work?" or "Who do you work for?"

Informality

Americans are informal and casual. Clothing and our manner of speaking are two areas where American informality is very noticeable. Dressing down is a national norm, and occasions on which Americans dress up are rare. The use of formal, honorary titles is also very rare.

Directness, openness, and honesty

Many other countries have developed subtle, sometimes highly ritualistic ways of informing others of negative or unpleasant information. Americans prefer the direct approach. They are likely to be completely honest in delivering their negative evaluations, and consider anything other than the most direct and open approach to be "dishonest" and "insincere."

Practicality and efficiency

Americans have a reputation for being realistic, practical and efficient. The practical consideration is likely to be given highest priority in making any important decision. Americans pride themselves on not being very philosophical or theoretical. The "bottom line" is often the most important consideration. This pragmatic orientation has caused Americans to contribute more inventions to the world than any other country in human history. The love of practicality has also caused Americans to view some professions as more favorable than others. Americans belittle emotional and subjective evaluations in favor of rational and objective assessments.

Materialism

Foreigners consider Americans to be very materialistic. Americans tend to give a higher priority

to obtaining and protecting material objects than they do in developing and enjoying relationships with other people. Since Americans value newness and innovation, they sell or discard possessions frequently and replace them with newer items. Americans would like to think that their material objects are their reward for working hard.

HANDLING ANTI-AMERICAN CRITICISM

As you meet people outside of the United States, you will begin to discover that others do not always think the way we do. People from other countries are often presented with a very different view of Americans. As a representative of the United States, people will be very curious to see if the stereotypes they hold are true. You will be probably expected to answer questions about American politics, geography, values and other issues. Commonly asked questions include:

- Why are Americans so materialistic?
- Why are they so wasteful of natural resources?
- Why are Americans so racist?
- Why are Americans so ignorant of other countries?
- Why does America give so much foreign aid to countries that abuse human rights?
- Why are there so many homeless people in "the richest country in the world?"
- Why are teachers so poorly paid in a country that claims to have one of the best educational systems?
- Why does the U.S. try to behave as the policeman of the world?

STRATEGIES FOR RESPONDING TO ANTI-AMERICAN CRITICISM

At times, you may experience direct criticism. There is no one right or wrong way to respond to attacks made against the United States or yourself for being American. The best method for dealing with confrontation is to defuse hostility or anger by responding calmly, without defensiveness, and subsequently removing yourself from the situation. This is not the time to feel that you must defend the U.S. administration's foreign policies and actions. Anti-American sentiment is prevalent, and it is wise to recognize this and not take criticism personally. Try and understand your critic's motives and beliefs. Realize that ideas about Americans and American policies may be based on (incorrect) information presented in the media.

Become more familiar with U.S. facts and policies

To combat the stereotype that "Americans are ignorant," you may want to brush up on current events, U.S. geography, American political and judicial systems as well as U.S. foreign policy and how it relates to your host country. It may surprise

you to realize that many people overseas know a great deal about U.S. politics and policies, and it is a good idea to know enough to keep up your end of the conversation when discussing your home country.

CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

When you first walk off the plane, you may feel a sense of great excitement. As you begin the process of making friends and exploring your new home, you will go through many emotional and psychological changes. This is what is known as "cultural adjustment" or "cultural adaptation." Everyone experiences phases of cultural adjustment, and it is a good idea to understand this phenomenon before you go abroad.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DEFINING CULTURE

It is difficult to begin a discussion on cultural adjustment without first defining the word "culture." According to the American Heritage Dictionary, culture is defined as "the arts, beliefs, customs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought created by a people or group at a particular time." Culture, according to [The Survival Kit for Overseas Living](#), encompasses:

- manners and customs
- beliefs and ideas
- ceremonies and rituals
- laws (written and unwritten)
- ideas and thought patterns
- language
- arts and artifacts
- social institutions
- religious beliefs
- myths and legends
- knowledge
- values and morals
- concept of self
- accepted behaviors

THE IMPLICATIONS OF CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

Cultural adjustment is an on-going process that varies from one individual to another and from one culture to another. Your study abroad experience may require you to confront not only differences in your new culture but it may also force you to take a good look at your own cultural and personal values and practices.

The concept of adjustment implies change. In your case, you will be moving from your "American" culture to one overseas. Your adjustment will depend on both the nature of the differences between your original culture and the new culture and on the

expectations you have for the new culture. Well-established behaviors for "operating" in your own culture may no longer satisfy your needs in the new culture. In developing new patterns of coping with your new environment, you may experience varying degrees of disorientation and discomfort. This is called "culture shock."

Culture shock and stress

Culture shock is a typical phenomenon that happens to all travelers who venture to a new culture and country for an extended period of time. There are many emotional effects of facing new values, habits, and lifestyles. You may experience confusing emotional highs and lows during your time abroad. You may also feel anxious, impatient, bewildered, annoyed, or depressed at times. These are all initial symptoms of culture shock and may easily be overcome.

Be aware that a moderate amount of anxiety and stress is a natural part of intercultural transitions. A new language, different foods, a new lifestyle, different classes, and even changes in the weather can affect your stress level. This stress is nothing to be afraid of and can easily be dealt with by having a positive attitude and taking good care of yourself emotionally and physically.

Lewis and Jungman, in their book [On Being Foreign](#), define culture shock as "the feeling of frustration and anxiety which arises when familiar cultural cues are suddenly removed and replaced by new and seemingly bizarre behavior." You may experience discomfort before you are able to function well in a new setting. This discomfort is the "culture shock" stage of the adaptation process. This is a very normal process that virtually everyone experiences. Just as you will take with you the baggage containing your clothing, you will also carry invisible "cultural baggage" when you travel. That baggage is not as obvious as the items in your suitcases, but it will play a major role in your adaptation abroad. Cultural baggage contains the values that are important to you and the patterns of behavior that are customary in your culture. The more you know about your personal values and how they are derived from your culture, the better prepared you will be to see and understand the cultural differences you will encounter abroad.

Initial expectations

Study abroad participants have found they go through a predictable series of stages as they adjust to living abroad. At first, although the new situation is a bit confusing, many students also find it to be exciting- a time of new experiences, sights, sounds, and activities. With so much to learn and absorb in the new culture, the initial period of settling in often seems like an adventure. During this time, you will tend to look for and identify similarities between your home culture and your host culture. You will find that people are friendly and helpful. The procedures are different, but there are patterns and things that you learn and understand. You may classify other aspects of the culture that seem unusual or even unattractive as curious, interesting, or "quaint."

Emerging differences

Gradually, as you become more involved in activities and get to know the people around you, differences - rather than similarities - will become increasingly apparent to you. Those differences may begin to seem more irritating than interesting or quaint. Small incidents and difficulties may make you anxious and concerned. As these differences emerge, they can be troubling or annoying. But culture shock does not happen all at once. It is a feeling that grows little by little as you interact with other students, faculty, and people within the community.

One possible reaction to culture shock is to withdraw from the host country culture, isolating yourself from the most threatening aspects of the culture, and perhaps clinging to people from your own culture. Another possible reaction is to view negatively all aspects of the new culture and to consider its norms and values inferior to your own culture.

A more positive reaction is to assume or take on many of the new culture's norms, especially those involved in expressing yourself to others both in image and language. As the length of time in the new culture grows, your ability to learn from your experiences should increase. An awareness of your own cultural influence assumptions and your personal motivations and value systems will likely increase as well.

Other common symptoms of culture shock are:

- extreme homesickness
- physical complaints
- depression and feelings of helplessness
- difficulty with coursework and concentration
- loss of sense of humor and irritability
- boredom

- need for excessive sleep
- compulsive eating or drinking
- hostility towards the host culture

Students are sometimes unaware of the fact that they are experiencing culture shock when these symptoms occur. There are ways to deal with this period of culture shock, so it helps to recognize that culture shock may lie behind physical symptoms and irritability.

Coping with culture shock

The most effective way to combat culture shock is to step back from a given event that has bothered you, assess it, and search for an appropriate explanation and response. Recognize that you are experiencing culture shock, and don't let your reaction surprise you. Try the following:

- Observe how others are acting in the same situation.
- Describe the situation, what it means to you, and your response to it.
- Ask a local resident or someone with extensive experience how they would have handled a particular situation or incident.
- Decide how you might act in the situation or similar situations in the future.
- Test the new behavior and evaluate how well it works.
- Decide how you can apply what you have learned the next time you find yourself in a similar situation.
- Be open-minded and flexible.
- Talk to your program director or host country coordinator if you are struggling.

Throughout the period of cultural adaptation, take good care of yourself. Take a short trip, exercise and get plenty of rest, see a movie, splurge on a good meal, and do things you enjoy with friends. Take special notice of things you enjoy about living in the host culture.

Although it can be disconcerting and a little scary, the "shock" gradually eases as you begin to understand the new culture. It is useful to realize that often the reactions and perceptions of others toward you - and you toward them - are not personal evaluations but are based on a clash of cultural values. The more skilled you become in recognizing how and when cultural values and behaviors are likely to come in conflict, the easier it becomes to make adjustments that can help you avoid serious difficulties.

Intercultural communication

Perhaps the major contributor to unease in a foreign environment is the increased difficulty, or even impossibility, in communicating. You will bring your own communication habits, both verbal and non-verbal, that sometimes do not transcend cultural lines. Studies of intercultural communication have shown that the amount of time and energy needed for simple communication increases dramatically as cultural differences increase. Your own gestures and other non-verbal cues can act, unbeknownst to you, as hindrances to communication. Your perceptions of any given person or situation can be quite different from the other person's perception.

You should try to recognize that other cultures may use different verbal and non-verbal communication methods. Body language, personal space when talking, and other non-verbal communication can be very different from what you are used to in the United States. Likewise, some cultures are not nearly as frank, sarcastic, or confrontational when discussing certain topics. Sometimes things are implied in conversation but are not explicitly said. It is important to remember that differences in communication styles are just that - different. You will be studied and possibly judged by your own communication styles. You should avoid making judgments about another person's behavior or attitude until you understand how verbal and non-verbal communication styles differ in your host culture.

Personal values

The tendency of people to impose their own values and assumptions onto people in the new culture usually inhibits cross-cultural understanding. While you are abroad you should avoid making definitive, prejudicial judgments that may result from your own cultural responses. For example, it is best not to move rapidly to the conclusion that locals are cheating, lying, or being rude when the behavior may really be the result of their culture. You should be open-minded, receptive to different ideas, concepts, and behaviors. A certain amount of "cultural self-analysis" might reveal much about your own motivations and value system; such knowledge can contribute to increased communication skills, increased acceptance and understanding of others, and more productive interaction. Until you have acquired enough self-knowledge to realize the true extent to which your outward personality is shaped by cultural habits and values, you will not be completely capable of comprehending or learning from the cultural habits and values of a different society.

Influence of time within a new culture

Cross-cultural adaptation is a continuing process with an on-going evolution of insights, knowledge, physical skills, and emotional skills. It is important that you be flexible with new-found knowledge, and realize that any single piece of information might not have universal applicability in the culture. Language learning provides an example: you will often learn new words or tenses and, until you learn more, you may use that new vocabulary in inappropriate situations.

Will I lose my own culture?

Sometimes students worry about "losing their culture" if they become too well adapted to the host culture. Don't worry: it is virtually impossible to lose the culture in which you were raised. In fact, learning about the new culture often increases your appreciation for and understanding of your own culture. Don't resist the opportunity to become bicultural, able to function competently in two cultural environments.

Adaptation

Just as culture shock derives from the accumulation of cultural clashes, accumulation of small successes can lead to more effective interactions within the new culture. As you increase your abilities to manage and understand the new social system, practices that recently seemed so strange will become less puzzling. Eventually you will adapt sufficiently and will relax and fully enjoy the experience. And you will recover your sense of humor!

PLANNING YOUR RETURN HOME

MAKING ARRANGEMENTS

There are a number of very important things you must do before you leave your host country. Do not leave everything for the last minute!

Confirm travel

If you already have a return ticket, you should contact the airline and reconfirm your flight at least 72 hours in advance. You may decide to travel before leaving the country, or have your family and friends join you. If you want to change the return date, contact the airline directly or visit a travel agency.

Transcripts

Make sure you check with the international office of your host institution or your program director about how and when you will be getting your transcript sent back to the United States. Since educational systems vary at each overseas institution, you need to allow ample time for the processing of your transcript and grades. You may want to obtain copies of your transcript or any other relevant documents for your own records. If you think you might apply to graduate school in the future, get information on how to order a transcript since graduate schools will not accept unofficial copies.

Shipping items home

Shipping gifts home may be expensive but may save you from having too much luggage to carry upon your return home. Some companies ship your packages to a warehouse where you must claim them (and pay the storage, customs charges, or other fees) when you return to the U.S. Ask if your package will be mailed directly to the shipping address, and be sure to read all disclaimers and exclusions. Be sure to use a reliable international carrier, and consider insurance for the items you ship.

VAT refund

The Value Added Tax (VAT) is a general consumption tax charged as a percentage of the price of goods and services. In Canada and countries belonging to the European Union, you are entitled to a VAT refund on certain purchases. Individuals living outside the EU and Canada who make purchases in those countries may apply for a refund of VAT, but you must inquire about VAT refund procedures at the time of purchase. Receipts and VAT refund forms are required in order to claim a

refund, and you must claim the VAT refund prior to departure. For more information, see <http://www.eurunion.org/legislat/VATweb.htm> (for European Union countries) or <http://www.canadasalestaxrefunds.com/> (for Canada).

Customs

Upon returning home, you will have to go through U.S. Customs. Be aware that under U.S. law, Customs inspectors are authorized to examine all luggage, cargo, and travelers. You must make a Customs declaration for all goods purchased while abroad. The duty-free exemption is the total value of merchandise you may bring back to the United States without having to pay duty. You may bring back more than your exemption, but you will have to pay a tax on it. In most cases, the personal exemption is \$800 (\$600 in the Caribbean), but there are some exceptions. Certain items will be exempt, depending upon the country of purchase and type of item. Make sure to keep all receipts for purchases you mail home or bring with you as you will need them when you go through Customs upon your return.

Under no circumstances will you be allowed to bring back any fruit, meat, dairy product or agricultural product that is not packaged. Be aware that possession of certain medications without a prescription from a physician licensed in the United States may violate federal, state, and/or local laws. In addition, some medications purchased abroad are not FDA-approved and therefore cannot be allowed into the U.S. The U.S. Customs Service Web page contains specific information for travelers returning from abroad. It can be found at <http://www.customs.ustreas.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/kbyg/>.

REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

The cycle of overseas adjustment begins at the time you plan to study abroad. You may think that adjustment ends when you have successfully assimilated into the life of your host country. However, the cycle of cultural adjustment continues through your return to the United States. Culture shock and re-entry shock (more commonly known as "reverse culture shock") are not isolated events but rather part of the total adjustment process that encompasses pre-departure to reintegration at home.

Change and adaptation

You have just had the opportunity to live, study, and travel overseas. During your stay, you have probably assimilated some of the host country's culture, learned new ways of doing things, and gained some new views and opinions about certain topics. In short, you have changed. For some people, living overseas and experiencing personal change can be a bit unsettling. While overseas, you may have experienced a greater amount of independence, both academically and personally, than you previously enjoyed in the United States. This independence can help make you more confident in your abilities to achieve your goals. You may have become increasingly more self-assured and gained a more mature or focused attitude about your future. You may even be a bit more serious and directed. Some of these new views and attitudes may be in conflict with the views and attitudes of family and friends. They may question your new way of thinking and doing things or even pressure you to change. These differences may often be unsettling and uncomfortable at first.

New skills

Along with the new ideas, views, and attitudes that you developed, you probably acquired some new skills. These may include discovering a new way to do an old task, developing a different perspective on an issue, or improving your foreign language ability. For those of you studying in an English-speaking country, the English language will have acquired a new meaning through idioms, lingo, and phrases that are specific to the host country. These new skills will now become a part of your daily life. You may even feel strange reverting back to your native language. The degree of strangeness is directly connected to the amount of culture from the host country that you have absorbed. You may feel frustrated and depressed if you cannot communicate your new ideas, skills, or opinions. Patience, flexibility, and time will be necessary - just as they were at the beginning of your journey.

Loss of status

In your host country, you may have been seen as an informal ambassador of the United States. When you return home, you are just like everyone else and you may experience the loss of feeling a bit special. Realize that these feelings are normal and will dissipate with time.

Friendships

Now that you have studied abroad, you obviously have a new circle of friends, and they have probably become an important part of your life. Leaving your

new friends can be the most difficult part of re-entry. Having to abandon intense friendships and/or girlfriends or boyfriends can bring about sadness or anxiety. Though you may seem to make a good surface adjustment once home, that adjustment may mask feelings of uncertainty, alienation, anger or disappointment.

Upon your return, friends at home will ask about your experiences but will not have the same reaction to pictures and stories as you do. Be prepared for their waning interest. After a while, you may find that your friends are more eager to talk about what has gone on in their lives instead of hearing more about your life overseas. If many of your friends have never lived abroad, you may also have to deal with feelings of envy, jealousy, or some degree of alienation and the inability to relate to your unique experience.

People are often threatened by new and unusual points of view if they have not had a similar experience. As much as you need to talk about your recent time away from home, it is advisable to be sensitive to the attitudes and feelings of others.

As with your family relationships, your relationships with your friends can change because of the changes that have occurred in both your life and the lives of your friends while you were away. Former friends may even have found new friendships and may have developed priorities that are now different from yours. Be patient. If the friendship is worth maintaining, these adjustments will happen.

Family relationships

These changes - your new independence, new views and attitudes, newly acquired skills, and your new friends - all have contributed to making you the person you are now. You are the one who has had so many new experiences. Everyone and everything at home should have stayed fairly stable. It can be a surprise to learn that you are not the only one affected by re-entry. The home that you remember may not be exactly the same as it was when you left. This feeling of "dislocation" occurs for two reasons. First, because you are now looking at the familiar with a new set of perceptions gained abroad, this may mean that home is never exactly the same again. Second, life at home did carry on while you were away. Things have happened to your family and friends and changes have occurred in their lives. These events may have caused differences in their feelings, perceptions, opinions, and attitudes.

It is normal for you to want to remain the person you have become. Your overseas experience and life is now a part of you and reflects who you are right now. The "new" you cannot be discarded or forgotten in favor of the "old" you. However, you and your family must come to terms with that "new" you.

University/college life

For those of you who do not return immediately to a university setting, you may feel you have re-adjusted during the few weeks/months at home. However, you may face a new set of re-adjustment issues on your return to academic life. If you have become very accustomed to a different type of academic system while overseas, you will have to deal with readjusting to your school's way of handling things. Upon return to university life, you may feel a bit excluded. To combat this, try to become re-acquainted with faculty, staff, and classmates.

LEVELS OF READJUSTMENT

As stated earlier, no readjustment experience is the same for everyone. Research on readjustment to the U.S. after a prolonged stay abroad suggests that there are several variables that may affect the degree of difficulty faced by individuals during re-entry. Some of these variables include:

Age and academic level

Older students or professionals who were well established in their field before their trip sometimes experience a less troubled re-entry than younger students do. Those who left home as teens, ready to discover new attitudes and explore new ways of living, may adopt the "host culture's way" rather than selectively integrate it with their own cultural or personal beliefs. Once home they may constantly compare home country traditions and practices with their host country experience, increasing the feelings of alienation.

Previous cross-cultural experiences

Students who have previously been away from the United States have less trouble adjusting. A student who expects to experience some difficulty on return is better able to manage re-acculturation problems. The longer a student stays in the host country and the greater the degree of interaction and empathy with the host culture he/she experiences, the more difficult re-entry into the home environment may be.

Readiness to return home

It has been hypothesized that students who strongly desire to return home at the end of their study abroad term are most likely to return home with a high

motivation to "re-socialize," while those who strongly desire to stay on in the host country will seem more alienated upon re-entry. Those who are looking forward to returning home are expected to have the healthiest re-entry.

Similarity between the home and host culture

The greater the differences between the host culture and the home culture, the greater the re-acculturation difficulty for the student. A student returning from an English-speaking country with strong similarities with the United States might expect an easier transition than a student who spent time abroad in a vastly different country.

Changes (or lack of) in the home environment

A returnee may expect everything to be the same at home as it was when he or she left. During the student's absence, there may have been subtle or dramatic changes in political, economic, environmental, or social factors on a national scale. These changes may be stressful psychologically and may make it difficult for the student to realize his or her plans. Conversely, a student may return home to find nothing seems to have changed. This can intensify the student's feeling that there is no one who can understand what he or she is experiencing.

Support

Being able to share concerns and coping strategies with other recent returnees could help reduce the frustration and sense of sadness that can accompany re-entry. It helps to locate a returnee who has shared this experience. If the study abroad office offers events for returnees, make every effort to attend.

COPING STRATEGIES

Acknowledge your adjustment

First, and foremost, acknowledge the re-entry phase as part of the overseas experience. Just as you had to give yourself time while going through the culture shock phase, you must also give yourself time to go through the re-entry phase. Acknowledging that reverse cultural adjustment is real will help you avoid feelings of sadness about being home.

Share your adjustment

Educate your family and friends about this phase of adjustment. Many people have never heard of reverse cultural adjustment and are not aware of its existence. If the people around you know a little about what you are experiencing, then they will be a bit more patient and understanding towards you and can help you to re-adjust. Remind those around you that you cannot

unlearn what you have learned, but that you need time to re-integrate those often conflicting components within yourself.

Stay in contact with your host culture

Keep in touch with the friends you made in your host country. It will help you to stay connected to those who were important to you during your life abroad.

Seek others and get involved

Also keep in touch with others from your study abroad program or seek out other returnees who have been overseas where you lived or studied. The fact that they have gone through (or are going through) re-entry and can offer support and advice about how to cope will be helpful. Other returnees often want to hear of your overseas adventures because they have a multicultural and international perspective. Becoming active in events sponsored by the international office at your college or university offers you an outlet to share your experiences.

If you want to keep using your foreign language skills, there are a couple of things you can do:

- Take some advanced language or literature courses.
- Seek out community groups or organizations where you can speak to native speakers.
- Volunteer as a tutor or language partner for an international student.

If you want to stay connected to international activities at your institution, seek out other "captive" audiences who would have a natural interest in your overseas experience. Part of re-adjusting is being able to tell your story and describe your experiences. Also consider volunteering for your campus international office. You are the perfect person to be an advocate for study abroad.

Set goals for your future

Now is the time for you to look toward your future. You have finished one phase of your life and are ready to move ahead. Think about your next challenge or goal, and begin to make plans and put those plans into action. You may even find yourself planning for your next overseas experience.



APPENDIX

The information contained in the *USG Study Abroad Handbook* was taken from a variety of study abroad resources, including guides, books, and the various Web sources. The following is a list of resources used to develop the handbook:

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- NAFSA: Association of International Educators – Section on U.S. Students Abroad (SECUSSA)
<http://www.secussa.nafsa.org/>.
- NAFSA: Association of International Educators -Special Interest Group
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- U.S. Department of State- Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Overseas Citizens Services Web site:
<http://www.state.gov/travel/>.
- USC Center for Global Education. Safety Abroad Handbook. Website located at
<http://www.lmu.edu/globaled/studentsabroad/>.
- USC SAFETI (Safety Abroad First - Educational Travel Information) Clearinghouse. Website located at
<http://www.lmu.edu/globaled/safeti/>.