

The World is Waiting for You...

Study Abroad Pre-Departure Handbook



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This handbook has been designed to answer some of the most frequent questions relating to the preparation for, experience during, and return from study abroad. Keep in mind that no handbook can be all-inclusive, so please contact your study abroad advisor if you have questions that are not answered in the following pages.

UM-ST. LOUIS LOGISTICS

There are three types of study abroad programs in which UMSL students may participate.

- 1. Exchange and Partner Programs.** Overseas universities partnered with UMSL have agreed to accept a certain number of our students per semester. Students enrolled in these programs pay UMSL tuition plus the information technology fee. The foreign institution issues a transcript and UM-St. Louis faculty determine UMSL equivalency for courses. Credit earned is UMSL credit. A list of partner universities is available in the Study Abroad Office. These programs are only open to registered UMSL students.
- 2. Faculty-Led Programs.** Programs led by UM-St. Louis faculty members have direct UMSL credit identified in promotional literature prior to the beginning of the program. These programs are open to UMSL students, other universities' students and, oftentimes, to non-student community members.
- 3. Non-UMSL Programs.** These programs are conducted by another domestic university or by a third-party organization (e.g. Australearn, CIEE, etc.). Students participating in these programs directly enroll with either the other university or with the third party provider. Credit earned is transfer credit.

Registration, fees, and application of credit vary depending on the type of study abroad program you choose. If you do not know what type of program you chose, please consult with your study abroad advisor.

Registration

UMSL students studying abroad remain enrolled at UMSL while abroad. **Non-UMSL students** studying abroad are admitted to UMSL as visiting students. Contact the UMSL study abroad advisor for required forms. Non-UMSL study abroad students are NOT required to pay the visiting student application fee.

Semester and Academic Year Programs. Undergraduate students enroll for 12 credit hours each semester. The Director of the Center of International Studies must approve hours more or less than 12. Due to financial aid regulations, full time status (12 credit hours) must be maintained to be financial aid eligible.

Short-Term Programs. These programs vary in the number of credit hours offered (usually 3-6). Generally all participants will take the same number of credit hours.

Registration

Proper registration is extremely important for receiving financial aid and academic credit. All students must be enrolled in the mandatory HTH international sickness & accident insurance program prior to registration at UMSL. All holds must be cleared from your student account before you can register.

Exchange and Partner Programs. UMSL students register at UMSL using a generic registration code called "placeholder" credit (course name is "Foreign Country Co-op") for 12 hours of credit/semester; students do not register for the actual courses they plan to take. Such registration ensures maximum flexibility when registering overseas: i.e., there is no need to drop/add if courses are not available or filled. Once you return from overseas, "Foreign Country Co-op" will be replaced with the UMSL equivalent of the courses that you took. **The study abroad coordinator will email the registration class number and permission code to you after you enroll in the HTH insurance.**

Students MUST complete a "Study Abroad Course Evaluation" form ("green sheet") prior to departure for study abroad. A student should check the host university's website, the course equivalency database at www.umsl.edu/studyabroad, or the host institution's catalogue in 261 MSC for course listings and descriptions. The courses you take could satisfy specific major or minor requirements, general education requirements, or simply count as elective credit, depending on your department and/or college. Once the

potential courses are identified, students must ask the appropriate department for course equivalencies. After the department determines equivalencies, the student's academic advisor must sign the form. This course list may be tentative because the course schedule may not be available until you arrive at the host university.

Short-Term Programs. Participants register at UMSL using a specific code unless otherwise advised. Usually the course numbers are "pre-approved," i.e., the equivalencies have already been determined. Students may not change course designation after the program has begun. Students will be given the registration information at the study abroad pre-departure orientation.

Non-UMSL Programs. There is a specific registration code that students use to register at UMSL that enables participants to maintain full-time student status at UMSL, but not be charged tuition or fees. Registration is also necessary for any financial aid you have received to be credited to your account. Participants also register through the appropriate university or third party provider. Participants in non-UMSL programs complete the "Study Abroad Course Evaluation" form (green sheet) to ensure that courses taken through the non-UMSL program are transferable. **The study abroad office will provide the registration class number and permission code to you after you enroll in the HTH insurance.**

Common Questions About Registration & Earning Credit

The courses I had pre-approved are not offered at the host institution. What should I do?

This is not an unusual occurrence. Students should register for similar substitute course(s) at the host university. Students should also contact the appropriate department or advisor at UMSL with as much information about the substitute course(s) as available. **Students must save and bring home with them all applicable course materials (syllabi, tests, reading lists, class notes, and number of hours a class meets per week) so that equivalence may be determined when arriving back at UMSL.**

The workload is much heavier than I anticipated. May I drop a course?

Usually you are not able to decrease the number of credit hours. If it is absolutely necessary you must first contact the Study Abroad Office. Reducing your credit hours below full time status will negatively affect your financial aid during the current semester and future semesters.

May I add more credit hours?

In general you may not add credit hours once overseas. If you add hours and wish to transfer them back to UMSL, you will be billed for these additional hours through the UMSL Cashier's Office upon your return.

What if I disagree with the grades I am given?

As a student in a foreign university, you must abide by all rules, policies, and procedures of that university. If you have a question or problem with a grade earned, you should contact the course professor and try to settle it with him/her directly. UMSL cannot change or modify the grades you earn abroad.

Do I need to save my course materials?

YES! In all cases, you must save your course materials and bring them back with you, including syllabi, papers, exams, assignments, and reading lists. Also note how many hours per week each class met. Credit is determined by these "contact hours." Faculty may need to review these materials to determine course equivalency.

Withdrawing from Study Abroad

Prior to the beginning of a program, a student who withdraws must submit a written statement of withdrawal from the program to Study Abroad, 261 MSC.

If a student wishes to withdraw once the program has started, s/he should contact the UMSL study abroad office. Do not just leave the program. The study abroad advisor will help you with your options. Remember there may be both financial and academic consequences of withdrawal. Written notification must be submitted to the Study Abroad Office. Participants should also contact the international office at their host university to inform them of the decision to withdraw and find out what procedures must be followed.

Grades

Letter grades. If the host university issues transcripts with letter grades, those grades will be converted to the US grading system and posted on the UMSL transcript. The Study Abroad office cannot change grades, even though the host university's system may be different or more difficult than the UMSL system. If there is a problem or disagreement about a grade, you must contact the professor at the host institution to resolve the dispute. **All** courses (passing and failing) on the host university transcript will be posted to your UMSL transcript. Grades do factor into your UMSL GPA.

Satisfactory/unsatisfactory. In some cases students may receive "S" or "U" instead of letter grades. Prior to departure students should check with their major department to make sure that the "S" or "U" grade is acceptable. Grades of "S" are recorded on the transcript, credit is earned, but the GPA is not affected. Grades of "U" are also recorded on the transcript but no credit is earned. Grades equivalent to A, B or C receive credit. Grades of D and F do not.

Credit Transfer

Grades and transfer credit are dependent on the Study Abroad office receiving an official transcript from the host university. Transcripts should be sent to Study Abroad, 261 MSC. **Check with the host university to see if a transcript is sent automatically or if you must request one.**

Once the transcript is received, the Study Abroad Office will match the courses on the Application for Study Abroad Credit (green sheet) with those listed on the transcript. Grades and credits are then sent to the student for review. You must respond with your approval or noting any concerns within one week. At that time, grades and credits will be reported to the Office of the Registrar and DARS to be posted on your transcript. All courses, grades and credits are posted: students may not "pick and choose."

Oftentimes, students take classes that they did not have pre-approved and further clarification or new equivalencies are necessary. If this is the case, you should contact the department to have your new courses approved for UMSL equivalence on the Application for Study Abroad Credit. It is your responsibility to obtain these equivalencies in a timely manner.

In some cases host universities are slow in sending transcripts. Every effort is made to have grades and credits posted within one semester after the student returns to UMSL; however, this is not always possible. For that reason, study abroad the second semester of senior year should be undertaken only if the student can be flexible about date of graduation.

It is YOUR responsibility to obtain course equivalencies. The Study Abroad Office cannot process your transfer credit until we have equivalencies for every class taken while abroad.

Registration for Your Return

You are responsible for pre-registering yourself for the semester that you will return to UMSL. Either designate someone you trust to register you or register yourself on the phone or through My Gateway. Both ways will require your **PIN**, as well as your registration date and time, and your registration password that will be e-mailed to your UMSL e-mail address prior to the registration period. The Schedule of Courses and online access will be available on the UMSL Web page at: <http://www.umsl.edu/curriculum/COURSES/>. Note: You will not be allowed to register if you have a hold on your account. Any balance must be paid in full before registration.

Academic Year Programs

If you are studying abroad for two semesters, the Study Abroad Office will register you for the second semester of your study abroad program. It is your responsibility to register for courses you plan to take once you return to UM-St. Louis.

Financial Aid & Scholarships

Academic Year and Semester Exchange and Partners Programs

All financial aid should be applicable for your study abroad program. Complete the Financial Aid for Study Abroad paperwork and check with Carol Banks (carol_banks@umsl.edu or 516-6394) in the Student Financial Aid office to ascertain the applicability of your loans and/or grants and to clarify any questions. If you need funding for your study abroad program in addition to current loans, grants, and scholarships, students may apply for additional student loans through the Financial Aid Office. **To ensure timely disbursement of your aid, make sure you have signed all paperwork and aid acceptance letters before going abroad.** Policy stipulates that aid will be disbursed no more than 10 days prior to the start of the UMSL semester. If you need funds prior to that, inquire at the Financial Aid Office about an “emergency loan.” This is an advance of your aid that can be disbursed after you have registered. The Cashier’s Office charges 1% per month interest on emergency loans. In addition, you must request these in advance and they are not guaranteed; you cannot get a same-day emergency loan.

Summer Programs

Usually, a financial aid package is divided equally between the fall and spring semesters. If you want or need to use financial aid during the summer session, then you must speak with the Financial Aid Office to see what your options are. You must take a minimum of five credits during the summer to qualify for aid.

Non-UMSL Programs

In general, federal grants or loans are applicable for non-UMSL programs, but in some cases UM-St. Louis or state grants or financial aid may not be used. Ask the Financial Aid Office for details about your specific aid.

Durable Power of Attorney

Consider giving your parent or another adult family member Power of Attorney. This can be useful for paying bills while you are away, transactions with the university (i.e. ordering a transcript, transactions with Financial Aid Office), and any other situation where your signature or approval would be required. Forms must be signed by a Notary Public (available in the Bookstore or Welcome Center) and should be returned to Financial Aid.

Scholarships

Scholarships awarded through the Center for International Studies will be submitted to Financial Aid after you have registered and turned in the completed Study Abroad Course Evaluation Form. **The Financial Aid Office will credit the scholarship to your student account no sooner than 10 days before the start of the UMSL semester.** If there is a positive balance you will receive a refund from the Cashiers Office. **You should make arrangements for direct deposit at the Cashiers Office.** If studying abroad for an academic year, the amount awarded will be divided in half and the second part will be awarded to your account approximately ten days before UMSL second semester starts. No scholarships can be disbursed without UMSL registration.

Forms

Before going abroad, there are certain forms that you must complete and return to our office. They include:

- Acceptance to Study Abroad Program
- Application for Study Abroad Credit (“green sheet”)
- Risk and Release
- Health Information Form
- Online registration of HTH insurance (if not included in the program fee of some short-term programs)

The study abroad coordinator will check the HTH website to verify your enrollment. You must return all these completed forms to the study abroad office before your scholarship can be transferred to your student account.

Mandatory Health Insurance Program

Most students have a perfectly safe study abroad experience and return to the US without ever having a major incident. However, accidents and situations can and do occur, and you must be prepared for it. Not having proper insurance can cause you and your family a financial burden that will last for years to come.

All University of Missouri students and people participating in any UM program are required to purchase HTH sickness and accident insurance. It is affordable and provides many benefits above and beyond your current insurance provider, including emergency evacuation and repatriation of remains. UM system has negotiated an affordable plan for all study abroad students through HTH Worldwide Student Travel Insurance. The rate is less than forty dollars per month, regardless of age.

From HTH Worldwide's website, www.hthstudents.com, you have 24/7 access to English-speaking physicians, prescription information, and 24 hour phone assistance. It is the best service available for study abroad students.

How to enroll:

1. Go to <http://www.hthstudents.com>.
2. Enter **Group Plan # CBM-2348** in the box on the left-hand side of the screen and click submit.
3. Read the disclaimer and continue to the next page.
4. Select "New" enrollment and click Next.
5. Complete all fields, including student ID.

Important Note Regarding Enrollment Dates:

HTH Insurance covers you only while *outside* of the U.S. (or your home country) and is charged in 30-day periods. Select your coverage to start one day before your departure date and extend several days beyond your return date in the event that your return is delayed. (if, for example, your semester abroad dates are September 7 - December 16: Set your coverage for Sept 1-December 31 and be billed for the same rate - 4 months). **If you stay abroad longer, login to HTH website to extend your insurance coverage.**

6. Continue following the instructions on the website.
7. Your insurance card will be mailed to you. You can also print one off the website approximately two days after enrollment.

Pre-Existing Conditions You must maintain continuous insurance coverage to ensure that any pre-existing conditions you have (or develop abroad) will be covered by current and future insurance. If possible, we recommend keeping your current coverage in addition to purchasing study abroad health insurance. Conditions that develop while you are abroad would be considered pre-existing if you had a break in coverage with your current insurer. **The HTH insurance covers you outside the US (or your home country) only**, so you will not be covered upon return.

TRAVEL PREPARATION AND ARRIVAL

Passport

Every student will need a passport that is valid for at least six months beyond the last date of the program abroad. If you do not yet have a passport, you should apply for one immediately. Information and forms to obtain a passport are available at <http://travel.state.gov/passport>.

When you receive your passport:

- Sign it in ink, and fill in the address and notification data in pencil
- Guard it as you would any other valuable.
- Make several copies of the official page to make it easier to replace if it's lost or stolen
- Give one to the Study Abroad Office to put in your file
- Keep one with you in a separate but safe place from your passport
- Leave one with a friend or family member

Loss or theft of a valid passport should be reported immediately to Passport Services, Department of State, Washington D.C. 20524, or the nearest passport agency. If the loss occurs while abroad, you should notify the nearest U.S. Consulate or Embassy. Theft of a passport also should be reported to the local police.

Ask your parents or designated emergency contact to obtain a passport, just in case they need to go abroad to help you in an emergency.

Visas

In most cases, US citizens will need a student visa for the country in which they are studying, but may or may not need a visa to visit other countries in the vicinity. Your host university's International Office is the best source of information about necessary visa application processes (and immunizations, etc.). They should indicate in the acceptance letter if you will need a visa, but it is your responsibility to obtain the application forms and apply for your own student visa. This can take up to 6 weeks, although it is sometimes possible to pay an extra fee for speedier processing. **Visa regulations and requirements change frequently. It is YOUR responsibility to research the visa requirements and apply for one, the UMSL Study Abroad Office cannot advise you on these procedures.**

In addition to the application form, the visa process generally requires several passport-sized photos, acceptance letter from the host university, evidence of financial aid or personal funds sufficient to support yourself while studying abroad, and a copy of your insurance card. Start the application process as soon as you receive your program acceptance letter!

For information on visa requirements of specific countries, visit the website of the host country's embassy or consulate in the US (example, do a websearch for Spanish Consulate in Chicago). You can find the websites at www.embassyworld.com. **Note: Many countries require you to apply at the Chicago consulate in person.**

NOTICE TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS who do not hold US citizenship: It may take up to eight weeks or longer to process a student visa or residency permit for a non-US citizen, even one who holds permanent residence status in the US. It is crucial that your program sponsor or host university understands that you do not hold US citizenship, so that they can give you the proper information about visas. Also be sure to obtain the necessary travel signatures and speak with an international student advisor before departing UMSL.

ISIC

We recommend that every student purchase the International Student Identification Card (ISIC) before going abroad. For only \$22, you receive supplemental emergency evacuation and repatriation insurance, discount airfare, and numerous student discounts abroad. Complete the application form and bring it, along with two passport-size photos and payment to the receptionist in the Center for International Studies, **366 SSB**.

Plane Tickets

You should purchase your airline ticket as soon as possible after determining the arrival and departure dates for your program. There are numerous deals for students, so shop around for the best price! No one organization is consistently less expensive than another, so be sure to check several sites and companies to compare prices.

Here are some of the best places to get great student deals:

- STA Travel www.statravel.com
- Student Universe www.studentuniverse.com
- Travel Cuts www.travelcuts.com/usa/html
- Student Flights 1-800-255-8000
- Booking Buddy www.bookingbuddy.com

You should research fares online at a variety of sites for comparison. Be sure to ask about change fees, cancellation policy, and change options (i.e. can you change your departure date to return to St. Louis? How much will it cost? What is the likelihood of being able to change it? Etc.)

Other Useful Airfare Tips

- Reserve flights as early as possible to take advantage of advanced purchased fares.
- Watch for specifications, restrictions, and cancellation penalties.
- Consider trip cancellation insurance if you have any doubts as to your plans.
- Try to travel during low season for the best fares. Keep high season cut-off dates in mind when making plans (approx. 15 June to 15 Aug)
- Consider "open-jaw" flights into one city and out of another. If you will be doing a lot of traveling once you arrive, it might save you considerable on-land travel time and expense to arrange a return flight from a different city.
- If you are considering buying an open-ended return flight, BE SURE to book a return date as soon as possible. You will have trouble getting a seat in the busy travel season at the end of the term when so many others are flying. Also, some countries may not let you have an open-ended ticket for immigration purposes. They want to know that you will actually be leaving. Check on the immigration policies of your destination.

Getting to Your Host Site

Depending on your destination city, there may or may not be an airport in that city. Even if there is, it may be less expensive to fly into the major airport and take a train to your final destination.

You should check the website or acceptance materials of your host university to see what airport and/or train/bus station they recommend. Once arriving in the city, you may be greeted by staff from the university, or you may be responsible for taking a taxi, train, or the metro. **Make sure you know exactly where to go and how you will get from the airport to your final destination (international office, dormitory, homestay, etc.) before you leave the U.S.** Make all reservations in advance and have a written plan of exactly how you plan to arrive. You will be tired and may feel overwhelmed in the new surroundings, so this written plan will be invaluable. You should also have the contact information written down (phone numbers and addresses of the residence where you will be staying and the international office of your host university) in case you have questions, your plane arrives late, you are lost, etc.

Money

It is important to budget your money while abroad. Remember that small expenses add up quickly, and that you will have many such items to purchase such as postcards, bus and train fares, stamps, newspapers, snacks, beverages, gifts, phone calls, etc. **Most importantly, expect to have unexpected fees.**

Money Tips

- Know the official currency where you will be living or visiting, and the approximate exchange rate to the US dollar.
- Exchange a small amount of money in the US to have some cash when you arrive.
- Upon arrival, you can often withdraw money using your ATM card at the airport. You can also convert money at the airport if needed, but they offer a poor exchange rate.
- Make a small guide to keep in your wallet listing different amounts of US dollars converted to host countries currency (i.e. \$10=5.50 GBP, \$50=27 GBP). This will help you realize how much you are spending.
- It's handy to have a small calculator or currency converter.
- You will need to have your passport with you for identification when changing money.

Budgeting Tips

- Make weekly and daily budgets, and stick to them!
- Be alert for special student rates and discounts; they are abundant abroad! Know what extra discounts are available with your ISIC card.
- Cook for yourself, or use the student cafeteria rather than eating out.
- Attend free events around the community or at your university.
- Shop in street markets or major chain supermarkets.
- Put off making major purchases until you have learned the range of available products and prices
- When traveling, stay in youth or student hostels.
- Take care of your belongings and safeguard your travelers checks and cash. You don't want to unnecessarily lose money by carelessness or pickpockets.

Obtaining foreign currency in the US

It is a good idea to obtain \$100-200 of the foreign currency before you leave. Often, banks will not be open on the weekends and national holidays and it may be a few days before you can change currency. Most larger banks provide this service. You can also exchange currency at the airport, but they have a less favorable exchange rate than banks.

Obtaining foreign currency abroad

The key to successful money exchange is advance planning. When staying in your host country, keep in mind commissions and fees are taken out each time you change money. If you are traveling to neighboring countries with different currencies, try to anticipate how much you will need for a particular country. It is costly to convert all you have to a new currency, because each time you convert, you pay a service charge. Remember to exchange only as much as you think you will need, and that it is not possible exchange/convert coins.

ATM Card

Often, the easiest way to obtain foreign currency abroad is with your ATM card. ATM cards with the Cirrus symbol or Visa logo are widely accepted.

- **Check with your bank to determine if you can use your ATM card abroad and what the fees are.** There is often a charge for using the local machine and a fee from your home bank for every transaction, plus a currency conversion charge.
- See if your bank has associated or partner banks you can use overseas without incurring fees. If not, take out large amounts of cash at a time and keep it in a safe place. Don't take out \$20 at a time, because you will pay extravagant amounts of fees!
- ATMs often have a daily withdrawal limit of \$200-300, so plan ahead.
- Rural areas may not have many accessible ATM machines, so don't depend on it as your sole source of money.
- Be sure your PIN is 4 digits long and is numeric only.
- Notify your bank that you will be abroad so that they do not cancel your ATM card.
- When you arrive, check the airport for an ATM and withdraw cash before leaving the airport.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are invaluable in case of emergency. Take one with you, if you can, but use it wisely. Visa, MasterCard, and American Express are widely accepted. The charge placed on your card will be converted to dollars on your statement. Before you go, know how you will access your statements and pay your monthly bills if you plan to use a credit card. Also check with your credit card agency to see if they charge a fee for conversion into US dollars (usually 1% - 3% of your purchase price). You can obtain cash advances with a credit card, but these have high fees and can be quite costly, so cash advances are not recommended.

Credit cards can come in handy to make purchases and avoid carrying a lot of cash. Keep in mind, however, that not all merchants abroad accept credit cards, regardless of the name brand: many of your gifts and/or souvenirs might be obtained at small shops and bazaars that do not take credit cards.

Many credit card companies charge a two or three percent conversion fee, which can dramatically increase your costs over time. Check with your credit card company to see what their policies are.

Traveler's Checks and Cash

Traveler's checks are a safe way to carry large amounts of money, since they can be refunded if lost or stolen, but cash cannot. Traveler's checks are available for purchase at most banks in the US. The major companies dealing in traveler's checks are Citicorp (First National City Bank), American Express, Thomas Cook, Bank of America, and Visa. Often there will be a 1% commission for the purchase of traveler's checks. Check with the bank where you have accounts – they may not charge you anything. Keep in mind that while purchasing traveler's checks in small denominations means carrying a bulkier package of checks with you, it also means that you will have greater control over the amount of currency you will receive each time you cash one or more of these checks.

Be sure to keep a separate record of the serial numbers and phone numbers in a safe place in case of loss or theft. Cross off the numbers as you cash the checks so you have an accurate record of your traveler's checks.

Traveler's checks and cash can be exchanged to local currency at banks, post offices, and airports. You will usually find the best exchange rate at a bank or post office; we do not recommend changing currency at hotels, restaurants, or retail shops as they have very unfavorable exchange rates. You will need to have your passport for identification to exchange traveler's checks or money. You can also expect to pay commission, either a flat rate or percentage of what you're changing. Some places will charge you per check you convert, others will charge you based on the total amount converted.

In recent years, students have reported difficulties exchanging traveler's checks abroad. They are a good, safe backup, but should not be your only method of obtaining money abroad.

Transfer from Home

Should you run short of cash while abroad, money can be sent from home in a variety of ways:

As discussed above, if you have enough credit or have not reached your daily limit, consider using your credit card or ATM card. You can also leave deposit slips with your family to deposit money into your bank account, which you can then withdraw from overseas.

If neither your ATM nor credit cards work and you are out of cash, the quickest way, although the most expensive, is by cable transfer from your American bank to a bank abroad. You should visit your hometown bank before your departure to obtain a list of overseas correspondent banks to which money can be transferred by cable and to let them know who is authorized to initiate cable transfers on your behalf. To pick the money up at the overseas bank, you will need identification (i.e., your passport). It

may be necessary for your hometown bank to process cable transfer through a major, internationally-recognized U.S. Bank which in turn probably will have to deal with a comparable internationally-recognized bank overseas. The correspondent bank abroad can then complete the transfer to a local bank in your study abroad location. This will take some time.

American Express money orders also are relatively fast. Transactions must be initiated at an American Express office in the U.S. and completed at one of their branch offices abroad, either of which could prove inconvenient depending upon their location. Since not all American Express offices prepare money orders or cable money, call your local American Express office for the location of offices that can provide these services.

Money wires are complicated and costly. Plan ahead to avoid having to use them!

Opening a foreign bank account

It usually not necessary to open a bank account in your host country, for it can be a very complicated process. If you need to open a bank account, check with the international office at your host university for instructions and required documents.

Staying in Touch

It is easier and more affordable than ever to stay in touch with family, friends, and yes, even your study abroad advisor, while you are abroad. Remember, your family back home in the US is concerned about you, so inform them if you will be traveling or unreachable for any period of time.

Email

You may or may not have internet access through your host university. However, internet cafes abound and you will likely have fairly regular access to email if you desire. **Safety Tip:** Although not foolproof, it is always a good idea to delete the cookies and history from your web browser whenever using public computers. Beware of people viewing your financial account statements that you may be loading...

Telephone

The cheapest way to phone home is usually with a calling card. When shopping for the best international rates, be sure that you indicate where the call will be originating. Check with your current long distance carrier to see what rates they have. There are prepaid cards available and phone cards that will bill you monthly. Make sure you know how to view and pay your bill online from abroad if you opt for the latter.

Many students find it extremely affordable for family members and friends in the US to call them abroad by using phone cards that you purchase online (such as ComFi) that offer very low rates or using Skype (below).

If staying with a host family, be respectful of their telephone. In most other countries, **people must pay for local calls and calls to cell phones are very expensive**. Talk with your host family about their preferences for your use of the phone. Usually, host families will prefer that you purchase a phone card and use a pay phone to make your calls. Many students also purchase cell phones while abroad.

Cell Phone

Many students purchase cell phones for use abroad. In some cases, your current cell phone will be able to work overseas if you unlock it and buy a new SIM card. Using your current service to roam abroad however is very expensive.

Voice-Over-Internet Protocol (VOIP)

You can also make phone calls over the internet if you have a headset or earphones and microphone. The most popular service is Skype, which allows users to make telephone calls to other Skype users (free), or to landlines and cell phones (for a fee). International calls start from 2.1 cents per minute, with a 3.9 cent connection fee. Skype also provides voice mail and monthly plans. Find more info on VOIP services online (see appendix).

Packing

It is nearly every student's tendency to overpack. For your own sake, do not pack more than you can comfortably carry **by yourself**. Remember, you could be carrying all of your luggage, alone, from the airport to the metro to the train station to the taxi to the university residence, up and down stairs, through terminals and crowds, and that's after having flown for several hours and being completely jet lagged.

Check the climate and weather at your destination and speak with study abroad returnees to see what types of clothing they recommend. Keep in mind that you will probably purchase clothing items while abroad and this will supplement your wardrobe. Bring along clothes that you can mix and match and don't need special care (such as dry cleaning, ironing, etc.). Speak to study abroad returnees or natives of that country to see what clothing style people wear. You should try to bring clothes that do not scream, "I'm American!"

Airlines have become stricter about what may be carried on in your hand luggage, and the regulations change frequently. Check the airline's website or TSA website before departure regarding the current restrictions regarding liquids carried on, size and type of carry on allowance, etc.

Luggage

Generally speaking, most international airlines will permit you to check through two pieces of luggage whose total external dimensions do not exceed 106 inches (length + width + depth of both pieces added together) with the larger piece not exceeding 62 inches. There may be some exceptions to this general rule, and most airlines are quite particular about weight limitations; the airline or your travel agent should be able to inform you of the latest policies affecting luggage limitations. **Note that extra luggage or exceeding weight limits can be very expensive!**

Bring durable luggage that is light nylon or canvas with wheels. You should consider a traveler's backpack to keep your hands free. Ideally, you should limit yourself to one piece of luggage and one carry on (i.e. suitcase and backpack; large traveler backpack and small bag, etc.)

Mark all luggage, inside and out, with your name and address. If you have an itinerary, put a copy inside each bag. Keep a list of what is in each bag and carry the list with your other documents. Mark your bags in some distinctive way (suggestion: brightly-colored luggage tag) so they are easily found. Count your pieces of luggage each time you move. Try to travel light; it's safer and easier!

With increased airport security, **only TSA-approved luggage locks** are permitted. You may purchase these at stores like Target. To ensure your suitcase doesn't open in transit, you should purchase and use a luggage belt. The belt will keep your luggage closed in the case of your zipper opening or breaking.

Do not bring anything that you would not want to lose! Leave your expensive jewelry, valuables, and sentimental items at home.

See the appendix for a packing list and other suggestions.

Travel During Your Study Abroad Program

No doubt you will want to take advantage of your new surroundings, proximity to cultural and tourist sites, and often excellent rail or public transportation systems to do some traveling while abroad. There are many resources (and deals!) to help students get around. When making travel arrangements at home or abroad, always make sure to tell the agent you are a student and ask if any discounted fares are available. This is especially important outside the U.S. where student discounts are more common.

Always leave your itinerary and expected return date with someone at your host location. If there is an emergency, someone needs to know where you are and when you're expected to return.

Guidebooks & Magazines

There are numerous guidebooks designed for independent and budget travelers, giving advice on travel arrangements, food, lodging, entertainment, and tourist (or non-tourist) sites. They are truly invaluable for finding and reserving accommodations when planning a trip over breaks. Some good ones are *Let's Go!* and *Lonely Planet*. The Study Abroad Office also has travel magazines available to students free of charge.

Eurail Passes

Eurail passes are a great bargain for traveling via train throughout Europe. There are different packages and rate plans available; visit the STA Travel website for full details and to purchase. **Note: Eurail passes and Europasses can only be mailed to addresses in the US, so plan to either purchase one before you go or have a family member send it to you via express mail.**

Budget Airlines

In many cases, especially in Europe, you can fly for less money than taking the train. Flights are usually not from the main airport, but are a substantial bus ride outside of the city (usually \$10 - \$20 charge to ride bus). You can find very inexpensive flights, but be aware that the advertised price does not include airport taxes and charges for service, security, credit card handling, fuel, and excess luggage. Try some of the following airlines:

- www.whichbudget.com view available routes and airlines by departure or arrival city and get a link to the airlines
- Easy Jet www.easyjet.com
- Ryan Air www.ryanair.com
- BMI www.flybmi.com

Hostels

Hostels are often the least expensive lodging option for students. A hostel is a type of budget accommodation that usually involves shared, dormitory-style room and shared bathrooms. Hostelling can be a great way to meet other student travelers and learn about interesting activities in that city. Many times bedding is provided but sometimes you must bring your own sheets. As you may be sharing a room with strangers (generally other student travelers) you should always lock your belongings in the luggage lockers that are provided. Be sure to book your hostels before you travel to ensure you have a bed for the night! www.hostelworld.com

SAFETY

Before Leaving and Soon After Arrival

- ❑ **Make photocopies of all important documents**, including:
 - Passport (picture/signature page and visa)
 - Travelers checks (serial numbers and hotline)
 - Credit cards (both sides) and telephone numbers

Leave one copy at home, and have a second copy packed separate from these documents. In case of loss or theft, it will be much easier to report and have these items replaced if you have photocopies.

- ❑ **Register with the US Embassy** (you can do this via internet before leaving the US). The following website will direct you to the page that explains how Americans can register with the local US Embassy in their host country. When an emergency happens, or if natural disaster, terrorism, or civil unrest strikes during your foreign travel, the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate can be your source of assistance and information. By registering your trip, you help the embassy or consulate locate you when you might need them the most. Given the current international situation, it is very important to take this simple precaution.
 - **Go to <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/>**
 - Click on “Add Trip”
 - Create an account
 - Select “Short-Term Traveler” for stays of less than six months or “Long Term Traveler/Overseas Resident” for longer stays
 - Follow the directions to complete the online form
- ❑ **Email the study abroad advisor your contact information** immediately upon arrival (address, phone number, room number, email address, etc.)
- ❑ **Complete the Emergency Card** with local emergency information and keep it in your wallet.

Throughout Your Period Abroad

Most of you will be studying in cities and traveling to other cities during your vacation periods. You should become familiar with your "home base" as quickly as possible. You should also familiarize yourself with cities that you will be visiting before you begin to wander around and explore. This is easily done through maps and travel guides. If you have a good map of a city, you can learn its transportation system. Plan to purchase travel guides before leaving the U.S., since these guides may be more expensive or unavailable in your host country. Cities in other countries, like American cities, have their safe and unsafe neighborhoods. You can find out what areas to avoid by asking at an information booth in a train station when you arrive. Use your common sense and do not take risks.

- ❑ **Keep informed** of current political situations by listening daily to the television or radio news. In case of an emergency, advisories may be made to the general public through the media. You will still find yourself with many surprises, such as strikes, that may cause you to change your plans. Stay out of the political affairs. You can be deported or worse -- end up arrested or hurt. Unsuspecting tourists sometimes find themselves in downtown areas during protests. If this occurs, you should leave the area immediately. The following websites will also help you stay informed:
 - <http://travel.state.gov>
 - <http://www.ds-osac.org/>
 - http://dir.yahoo.com/News_and_Media/By_Region/Countries/
 - <http://asnic.utexas.edu/asnic.html> (for Asia and India)
 - <http://allafrica.com> (for Africa)
- ❑ **Know the laws of your host country.** Read the Consular Information Sheet for your country.
- ❑ **Stay in contact** with the International Office at your **host university**.
- ❑ UMSL Campus Police has our **after-hours phone numbers in case of emergency**: 314-516-5155
- ❑ **Keep in close touch with your family.** Reassure them often that you are ok....they worry about you!

Safety on the Street Use the same common sense while traveling abroad that you would at in the US.

- ❑ Don't use short cuts, alleys, or poorly-lighted streets. Avoid traveling alone at night.
- ❑ DO NOT get involved in political demonstrations, protests, or any other potentially volatile situations. Do not broadcast your political views to strangers, and avoid restaurants and entertainment places where Americans are known to congregate.
- ❑ Keep a low profile and avoid loud conversations or arguments.
- ❑ Avoid dressing "like an American" (i.e., tennis shoes, patriotic t-shirts, etc.) or congregating in commercial establishments known to attract large numbers of Americans.
- ❑ Avoid scam artists. Beware of strangers who approach you with "bargains."
- ❑ Beware of pickpockets. Often they have an accomplice who will:
 - Jostle you
 - Ask you for directions or the time
 - Point to something spilled on your clothing
 - Distract you by creating a disturbance

A child or a woman with a baby can be a pickpocket. Beware of groups of children who create a distraction while picking your pocket.

- ❑ Wear the shoulder strap of your bag across your chest to prevent passers-by from snatching it
- ❑ Appear as if you know where you are going at all times. To consult a map, duck into a shop. It is usually best to ask directions from authorities, families, or women with children.
- ❑ Know how to use the pay phones and always have change or a phone card on hand. Stand facing outwards, with your back to the payphone so no one can approach you unnoticed.
- ❑ Learn phrases in the local language so you signal your need for help, police, or doctor.
- ❑ If you are confronted, don't fight back. Give up your valuables. Your money and passport can be replaced, but you cannot.

Safety on Public Transportation

If a country has a pattern of tourists being targeted by criminals, that information is under the "Crime Section" on the Consular Information Sheet.

- ❑ Taxis. Only take taxis clearly identified with official markings and ask what the cost will be upfront. Taking a taxi late at night can be dangerous and in some places, women do not take taxis alone late at night. To prevent potential robbery or assault, use a Radio Taxi. Ask an employee at the restaurant or bar to call a taxi for you, and to tell you the company name so you will know when they arrive.
- ❑ Trains. On overnight trains, sleep on your luggage or take turns staying awake. Be aware of your surroundings and luggage at all times. When putting your bags overhead, store it slightly in front of you so you can see it.
- ❑ Buses. The same type of criminal activity found on trains can be found on public buses on popular tourist routes.
- ❑ If you see your way being blocked by a stranger and another person coming up behind you, move away. This can happen in the corridor of a train or on the platform or station.
- ❑ Do not accept food or drink from strangers, as it could be drugged. Where possible, lock your compartment.
- ❑ Do not hesitate to alert authorities if you feel threatened in any way.

Safety at Your Study Site

- ❑ Room security. Make sure all outside doors and windows close and lock; immediately report those that do not. Know the building layout and emergency exit routes.
- ❑ Secure valuable objects and documents. Keep them hidden, preferably in a locked container, while you are out of the residence. When not traveling, secure your passport in your residence.
- ❑ Get to know your neighborhood. Who are the residents? Who works in your building? Know where streets and alleys lead in your vicinity and the normal activity pattern.
- ❑ Be cautious and choosy about whom you invite into your residence. If you live in a dormitory or apartment, meet visitors in the lobby.

- ❑ Let someone you trust know your destination and estimated return time when you go out, especially if you will be gone for a full day or more.
- ❑ Remember the emergency number is probably **not** 911. Check to find out what it is in your host country.

Safety in Your Hotel or Hostel

- ❑ Keep your hotel door locked at all times. Meet visitors in the lobby.
- ❑ Use the hotel safe or hostel locker to store money and valuables while you are out.
- ❑ If you are alone, do not get in the elevator if there is a suspicious-looking person inside.
- ❑ Read fire safety instructions inside your room and know where the exits are located.

Lost or Stolen Possessions

- ❑ Report the loss immediately to the local police. Keep a copy of the police report for insurance claims.
- ❑ Report the loss or theft of the following to these agencies:
 - Travelers checks – Nearest agent of the issuing company
 - Credit cards – issuing company
 - Airline tickets – airline or travel agent
 - Passport – nearest US embassy or consulate

Safety When Going Out and/or Consuming Alcohol

- ❑ Always know how you're going to get home and what time the public transportation stops running.
- ❑ Go out in groups and keep tabs on each other. Use the buddy system!
- ❑ Drugs known as Rohypnal, roofies, GHB, and the "date rape" drug exist. Be cautious about your drinks (alcoholic or non) to ensure you're not a victim.
- ❑ Order bottled drinks and watch the bartender open them. If ordering mixed drinks, order from the bar and watch them being made.
- ❑ Never leave your drink unattended or let anyone else carry it. If you do, do not finish it.
- ❑ Know your limits. Alcohol reduces your inhibitions and makes you an easy target for a multitude of crimes, from robbery, to sexual assault and rape.
- ❑ Do not drive if you have consumed **any** alcohol. Other countries often have much stricter laws regarding driving under the influence, and you could end up in jail.

Safety in Dating and Relationships

- ❑ Dating is full of misread signals and confusion when you're at home in the US, and that uncertainty is multiplied in a foreign country with different cultural and social values, expectations, and even languages! **You should expect differences, observe before you act, communicate your boundaries clearly, and move away from situations that make you uncomfortable.**
- ❑ Women should act more conservatively abroad than they would at home. In many countries, a simple smile or hello can be construed as an invitation.
- ❑ Before you go, find a native of the host country to discuss heterosexual and homosexual dating patterns, such as group vs. individual dates, if it is OK for women to ask out men, flirting, sexual expectations, taboos, etc.
- ❑ Be aware of the stereotypes people in your host country have of American men and women, ranging from "Puritan" to "easy." Address these stereotypes with your partner.
- ❑ Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered students will face different stereotypes abroad. Cultures vary in how sexual identities are defined and understood, so GLBT students should research the receptivity and social climate of their host country. An excellent resource is <http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/>.
- ❑ You should bring all contraception (oral and condoms) with you. It is possible that it won't be available at all, or not the same quality, as here in the US.
- ❑ Keep in mind the long-term consequences of your actions, and take proper precautions. You don't want to bring home a "souvenir" such as STDs, AIDS, or a pregnancy.
- ❑ Depending on your host country, the rate of STDs and AIDS may be much higher than in the US.

General Study Abroad Safety

The majority of injuries and fatalities that occur to study abroad students from:

- ❑ **Alcohol.** Know your limits and be careful (see notes on alcohol above).
- ❑ **Swimming.** Currents can change unexpectedly, trapping students and causing death by drowning. Many areas do not have lifeguards. Be extremely cautious when swimming and swim only in designated areas. Never swim alone.
- ❑ **Motor Vehicles.** Students can be killed or injured while riding in motor vehicles, or hit when walking on the street. Know the traffic rules and customs – pedestrians may not have the right of way!

Special Safety Notes for Women

From the U.S. Department of State “Tips for Women Traveling Alone” http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips_women.html

Each country and culture has their own views of what is appropriate behavior for women. Although you may not agree with these views, it is wise to abide by the local laws and customs to avoid problems. Please become familiar with the laws and customs of the places where you wish to go. Here are two examples of situations you may encounter:

- It is illegal in Laos to invite Lao nationals of the opposite sex to one's hotel room.
- Foreigners in Saudi Arabia have been arrested in the past for "improper dress."

Women traveling alone can be more vulnerable to problems in certain cultures. Keeping in mind the following information can help make your trip as safe and rewarding as possible.

- ❑ **Safety and Security:** Use common sense and be alert and aware of your surroundings. If you are unsure in general about the local situation, feel free to check with the American Citizens Services section of the local U.S. Embassy or Consulate for the latest security information.
- ❑ **Don't announce that you are traveling alone!** Some guides for women even advise wearing a wedding ring if you're single. If you feel like you're being followed, step into a store or other safe place and wait to see if the person you think is following has passed. Do not be afraid or embarrassed to ask for someone to double check for you to see if all is safe. Display confidence. By looking and acting as if you know where you're going, you may be able to ward off some potential danger.
- ❑ **Ask for directions before you set out.** No matter how modest your lodgings, your hotel concierge or other hotel staff should be able to help. If you find yourself lost, do not be afraid to ask for directions. Generally, the safest people to ask are families or women with children. Getting the right information may save you from ending up in a potentially unsafe area.
- ❑ **Hotels:** Choose a hotel where security is good and transportation is readily available and nearby. Check that all the doors and windows in your room have locks and that they work. If you feel uncomfortable, ask hotel security to escort you to and from parking lots or your room at night. Always use your peephole and common sense about letting strangers into your room.
- ❑ **Clothing:** There is no doubt that fashion makes a statement. Unfortunately, not everyone will interpret how you dress the same way you would. What you consider casual clothing might be seen as provocative or inappropriate in other cultures. Thieves might choose you over another potential target based on your style of dress or the amount of makeup or jewelry you are wearing. Other might single you out for harassment or even physical violence because they find your clothing offensive, based on their cultural norms. By taking your cues from local women, or at least by dressing conservatively, you could save yourself a great deal of trouble.

Special Safety Notes for Ethnic and Religious Minorities

You may not be considered an ethnic or religious majority in the United States, but by going abroad you become, in a sense, a minority. There might not be a lot of U.S. students studying in the area you will be, so, in that sense, you are a novelty—someone new and different who stands out from the locals. In some cases, your outward appearance can also make you stand out, especially if the country's population is very homogeneous. Sometimes the locals' curiosity, interest, ignorance or misunderstanding of you can be unpleasant. If a comment offends you, try to be tactful with your response, or if you are very upset, leave the room. Remember that

cultural and ethnic sensitivity is not as strong abroad as it is in the United States, and some comments are simply made out of ignorance, not malice.

Political turmoil or lack of tolerance can make some ethnic and religious groups a target for mistreatment or even violence in many countries. Political rallies and certain dates like anniversaries of historic events also often spur ethnic and religious conflicts in many countries. Certain hate crimes may not even be considered crimes in your host country. With regard to religion, the risk or censure you attract depends on your level of religious involvement abroad. If others where you will be studying have been attacked for practicing the religion you practice, any signs of your religious affiliation may put you at risk as well.

Ethnic or religious issues shouldn't be a negative factor of your study abroad experience. That's why it's important to do a little research ahead of time to survey the national sentiment and current events of your host country. For more information on the current events going on at your destination, please see links in the appendix section of this Handbook.

Special Safety Notes for GLBT Students

It is important for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender (GLBT) students to be aware that the way sexual identities are defined and understood will vary by country and culture. In some countries, even modern ones, homosexual sex itself can result in severe state-sanctioned punishment up to and including the death penalty. It is usually not homosexuality that brings about such punishments, but rather the sex act. You might want to consider how a possible threat of discrimination or punishment might affect your experience or activities in your host country. Generally, acceptance and tolerance of GLBT issues is increasing in some parts of the world, but some countries and individuals remain intolerant. Make sure to research the prevailing sentiment toward GLBT issues abroad, as well as the laws related to them. If you don't want to compromise on your lifestyle or if you're concerned that your sexual orientation may be an issue, then you may have to be selective in where you travel.

Points of Consideration for All Students

1) Sexuality and Gender Stereotypes

- What are gender relations in the host culture?
- What is considered typical male and female social behavior in the host culture?
- What is the social perception of gays and lesbians? How are they socially defined?
- What roles do transgender people play in the host culture?
- What is the difference between sexuality and sensuality in the host culture?

2) Law and Local Attitudes: "Legal but not Legal"

- Are there "public decency" laws? Or "public indecency" laws?
- Are there laws forbidding homosexual acts?
- Are there "vagrancy" laws?
- Does the law require having "proper documentation" at all times?
- What is the police attitude towards the local GLBT community?
- Does the law apply the same to "upper class" and "working class" gays?
- Does the law apply the same in urban areas (cities) as in rural, in-country areas?

Special Safety Notes for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities abroad can also be the victims of prejudice and stereotyping. The disabled report being stared at, ignored, un-assisted, and/ or talked down to more frequently abroad than they tend to be in the United States. In many countries, there are no standards or requirements for providing access for the disabled.

Wheelchair ramps, handicapped parking spaces, braille signs, and other aides may be non-existent in parts of the host country, especially rural areas. In addition to a lack of services provided to the physically disabled, there may also be a lack of services provided to those with a learning disability, those with a psychological or emotional need, or those who are mentally challenged. If you need to make special arrangements abroad, it is a good idea to inquire far in advance. Your program's staff abroad may require some time in order to facilitate your needs. UM-St. Louis will help facilitate accommodations through the host university, but even though you request that your special needs be met, it may be impossible for your program's staff abroad to assist you.

Institutional Responsibilities

Institutions:

- ❑ Cannot guarantee or assure the safety of participants or eliminate all risks from the study abroad environments.
- ❑ Cannot monitor or control all of the daily personal decisions, choices, and activities of individual participants.
- ❑ Cannot prevent participants from engaging in illegal, dangerous or unwise activities.
- ❑ Cannot assure that U.S. standards of due process apply in overseas legal proceedings or provide or pay for legal representation for participants.
- ❑ Cannot assume responsibility for the actions of persons not employed or otherwise engaged by the program sponsor, for events that are not part of the program, or that are beyond the control of the sponsor and its subcontractors, or for situations that may arise due to the failure of a participant to disclose pertinent information.
- ❑ Cannot assure that home-country cultural values and norms will apply in the host country.

DRUGS and the LOCAL LAW

U.S. State Department Travel Warning on Drugs Abroad: Things You Should Know Before You Go

http://travel.state.gov/travel/livingabroad_drugs.html

HARD FACTS

- **Each year, 2,500 Americans are arrested overseas.** One third of the arrests are on drug-related charges. Many of those arrested assumed that, as U.S. citizens, they could not be arrested. From Asia to Africa, Europe to South America, U.S. citizens are finding out the hard way that drug possession or trafficking equals jail in foreign countries.
- **There is very little that anyone can do to help you if you are caught with drugs.**
- **It is your responsibility to know what the drug laws are in a foreign country before you go, because "I didn't know it was illegal" will not get you out of jail.**
- In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of women arrested abroad. The rise is a result of women who serve as drug couriers or "mules" in the belief they can make quick money and have a vacation without getting caught. Instead of a short vacation, they get a lengthy stay or life sentence in a foreign jail.
- **A number of the Americans arrested abroad on drug charges possessed marijuana. Many of these possessed one ounce or less of the substance. The risk of being put in jail for just one marijuana cigarette is not worth it.**
- If you are purchasing prescription medications in quantities larger than that considered necessary for personal use, you could be arrested on suspicion of drug trafficking.
- **Once you're arrested, the American consular officer CANNOT get you out!**
- You may say "it couldn't happen to me" but the fact is that it could happen to you if you find yourself saying one of the following:
 - ...*"I'm an American citizen and no foreign government can put me in their jail."*
 - ...*"If I only buy or carry a small amount, it won't be a problem."*

If you are arrested on a drug charge it is important that you know what your government **CAN** and **CANNOT** do for you.

The U.S. Consular Officer **CAN**

- visit you in jail after being notified of your arrest

- give you a list of local attorneys (The U.S. Government cannot assume responsibility for the professional ability or integrity of these individuals or recommend a particular attorney.)
- notify your family and/or friends and relay requests for money or other aid -- but only with your authorization
- intercede with local authorities to make sure that your rights ***under local law*** are fully observed and that you are treated humanely, according to internationally accepted standards
- protest mistreatment or abuse to the appropriate authorities

The U.S. Consular Officer ***CANNOT***

- demand your immediate release or get you out of jail or the country!
- represent you at trial or give legal counsel
- pay legal fees and/or fines with U.S. Government funds

If you are caught buying, selling, carrying or using ANY drugs, **IT COULD MEAN:**

- **Interrogation and Delays Before Trial** - including mistreatment and solitary confinement for up to one year under very primitive conditions
- **Lengthy Trials** - conducted in a foreign language, with delays and postponements
- **Weeks, Months or Life in Prison** - some places include hard labor, heavy fines, and/or lashings, if found guilty
- **Death Penalty** - in a growing number of countries (e.g., Malaysia, Pakistan and Turkey)
- Although drug laws vary by country, it is important to realize before you make the mistake of getting involved with drugs that foreign countries do not react lightly to drug offenders. In some countries, anyone who is caught with even a very small quantity for personal use may be tried and receive the same sentence as the large-scale trafficker.

DON'T LET YOUR TRIP ABROAD BECOME A NIGHTMARE!

This information has been provided to inform you before it is too late. SO THINK FIRST!

- A number of countries, including the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Mexico and the Philippines, have enacted more stringent drug laws which impose mandatory jail sentences for individuals convicted of possessing even small amounts of marijuana or cocaine for personal use.
- Once you leave the US, you are not covered by U.S. laws and constitutional rights.
- Bail is not granted in many countries when drugs are involved.
- The burden of proof in many countries is on the accused to prove his/her innocence.
- Evidence obtained illegally by local authorities may be admissible in court.
- Few countries offer drug offenders jury trials or even require the prisoner's presence at his/her trial.
- Many countries have mandatory prison sentences of seven years or life, without the possibility of parole for drug violations.

REMEMBER!

- If someone offers you a free trip and some quick and easy money just for bringing back a suitcase... **SAY NO!**
- Don't carry a package for anyone, no matter how small it might seem.
- The police and customs officials have a right to search your luggage for drugs. If they find drugs in **your** suitcase, **you** will suffer the consequences.
- You could go to jail for years and years with no possibility of parole, early release or transfer back to the U.S. Don't make a jail sentence part of your trip abroad.

The Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs' Office of Overseas Citizens Services provides emergency services pertaining to the protection of Americans arrested or detained abroad, the search for U.S. citizens overseas, the transmission of emergency messages to those citizens or their next of kin in the United States and other emergency and non-emergency services. Contact the Office of Overseas Citizens Services from Monday through Friday, 8:15 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. at (202) 647-5225. For an emergency after hours or on weekends and holidays, ask for the Overseas Citizens Services' duty officer at (202) 647-4000. Internet home page: <http://travel.state.gov>.

HEALTH

Starting Out Right

- ❑ Before going abroad, have a check-up with your doctor and address any concerns you may have.
- ❑ If you require regular medical care for any condition you may have, tell those in your host country who can be of assistance. This could be identifying a doctor who will provide your care abroad, or discussing your condition with dorm mates/ classmates in case emergency intervention is required. If you are unsure about anything in your host country, ask questions.
- ❑ Many study locations in developing countries require immunizations that must be obtained starting approximately 8 weeks before your departure. Check the Centers for Disease Control website to see what immunizations are required/recommended for your destination. Also be sure to check for neighboring country requirements. www.cdc.gov
- ❑ Students going to any country should update their immunization boosters, such as MMR and Tetanus.
- ❑ Review the HTH Medical Pre-departure Checklist included in your orientation packet.
- ❑ Utilize the HTH website at www.hthstudents.com. They have a list of medical terminology and prescription drug translations, lists of English speaking doctors, and extensive information on health and safety in cities around the world. Logon to their website for full access to this information.

Healthy Living

Living in a foreign country can be stressful on the body, so take care of yourself. Get enough sleep, exercise, and eat balanced meals (as much as you can!).

- ❑ Inform yourself about common ailments and diseases at your study location.
- ❑ Don't forget the emotional as well as physical aspects of health. Don't isolate yourself. You may have to make the first move in developing new friendships, but they are an essential part of the overseas experience and your emotional well-being.
- ❑ Wash your hands often. It is the number one way to prevent sickness, from the common cold to viral and bacterial infections.
- ❑ Check with the American embassy or consulate in your host country for a list of English-speaking doctors if you need treatment.

Eating Abroad

Consider items you will need to facilitate eating inexpensively before you depart. Some items you might want to take along are: pocketknife, corkscrew, can opener, water bottle, and a mess kit (pack in your luggage, not carry on). Bring any special dietary supplements or food items you are accustomed to: black pepper, vitamin C, peanut butter, or granola bars. It is illegal to carry perishables or plants across country boundaries.

Food and Water In many parts of the world, it is unsafe to drink the water and eat certain foods. If you are traveling to a country in the developing world, remember to purify your water by boiling it or drink bottled water. Brush your teeth with purified water. Carefully wash all fruits and vegetables with purified water. A good rule of thumb is: **boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it!**

Don't panic if the change in diet affects your health adversely when you first arrive in a new country. In countries where tap water is safe to drink, the slight difference in mineral content in the water might be enough to upset your system. Be patient. Students studying in the developing world may need to review food and water safety guidelines.

Vegetarians will likely encounter some difficulties abroad. The definition of "vegetarian" varies: in many countries, vegetarians still eat seafood or chicken. You should familiarize yourself with food names and ingredients before you go abroad so you can ask appropriate questions.

Be brave! Take the time to explore local taverns and restaurants. You can learn a lot about countries by their cuisine and the clientele they serve. But at the same time, be aware of food and water safety precautions. Also, watch out for "extras." In some places you may pay extra for a napkin or ketchup!

Prescriptions

- ❑ Always pack medications in your carry on luggage. Keep them in the original containers.
- ❑ If you require prescription drugs such as medications for asthma or diabetes, you must take an adequate supply with you and know how to administer them. Check with your airline to what the regulations are regarding bringing needles onboard the aircraft and any documentation that you may need.
- ❑ Carry a copy of all prescriptions, including the generic names for drugs, and written instructions from your physician.
- ❑ Obtain enough prescription medications in the US to cover your entire stay abroad. If you cannot, you should contact HTH Insurance to see what the procedure is for obtaining refills. It can take up to 1.5 months to obtain a refill, so plan in advance!
- ❑ Check the host country's embassy website to see what prescription drugs may be illegal in that country.
- ❑ Be aware that certain drugs used for mental health or anxiety may not be available in other countries, so bring an adequate supply and a note from your physician supporting your use of them.
- ❑ If you become ill and need to purchase prescription medication while abroad, be sure to save your receipts to submit the claim to HTH Insurance.
- ❑ You cannot simply have prescriptions mailed to you – they will likely be confiscated in customs.

Glasses and Contact Lenses

Take an extra pair with you and the prescription for them. Bring enough contact lens solution for the duration of your stay, as it can be very expensive or hard to find abroad.

Mental Health

As many as one in three college students take medication designed for psychological purposes. For the most part students taking medication (or those with psychological issues not on medication) do well on study abroad programs. However, there are several things to keep in mind if you fall into this common category. The pressures of adjustment to a new way of life, the lack of familiar support, and a new language can all present special concerns. Study abroad is not an escape. Problems and issues that students have in the US are often exacerbated in a foreign country when coupled with the stress of a new culture and environment. It is important to keep this in mind and follow the suggestions below (from the Study Abroad Foundation).

- ❑ Students undergoing treatment for mental health conditions should notify their study abroad advisor so that we may assist them student in finding counseling support in the host country, if necessary. Any information of this type is kept completely confidential.
- ❑ Students on medication for a mental health condition should continue treatment unless advised by a physician to stop. Too often, temporary changes make students feel overconfident and that they no longer need the medication.
- ❑ Students who have been treated for anxiety, depression, eating disorders, or anything else that can be classified as a mental health condition should check their study abroad insurance policy.
- ❑ If you are a recovering alcoholic, check into AA chapters that may be available in your host city.
- ❑ Availability of certain medicines may be limited. Students should check with HTH insurance website or the host country's website about possible restrictions and methods of refilling prescriptions while abroad.
- ❑ "Forewarned is forearmed" is an appropriate adage. Prior to departure students should research support systems (counselors, crisis centers, etc.) available at the host university and/or city where they will live. The International Office of the host university should be of assistance in planning for emergencies.

In Case of Emergency

- ❑ Know the local emergency number. It is not 911!
- ❑ For a natural disaster or political occurrence contact the US Embassy
- ❑ Contact your program leader or host university's international office staff for guidance
- ❑ If you need medical assistance, contact HTH Worldwide 24 hours a day
- ❑ Keep the Study Abroad Office apprised of the situation. Staff members may be reached during non-business hours by calling the UMSL Police at 314-516-5155.

ACADEMICS ABROAD

Although we hope that you will spend time traveling and exploring abroad, your primary responsibility will be academic. After all, you are undertaking an endeavor called *study* abroad. Depending on the type and length of program, the academic experience of participants is going to vary widely.

Exchange Programs

Students participating in exchange programs attend a foreign university for a summer program, one semester, or an academic year. This is the most challenging academic situation for students, because you are immersed in and must adapt to a foreign educational environment. Because each country and university will be unique, be sure to talk with UMSL returnees or exchange students from that university to find out exactly what it will be like. Once you arrive, be sure to talk with other students, faculty, and the international office staff about any questions you have regarding academic structure and expectations.

Overall, here are some differences to expect:

- *Registration.* You will probably register for classes when you arrive at your host university. The registration process may seem inefficient or frustrating. Ask questions and try to follow along – just because something is different from how we do it in the US does not make it bad!
- *Homework.* Usually, foreign universities do not have daily or weekly homework like in the US. Students are independent learners and are expected to keep up with the readings on their own.
- *Books.* Usually you will not purchase several textbooks like in the US, but rather will have to make copies from the library or purchase a copied set of readings. There may be an extensive “recommended” reading list.
- *Exams.* Often, students take only one or two exams throughout the entire semester. Exams may be several hours long and require lengthy and well-constructed essays.
- *Grading.* Your grade is often based on just one or two exams (usually the final exam). Any grade disputes must be settled at the foreign institution. We cannot change grades at UMSL for classes taken abroad.
- *In-class participation.* Students may or may not be expected to participate or ask questions in class. Observe how native students are acting in your classes.
- *Student-instructor interaction.* In most other countries, student-instructor relations are more formal than in the US. Pay attention to how other students address the instructor and other university staff (Doctor, Professor, Mrs., etc.). When is the instructor available for questions – after class? office hours?

Faculty-Led Programs

On faculty-led programs, the faculty leader will give a clear explanation of how the class will function and what the grading requirements/expectations are. Any questions should be directed to the faculty leader.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

So far, we’ve discussed the logistics, safety, and health issues to consider when preparing for your study abroad experience. Just as important is preparing mentally and psychologically, as things will not be the same as they are in the US. One way to feel more secure about your preparedness is to research the culture of the country you will be living in.

Understanding Culture

What is culture? *From the Peace Corp’s “What’s Up with Culture?”*

One of first things you will encounter when you go abroad is something you can’t really see, but which, if you don’t understand what it is and how it works, can seriously affect how you adjust to and enjoy your time overseas. That “thing” is CULTURE. The kind of culture we will address here is not at all the kind of thing one

refers to when talking about being a "cultured person" or possessing a taste for modern art, champagne, and opera. Nor is culture the exclusive province of an educated elite.

Culture is a neutral term, neither good nor bad, and refers to the broadest conception about the learned knowledge that humans use to fulfill their needs and wants. It refers to the collective historical patterns, values, societal arrangements, manners, ideas, and ways of living that people have used to order their society. It is comprised of all those things we learn as part of growing up including language, religion, beliefs about economic and social relations, political organization and legitimacy, and the thousands of "Dos and Don'ts" society deems important that we know to become a functioning member of that group.

When you go abroad you immediately meet individuals, perhaps a bewildering variety of them, but you also enter another "culture." The behaviors and attitudes you can externally observe in others are molded and motivated by their prior cultural learning, just as yours have molded you. You can't see a person's culture directly because feelings, judgments, and mental constructs are not always on display, although they may become evident through what people say or do.

Culture has been defined in literally hundreds of ways for different reasons. **For study abroad purposes, culture can be most broadly defined as the shared sets of values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that are widely held by members of the host culture. You will not only need to be aware of these cultural patterns but will have to respond to them appropriately.**

Values

The values held by the people in your host country form a major part of the culture.

- A value is a cultural judgment
 - about what is good or bad
 - right or wrong
 - desirable or undesirable
- Values are emotionally charged

Students going abroad must understand the values they hold and how they pertain to US culture in order to understand their own reaction to the values and culture of the host country.

Generalizations vs. Stereotypes

It is important to learn as much as possible about your host culture before going abroad. In doing so, and when encountering cultural situations in your host country, keep in mind the difference between generalizations and stereotypes.

Generalizations:

- Are consciously held
- Are based on intercultural research
- Allow for individual difference
- Use tentative and relative language

Stereotypes:

- Are usually held unconsciously
- Are formed from limited experience
- Put a whole group in a "pigeonhole"
- Oversimplify and use sweeping language

Generalizations can be tools for understanding your host culture, but as with any tool, there are limits to their applicability. It is important to understand generalizations and to avoid making stereotypes which are often incorrect and do not apply to the majority of a population.

Defining Your Host Country's Culture

Below is a list of thirty basic questions you can ask about your host country and culture. They are designed to help you become more aware of facts and behaviors found in your host country and to lay the groundwork for comparative thinking between host and home cultures. This is not intended to be an inclusive list and you will probably think of more questions as you attempt to answer these.

Go through the list and try to answer as many of the questions as you can. Next, try to answer the rest by reading

about the country, browsing the Internet, or by talking to someone here who is from your host country. There are international student organizations at UMSL whose members could be a great resource for finding out information about your new home. Take the questions you have remaining with you abroad and utilize the relationships you form with your host country's nationals to help you find the answers. People will most likely be flattered by your interest and will be eager to help you fill in the gaps.

1. How many people who are prominent in the affairs (politics, athletics, religion, the arts, etc.) of your host country can you name?
2. Who are the country's national heroes and heroines?
3. Can you recognize the national anthem?
4. Are other languages spoken besides the dominant language? What are the social and political implications of language usage? What language is used in the schools? At what level are foreign languages introduced?
5. What is the predominant religion? Is it a state religion? Have you read any of its sacred writings? How do members of the predominant religion feel about other religions?
6. What is the attitude toward- drinking? Smoking cigarettes? Gambling?
7. Is the price for merchandise fixed or are customers expected to bargain? How is the bargaining conducted?
8. How do people organize their daily activities? What is the normal meal schedule? Is there a daytime rest period? What is the customary time for visiting friends?
9. What foods are most popular and how are they prepared?
10. What is the usual dress for women? For men? Are slacks or shorts worn? If so, on what occasions? Do teenagers wear jeans?
11. If you are invited to dinner, should you arrive early? On time? Late? If late, how late? Does the same timing hold true in terms of arrival at school? At work?
12. On what occasions will you present (or accept) gifts from people in the country? What kind of gifts would you exchange?
13. How do people greet one another? Shake hands? Embrace or kiss? How do they leave one another? What does any variation from the usual greeting or leaving signify?
14. What kinds of non-verbal behavior are acceptable between sexes? Same sex? e.g. touching?
15. What are U.S. relations like in the past and present with your host country and the surrounding regions? Be able to provide a valid opinion of the U.S.'s actions or positions.
16. What are the important holidays? How is each observed?
17. What sports are popular? Do they involve gambling? If so, which ones?
18. How will your financial position and living conditions compare with those of the majority of people living in this country?
19. What things are taboo in this society?

20. Is military training compulsory?
21. Are the main newspapers generally friendly in their attitude toward the United States? Give examples.
22. Are there special privileges of age, sex, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status?
23. How many people have emigrated from this country to the United States? Other countries? Are many doing so at present?
24. What kinds of health services are available? Where are they located? How are the health services funded?
25. Where are the important universities of the country? If university education is sought abroad, to what countries and universities do students generally go? What percentage of university students has the opportunity to study abroad?
26. What are a few of the country's major literary contributions? Authors?
27. What are the differences/similarities between your home and host culture as to public/private institutions such as banks, libraries, post offices, media, schools, day care, hospitals?
28. What are the favorite leisure and recreational activities of adults or teenagers?
29. Where can medicines be purchased? What are the common local remedies?
30. What kind of local public transportation is available? Do all classes of people use it? Do many people have cars? Who has the right-of-way? Pedestrians? Animals?
31. How are children regarded? Do working mothers predominate or do most moms stay home? What are the father's responsibilities?

Culture Shock

What is culture shock?

Traveling abroad can be one of the most exhilarating learning experiences of your life. Or, it can turn out to be a series of bewildering and frustrating incidents that leave you longing for home. Aside from the basic preparation of the "dos" and "don'ts" of your trip, it is valuable to also take some time to investigate the "what am I likely to encounter" - that is, the things that will happen to you as you mingle with people whose values, traits and characteristics are different from your own. By thinking and preparing for these encounters, you will certainly enrich your travel abroad experience.

We are surrounded by elements in our own culture that influence who we are and how we relate to the world. Because we have grown up with this culture, we are comfortable in it. Our values and attitudes about who we are and how things should be have been shaped by our experiences in our native culture. What happens when we suddenly lose cues and symbols that orient us to situations of daily life? What happens when facial expressions, gestures and words are no longer familiar? The psychological discomfort that we feel in this foreign situation is commonly known as "Culture Shock."

Causes of cultural shock/culture stress

- Lack of a defined niche (no place where you fit in)
- Increased ambiguity and uncertainty
- Frustration with daily activities, including using a phone, convenient shopping hours, and getting around
- Deprivation of identity reinforcement

- Presence of structure where you don't want it and lack of structure where you need it
- Absence of clear role models
- Lack of meaningful work; unclear assignments or expectations
- Situational factors that differ from what you're accustomed to: food, housing, climate, neighbors

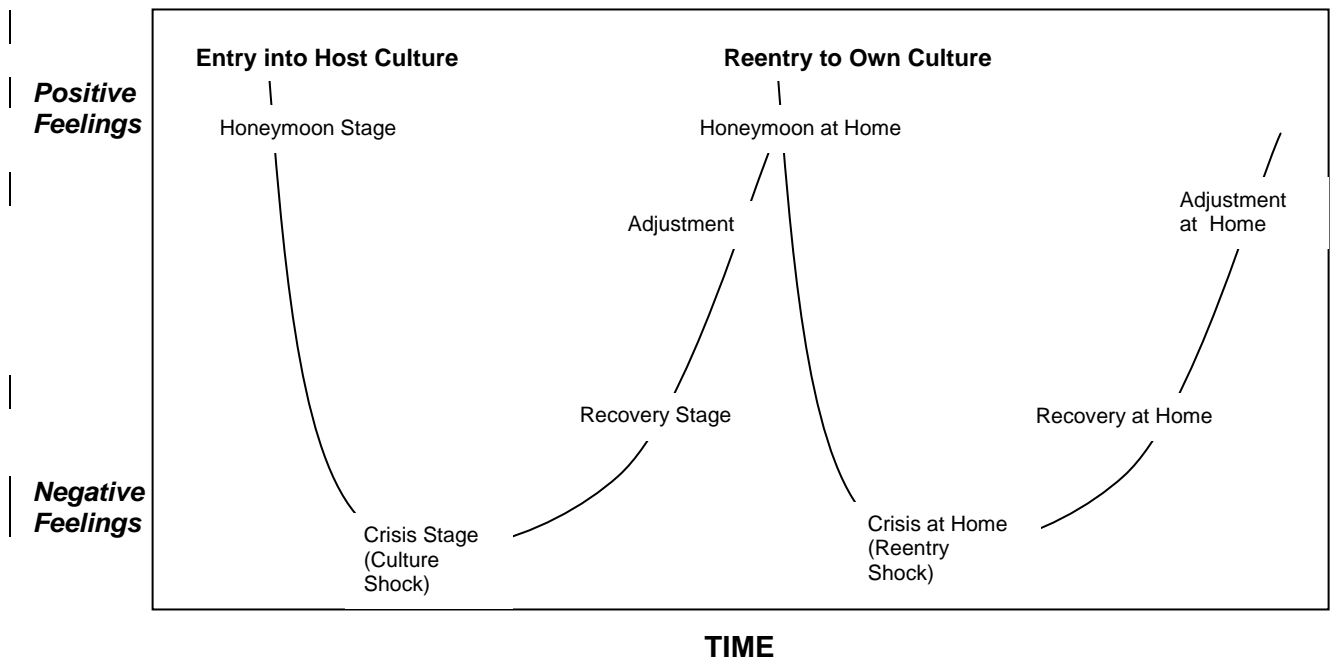
Common symptoms

- Fatigue, generalized frustration
- Feeling of helplessness
- Irritability at slight provocations, perceived criticisms
- Strong desire to seek out people from back home
- Loss of spontaneity, flexibility; work declines in quality
- Difficulty communicating feelings to others
- Excessive preoccupation with appearance and/or cleanliness
- Excessive concern about cheated or being made fun of
- Overwhelming urge to go home

Positive results of culture stress

- New situations create new responses
- Strong feelings can be energizing
- Trying new behaviors leads to new skills
- Gaining new skills, which builds self-realization and self-affirmation
- Process of change, while challenging, leads to learning and growth

The W-Curve of Culture Shock



1. Honeymoon Stage: Being fascinated with all the new things you are experiencing.
2. Downward slope: Feeling uncomfortable because you don't belong.
3. Crisis Stage: Rejecting the foreign culture and people as being strange.
4. Recovery Stage: Learning to decipher foreign behavior and customs.
5. Adjustment: Accepting and enjoying the foreign culture.

What You Can Do About Culture Shock

There is no way to completely avoid culture shock, but you can prepared for it and minimize its effects. You can, and should, take many steps before leaving the US to prepare for your cultural experience abroad.

1. Increase your knowledge about the host culture. Knowledge helps dispel paranoia and increases your sense of efficacy, as well as feelings of familiarity and comfort. You can learn more about your host culture through the following activities:
 - a. Read about the culture before you leave and bring some materials with you. A great resource is the **Culture Shock!** series, specific to each country (e.g. Culture Shock! France)
 - b. Answer the questions in the previous pages and make a list of your own to guide your search for information
 - c. Talk to international students from that country
 - d. Talk to American students that have studied in that country
2. Get your bearings. When you arrive, spend some time exploring and mapping your neighborhood. Learn where you can find services such as groceries, laundry, police, or medical assistance.
3. Go to your classes everyday and practice the host language. Falling behind in your coursework will cause you even more stress and fatigue, so stay current with your classes.
4. Moderate your expectations and be proud of your “baby steps.” Feel good about the small accomplishments you make, such as learning to use the sideways washing machines, finding your way to school without getting lost, and having the baker understand you when you order something.
5. Have fun! Find a place that is comfortable for you and do things you enjoy each week, incorporating exercise, time to interact with others, and time for yourself.
6. Discuss your feelings with others. Other international students, from the US or other countries, are likely experiencing the same feelings that you are. Help each other out, explore the city together, etc. Just remember to stay positive!
7. Consider culture shock a natural process, not a sign of weakness.
8. Keep a journal to help articulate your feelings.
9. Seek help if you need it. If you feel sad, angry, or homesick for a long time, ask for help! The international student office at your host university or your study abroad advisor back at UMSL may be able to refer you to someone with whom you can discuss your concerns.
10. Remember that culture shock is temporary. Every student before you has experienced some form of culture shock, and you too will get through it and appreciate what you have learned from the experience.

Adjusting to Life in a Foreign Country

As discussed above, one reason people experience culture shock is the uncertainty we face in a new environment. Besides researching your host country’s culture and attitudes, it also helps to be mentally prepared for some challenges.

Appropriate Dress *adapted from CIEE*

How students dress when in a foreign country will affect how others perceive and act towards them. Dress can have a positive or negative effect on an international experience. While we do not advocate students “being something they’re not,” we are interested in helping them fit in better and learn to function more effectively in other cultures. Cultural engagement does not require that students wear local dress. The “gapping” of the world

makes us far more globally similar in dress than ever before. What we want is for students to be able to engage in local activities, organized and informal, so that they have a culturally rich experience. It is important to be aware of the extent that clothes, attitudes, food habits, and other “typically American” behavior impede this engagement, and take steps to act appropriately.

Many other cultures dress more conservatively than ours and require students to change from what is acceptable at home to a slightly different look abroad. Failure to do so “marks” them as outsiders. While they are, the inappropriateness of their look makes it more difficult for them to make friends, blend in, and experience the country as locals experience it, and often makes them poor ambassadors for their own culture. Let’s face it: Caucasians in China will always be outsiders. Clothes aren’t going to change that, but appropriate clothes will minimize the extent to which these students are seen as “from Mars” and in many cases will prevent them from being seen as offensive and inappropriate in presentation.

Here are some tips to help you fit in:

- Pay attention to how people of your gender dress and try to tailor your look accordingly.
- Baseball caps, tennis shoes, baggy pants, and graphic logo Tees all scream “American!”
- Depending on the culture and where you are going (i.e. school or church vs. nightclub), it may be inappropriate to show “skin”, such as midriff, low-cut shirts, shoulders, lower back, etc.

World Citizen’s Guide: Combating Anti-Americanism Abroad

For years, many people in the world have had a great fondness for America. They have admired our culture, our products and our cheerful, fun-loving nature. In recent years, however, there has been a significant shift in those feelings. Research shows that, for a number of reasons, “favorability” ratings for America are declining around the world.

While it is true that the rise in negative feelings toward us may result from perceptions more than reality, it is also true that perceptions are powerful opinion makers. You, and the 55-60 million other Americans who travel abroad each year, have a unique opportunity to change at least some impressions of us from negative to positive. By following the few simple suggestions in this guide, you can have a better travel experience while showing America’s best face to those you visit. Take a look at the World Citizen’s Guide in your handbook and visit the World Citizens Guide site for additional travel information and resources. www.worldcitizensguide.org

How to Handle Anti-American Criticism

You probably consider yourself to be a good person, or at least someone with good intentions. But as you meet people outside of the United States, you will begin to discover that others don’t always think that way. In fact, you must be prepared for confrontation based on what and who you are, to be judged not for yourself at times, but rather as a collective body of people who live south of Canada and north of Mexico. The forms of confrontation may vary; sometimes you will be expected to answer questions about American politics, geography, values, and other issues as if you were the #1 expert on the subject. At other times, criticism may simply be words yelled in your face. Only in rare instances would you expect to ever be confronted with actual physical harm. A list has been compiled by former study abroad students of commonly asked questions which include:

- Why are Americans so materialistic? Why are they so wasteful of natural resources?
- Why are Americans so racist? How can you justify forcing the Native Americans onto reservations when the whole country belongs to them?
- 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 did the US invade Iraq? Why do Americans support Bush and the war?

Strategies for Responding to Anti-American Criticism

There is no one right or wrong way to respond to attacks made against the United States or yourself for being American. You will have your own method for dealing with confrontation based on your experiences, your way of dealing with conflict, and your opinions. You may choose to take an active role, and respond to the questions or accusations, or you may choose to take a passive role and not say anything in response. As you begin to respond to any criticism; keep the following strategies in mind.

Try to understand the critic's motives

Americans are fond of saying "don't judge a book by its cover." Outward appearances are not always enough to go on in a situation where you are being confronted with anti-American sentiment. Try and talk to your "accuser" and ask questions that may elicit this person's beliefs about the United States and why s/he might hold them. Does this person get ideas from the media? Movies? Television? Is this something being taught in school? Has this person experienced some sort of harassment from an American? If you understand the critic's motive(s), or from where his or her information comes, perhaps you can find some common ground and a more tolerant way to respond. Draw upon personal experiences and observations. When someone asks you a question like, "Why are Americans so wasteful of natural resources", your first response might be to say: "Oh, not me." Whether or not the question is based on fact, one way to respond might be to draw on your own experiences and observations. In this case, you can say that while you cannot speak for the rest of the American population, you have your own personal practices, such as recycling, water conservation or use of public transportation.

Avoid becoming defensive

You sometimes can't help becoming defensive - you are, after all, an American. Try to avoid becoming defensive as much as possible. Keep an open mind, and remember to try and understand your critic's motives. Become more familiar with common U.S. facts and policies "Americans are uneducated." That is a common belief overseas. How can you dispel that stereotype? "Why don't you know who the Secretary of State is?" People in other countries will probably ask you a lot of questions about the United States, on such varied topics as geography, politics, pop culture, etc. They may be questions from, "Who decides whether a person is guilty of a crime?" to, "Does every American wear cowboy boots and ride a horse?" However, it is not uncommon to find that people overseas know a great deal about U.S. politics and policies. You should re-familiarize yourself with basic U.S. facts and policies, because you do not want to be uneducated or ignorant of basic facts. Some areas of suggestion are:

- U.S. geography (differences in regions)
- U.S. political system (how does Congress differ from the Senate?)
- U.S. judicial system (how does the jury system work, in theory?)
- U.S. foreign policy (especially how it applies to your host country)

Reverse Culture Shock or Reentry Shock

Why are we telling you about reentry shock when you haven't even left yet? Because we won't be with you in your last days abroad, and it's important to be aware of this normal occurrence before you come back to UMSL. Returning to the US after an extended stay abroad can be as challenging as your initial days in your host country. Most returnees experience a form of "reverse culture shock," where customs, habits, and people in the US don't make as much sense as they did in your host country. Reverse culture shock consists of feeling out of place in your own country, or experiencing a sense of disorientation. While everything is familiar, *you* feel different. Even walking through the airport and hearing American English spoken can be a very surreal experience.

You've grown, changed, met people, and experienced things and places that your friends and family have not. You've adjusted to a foreign culture, made new friends, and probably consider your host country as a home. For months, you've been the foreigner, someone that people notice and are curious to meet. Now you're back at UM-St. Louis, and you're probably finding that classes and daily life are not quite as exciting as in England, Japan, Mexico, etc. Your friends may tire of your photographs and stories of "When I was in X..." Perhaps

you want nothing more than to return to your host country, or maybe you're glad to be back. Either way, you have changed and your experiences will always remain with you.

There are some individual characteristics that can be affected by living in another culture. Recognizing how these have changed your mindset can help you deal with return culture shock. Some of these characteristics are:

- More aware of international issues and needs
- Less authoritarianism or rigidity in ways of thinking
- More independence
- A more realistic spectrum of success standards
- More tolerance in different points of view
- Increased sensitivity to differences in people
- An increase in the acceptance of others
- More complex self-thinking that will help when making decisions
- An increase in creativity, combining different cultural ideas
- A deep appreciation of "cultural relativity"
- Competence in another language.

It's important to take time to readjust to life in the US and learn to incorporate your newfound passions, ideas, and beliefs into your daily life. Some of these strategies may help with readjusting:

- Give yourself time to readjust, relearn, and readapt to your life in the U.S.
- Recognize personal growth and identify positive changes by journal writing, submitting articles and photos to contests, joining community and/or student groups, and volunteering with internationally-minded organizations.
- Seek out other returnees to share experiences and talk about your readjustment.
- Incorporate your experiences gained abroad into your academic work by through papers, presentations, and research projects.
- Keep up your language skills! Continue to take language courses, meet international students, and keep in touch with the friends you made abroad.
- Volunteer to tutor immigrants and refugees.
- Continue a habit you gained while abroad, such as chatting with friends at a coffee shop, afternoon tea, walks through the park, etc.

Again, remember that the return shock is temporary and you will be able to readjust to your home culture. Be patient, flexible and understanding of the events and people around you and you will be reintegrated into the culture you have always known.

Stop by the Study Abroad Office when you return to tell us all about your experience. We can't wait to hear all about it!

Acknowledgements

Some information for this handbook comes from the University of Kansas, the University of Missouri-Columbia, SAFETI handbook, and other sources.

HELPFUL WEBSITES

PRE-DEPARTURE PREPARATIONS		
What's Up with Culture	Online cultural training for study abroad	www3.uop.edu/sis/culture/index.htm
Mobility International	Information on traveling abroad for people with disabilities	www.miusa.org
Rainbow Special Interest Group	Links to sources for GLBT students going abroad	www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay
Journey Woman	Website for women travelers. Link to "Culturally Correct Clothing"	www.journeywoman.com/ccc/
Travel Clinic Locator	Locate nearby travel clinics for health advice and vaccinations.	www.travelersvaccines.com
Students.gov	Click on "Study Abroad." Links to health, travel, and safety advice.	www.students.gov
Transportation Security Administration (TSA)	Information on current travel restrictions and regulations	www.tsa.gov
Federal Voting Assistance Program	Register to vote absentee	www.fvap.gov/pubs/vag/pdfvag/mo.pdf www.fvap.gov
CURRENCY		
xe.com	Currency Converter	www.xe.net/ucc
Oanda	Currency converter, cheat sheet, and online foreign currency ordering	www.oanda.com/channels/traveler
HEALTH AND SAFETY ABROAD		
Embassy World	List of embassies throughout the world	www.embassyworld.com
US State Department	Travel information and warnings	www.travel.state.gov
Embassy Registration	Online registration with American Embassies abroad	https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/
Centers for Disease Control	Health information by country. Lists immunization requirements.	www.cdc.gov
Emergency Telephone Numbers	List of emergency telephone numbers ("911") for other countries	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emergency_telephone_number
COMMUNICATION		
US Postal Service	International shipping rules and rates	www.uspsglobal.com
Country Calling Codes		www.countrycallingcodes.com
ComFi	Purchase calling cards instantly online	www.comfi.com
Skype	Call over the internet	www.skype.com
Cellular Abroad or Telestial	Purchase or rent cell phone for use abroad before leaving US	www.cellularabroad.com www.telestial.com
TRAVELING		
Tourism Offices Worldwide Directory	Guide to official tourism sources	www.towd.com
Hostel World	Find and reserve hostels online	www.hostelworld.com
hostels.com	Find and reserve hostels online	www.hostels.com

International Youth Hostels	Locate IYH around the world. Membership required.	www.iyhf.org
STA Travel	Budget airfare, Eurail passes, etc.	www.statravel.com
Student Universe	Student airfare and travel deals	www.studentuniverse.com
Routes International Travel	Bus, rail, and subway routes for thousands of cities worldwide	www.routesinternational.com
Lonely Planet	Youth Travel Guide	www.lonelyplanet.com
Let's Go	Budget Travel Guide	www.letsgo.com
Which Budget	Links to budget airlines	www.whichbudget.com

PACKING LIST

Documents and Essentials

- Money belt or neck wallet
- Passport and copy
- Visa(s) if necessary, and copy
- Airline tickets
- Traveler's checks
- ATM, Credit, and/or Debit card(s) and copy
- Insurance Information
- Contact Information
- Copy of written prescriptions
- Letter of Admission to host university
- Phone card
- Rail pass, hostel card, etc. (if desired)
- Other _____
- Other _____

Miscellaneous

- Luggage locks, tags, luggage strap
- Sewing kit
- Laundry kit – line, soap, flat drain plug
- Travel alarm clock (battery operated)
- Adapter, converter, transformer
- Camera and film
- Pictures and postcards of family, friends, hometown, university, etc.
- A few CDs and portable player
- Address book
- Journal
- A few notebooks and pens
- Phrase book or dictionary
- Sleep sheet for hostelling
- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____

Medical/Toiletries

- Prescription medication in original containers, prescriptions
- Eyeglasses or contacts, spare pair, lens prescription, solution
- Small first aid kit (Band Aids, ointment, pain reliever, laxatives, diarrhea medication)
- Tampons/sanitary napkins
- Contraceptives, condoms
- Sunscreen
- Wash cloth and small towel
- Comb/brush
- Toothbrush
- Travel blow-dryer with dual voltage

Clothing

- Sturdy, comfortable walking shoes
- Shower shoes or slippers
- Dress shoes
- Athletic shoes
- Socks, hose, tights
- Underwear
- Pajamas
- Work-out wear, bathing suit
- Pants and skirts
- Shirts or knit tops
- Sweater or fleece
- Nice outfit (shirt and tie for men, nice dress or outfit for women)
- Rain jacket, light jacket
- Heavier outerwear, as recommended (coat, hat, gloves, scarf)
- Belt
- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____

PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

Contact Information and Personal Documents

- Complete the Emergency Contact wallet card
- Give your family and the Study Abroad Office copies of your itinerary and keep all apprised of changes
- Copy of passport – one at home, two to take with you
- Bank information, copy of credit card info at home and with you
- Visa(s), if required
- If you are not a US citizen, consult with an international student advisor to make sure your US visa, travel documents, and other papers are in order

Financial

- Pay all fees on your student account
- Financial aid – Promissory Note or other critical papers signed and turned in
- Financial aid disbursement arrangements made with Study Abroad Financial Advisor (Carol Banks)
- Give your parents or other family member Power of Attorney while you are gone to deal with any financial matters.
- Obtain small amount of local currency to take with you
- Credit, Debit, and/or ATM cards have 4-digit numerical PIN numbers
- Card numbers and emergency assistance numbers – leave one copy at home and take one with you, separate from the cards
- Traveler's checks purchased and check numbers recorded – leave one copy at home and take one with you, separate from the checks
- Plan with family at home for emergencies – can money be deposited in an account at home that you can access overseas?
- Know how you will be billed for and paying for room and board in your host country.

Academic

- Copy of "Green Sheet" so you know which classes to register for at host university.

Health

- Inform exchange student coordinator at host university of any pre-existing conditions which may affect your participation at some point or which may be critical to know if you are ill/injured and unable to speak for yourself
- Health insurance card – leave a copy at home and bring the original with you. Know how payment/reimbursement works if treated overseas and what documentation you need to bring back.
- Get appropriate vaccinations, immunizations in the recommended time frame.
- Regular prescription medications – obtain a supply adequate for the duration of your stay plus two weeks. Keep prescriptions in original containers from pharmacy and bring copies of the prescriptions.

General

- Discontinue CD/Book/Coffee/whatever-of-the-month club & magazine subscriptions in your absence
- Make an address book of the addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses of your family and friends. Include embassy information for the countries you'll be visiting, insurance plan number, emergency numbers, etc.
- Purchase International Student Identification Card from 366 SSB (\$22 + passport size photo)
- Know electrical current and plug adapters used in your host country. Obtain appropriate transformers, converters or adapters for appliances you will bring.
- Clothing packing list – know generally accepted standards of dress. Know range of temperature and precipitation for the area you will visit.
- Obtain rail passes, hostel cards, etc. if desired.

METRIC CONVERSION CHART

(Approximations)

	When you know...	Multiply by:	To find:
Length	mm cm m m km	0.04 0.4 3.3 1.1 0.6	in in ft yd mi
Area	cm ² m ² km ² ha	0.16 1.2 0.4 2.5	in ² yd ² mi ² acre
Mass (Weight)	g kg t	0.035 2.2 1.1	oz lb ton
Volume	mL L L L m ³ m ³	0.03 2.1 1.06 0.26 35 1.3	fl oz pt qt gal ft ³ yd ³
Temperature	°C °F	$9/5 (°C) + 32$ $5/9 (°F - 32)$	°F °C
Length	in ft yd mi	2.54* 30 0.9 1.6	cm cm m km
Area	in ² ft ² yd ² mi ² acre	6.5 0.09 0.8 2.6 0.4	cm ² m ² m ² km ² ha
Mass (Weight)	oz lb ton	28 0.45 0.9	g kg t
Volume	tsp tbsb fl oz c pt qt gal ft ³ yd ³	5 15 30 0.24 0.47 0.95 3.8 0.03 0.76	mL mL mL L L L L m ³ m ³

* in = 2.54 cm (exactly)

US CUSTOMS REGULATIONS

Below are excerpts relating to US Customs regulations. To see a full list of rules, exemptions, and prohibitions, please see the online "Know Before You Go" brochure at www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/kbyg/.

Duty-Free Exemption: Duty-free exemption, also called the personal exemption, is the total value of merchandise you may bring back to the United States without having to pay duty (taxes). You may bring back more than your exemption, but you will have to pay duty on it. **In most cases, the personal exemption is \$800**, as long as you bring back the items with you. Duty on items you mail home to yourself will be waived if the value is \$200 or less.

Tobacco Products: Passengers/travelers may import up to 200 cigarettes or 100 cigars duty free. Any additional tobacco would be charged duty and tax. Travelers may import up to this limit of previously exported tobacco products only. Any quantities of previously exported tobacco products in excess will be seized and destroyed. These items are typically purchased in duty-free stores, on carriers operating internationally, or in foreign stores. These items are usually marked "Tax Exempt. For Use Outside the U.S.," or "U.S. Tax Exempt For Use Outside the U.S."

Alcoholic Beverages: One liter (33.8 fl. oz.) of alcoholic beverages may be included in your exemption if: you are 21 years old; it is for your own use or as a gift; it does not violate the laws of the state in which you arrive. Federal regulations allow you to bring back more than one liter of alcoholic beverage for personal use, but, as with extra tobacco, you will have to pay duty and Internal Revenue Service tax.

Mailing Gifts: Gifts worth up to \$100 may be received, free of duty and tax, by friends and relatives in the United States, as long as the same person does not receive more than \$100 worth of gifts in a single day. When you return to the United States, you don't have to declare gifts you sent while you were on your trip, since they won't be accompanying you. Be sure to mark the outside "Unsolicited Gift," listing the recipient's name and the nature and value of the gift (i.e. To John Jones-one belt, \$20; one box of candy, \$5; one tie, \$20).

Register Items Before You Leave the United States

If your laptop computer was made in Japan - for instance - you might have to pay duty on it each time you bring it back into the United States, unless you could prove that you owned it before you left on your trip. Documents that fully describe the item - for example, sales receipts, insurance policies, or jeweler's appraisals - are acceptable forms of proof. To make things easier, you can register certain items with Customs before you depart - including watches, cameras, laptop computers, firearms, and tape recorders - as long as they have serial numbers or other unique, permanent markings. Take the items to the nearest Customs Office and request a Certificate of Registration (Customs Form 4457). It shows Customs that you had the items with you before leaving the U.S. and all items listed on it will be allowed duty-free entry. Customs inspectors must see the item you are registering in order to certify the certificate of registration. You can register items with Customs at the international airport from which you're departing. Keep the certificate for future trips.

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR TRAVELERS

1. Thou shalt not expect to find things as thou hast them at home, for thou hast left thy home to find things differently.
2. Thou shalt take nothing too seriously, for a carefree mind is the basis for a good vacation.
3. Thou shalt not let other tourists get on thy nerves, for thou are paying good money to enjoy thyself.
4. Thou shalt not forget that thou dost represent thy country at all times.
5. Thou shalt not worry. He who worrieth hath no pleasure, and few matters are fatal.
6. Remember thy passport and knowest where it is at all times. A man without a passport is a man without a country.
7. Blessed is the man who can say thank you in all languages, verily it is worth more than gold.
8. When thou art in Rome do thou as the Romans do! If sorely beset, use thou thy American friendliness and commonsense.
9. Thou shalt not judge the people of a country by one person who hath offended thee.
10. Remember thou art a guest in every strange land. He who treateth his hosts with consideration shall himself be so treated.

Have a safe and enriching trip abroad!

Center for International Studies

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