

UIC Study Abroad Office

Parents

Welcome letter	2
Emergency phone system	3
What will students learn by being abroad?	3
Should I be concerned about health and safety?	4
Expectations	4
FERPA	4
How will students get credit?	5
How much does it cost?	5
What can parents do to stay informed?	5
What is ‘Culture Shock’?	6
<i>1. Honeymoon Phase</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>2. Irritability and Hostility</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>3. Gradual adjustment</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>4. Adaptation or Biculturalism</i>	<i>7</i>
What is ‘Reverse Culture Shock’?	7
Communication with your student while s/he is abroad	8
Visiting	8
Staying healthy	8
Medical insurance	9
Advice for parents: FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)	9
<i>Why is study abroad so popular these days?</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>But why does one need to go far away to learn these lessons?</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>What would a summary of all the reasons for studying abroad look like?</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>What are our roles as parents in helping select the right program?</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Are there any program types or locations which should be avoided?</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>How do we identify a ‘responsible’ program?</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Aren’t most countries just inherently dangerous to Americans?</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Aren’t Americans often the target of terrorists?</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Who can help my student if trouble erupts?</i>	<i>13</i>
Surviving Re-entry: A Readjustment Manual for Parents	13

Welcome letter

Dear Parents, Family Members, and Friends:

Through more than two hundred approved program opportunities on six continents, offering coursework across all academic disciplines, the Study Abroad Office seeks to engage the UIC student as an intentional learner with enhanced global awareness. In partnership with faculty and academic professionals, our goal is to provide international academic programming for UIC credit for as many students as possible to compliment their academic career and prepare them for a workplace eagerly searching for those with international experience and the skills that it brings.

So I'd like to start by thanking you for supporting your son's and/or daughter's motivation to study abroad. This kind of experience could be one of the most exciting and influential parts of their undergraduate career. It is also an opportunity to learn about another country, its language and culture, and will provide a unique environment to learn more about oneself and reflect on the role of our home community in the wider world.

The Study Abroad Office staff work with each student on an individual basis in preparation for their term abroad. From the initial information and consultation sessions, to helping choose the right program, select appropriate academic courses, and complete the application, we are focused on what the student needs to succeed. During our pre-departure orientation we review academic requirements, issues around health and safety, and answer any lingering questions. Most importantly, we reaffirm that the Study Abroad Office staff will continue to support them while they are abroad and we make sure every student knows how to contact us.

The information below is divided sectionally for your convenience. Of course, if you have questions, concerns, or suggestions about our programs, please feel free to contact us. In the meantime, we hope you will join us in continuing to support this very important decision your student has made to study abroad.

Sincerely,

Chris Deegan
Director, Study Abroad Office

Emergency phone system

If there is an emergency at home during business hours (8:30am - 4:30pm Central Time), and you would like our office to help you get in touch with your student, please call 312-413-7662 and an SAO staff member will assist you.

If there is an emergency during non-business hours, parents and students can reach a member of the SAO staff by calling our 24-hour cell phone: (312) 636-4150. This is for EMERGENCIES ONLY, where the health/safety of the student is an issue.

What will students learn by being abroad?

A growing number of studies are showing what study abroad administrators have known anecdotally for a long time ... that students who study abroad develop enhanced skill sets in four main areas: academic, professional, inter-cultural, and personal.

Academically, students develop skills in problem solving, have a terrific opportunity to improve their foreign language capability, gain geographical knowledge and be exposed to people who process information differently than they do. In some instances they are able to take coursework not available at home, or with scholars they would otherwise not have access to. While some programs have a foreign language requirement, there are many opportunities for English-speaking study abroad experiences. In some locations, students may study the local language at a beginner level and have the perfect chance to practice their new skills outside the classroom. Whatever language level your student has achieved, where better could he or she practice the proper usage and pronunciation than surrounded by native speakers? The ability to speak a foreign language remains a vital talent in any field or career.

Students can also make professional contacts and gain a sense of direction for their future career. The Study Abroad office considers the University of Illinois at Chicago campus as one which extends across borders and around the globe. In today's global economy, study abroad can be a defining element to every student's undergraduate degree. Many companies increasingly desire leaders with the ability to live successfully in a variety of countries and work with people of various cultural backgrounds. Study abroad can provide the structure for students to acquire these skills and give them an edge over the competition. The distinction of having studied in a foreign country for a session, semester, or year can be invaluable to your student's future career in today's competitive job market.

Students also gain an appreciation about what we have here in the U.S.; they often develop confidence, a strengthened sense of personal identity, flexibility, and creativity. During the students' time overseas, they will undoubtedly encounter unexpected situations that will allow them to develop self-sufficiency and independence. The more times participants successfully navigate such situations, the more confident they will become in their ability to fend for themselves.

It is also important for students to learn what it means to be a member of their own culture. They may find themselves challenging long-held beliefs. They will discover many surprising differences and similarities between their own culture and that of the program site. Students should be prepared to encounter criticism of American foreign policy and consider what their response will be.

Finally, by living and learning abroad students will increase their interest in other cultures,

become less ethnocentric as they become aware of cultural difference, develop language skills within a cultural context, become more culturally sensitive and accepting.

Should I be concerned about health and safety?

UIC takes participant safety with the utmost seriousness. Today's world is increasingly unpredictable, with local conditions which can rapidly change. Study Abroad relies on a variety of sources of information to help assess levels of program risk in advising and support of students. It is important to note, however, that neither UIC nor the Study Abroad Office:

- ❖ Can guarantee or assure the safety of participants or eliminate all risks from the study abroad environments.
- ❖ Can monitor or control all of the daily personal decisions, choices, and activities of individual participants.
- ❖ Can assure that U.S. standards of due process apply in overseas legal proceedings or provide or pay for legal representation for participants.
- ❖ Can 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, or for situations that may arise due to the failure of a participant to disclose pertinent information.
- ❖ Can assure that home-country cultural values and norms will apply in the host country.

Expectations

We expect that every student on a study abroad program will act responsibly, ethically, and as the best representative of their family, university, and nation as possible. The SAO retains the right to not accept applications from students who do not demonstrate they are capable of good academic and personal behavior. We will also recommend dismissal from a program should a student not meet the expectations of the program partner abroad.

All students have signed the “Conditions of Participation and Student Rights and Responsibilities” which clearly outlines these expectations. Please refer to the complete document which is posted on our website under Forms.

FERPA

Although we understand that occasionally a parent will want to discuss their student's academic, health, or other personal information, the Study Abroad Office cannot do this. Students are protected by The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) which was enacted to give students access to their records and to protect their privacy. Unless the student is a dependent, the school cannot release student financial information to a parent or third party without the written consent of the student. If the student is a dependent, a tax return showing the student as a dependent would be considered sufficient documentation to show dependency for purposes of FERPA, and the school may release this information to the parent. The school may also release information to a parent or third party if the school has written consent from the student. (If parents are divorced or separated, the school may release information about a dependent student to either or both parents. Release of information to one parent does not guarantee release to both.)

Remember, FERPA is designed to protect students. The best way to make sure that you have access to information regarding your child is to get his or her written consent.

How will students get credit?

International academic programs are not vacations in foreign countries. Students are expected to attend class and meet all courses requirements during the time abroad. Grades in courses taken abroad are earned, not automatically assigned, and will be on your student's transcripts as if the student had taken the courses here in Chicago. All grades received abroad will be reported to the Registrar's Office regardless of whether the student needs the course for graduation.

All Study Abroad Office (SAO) program participants earn UIC residence credits for the pre-approved work they complete abroad. This means the credits they earn while on an SAO approved program will appear on their UIC transcript with a course title and grade. Credits earned on SAO programs are counted towards the graduation requirement the same as if the students were physically in Chicago. For this reason, in most cases, studying abroad does not delay the student's graduation (depending on specific degree requirements in the major).

During the application process, students are required to look for course equivalencies for their specific program site and to meet with their academic advisor. Doing so helps them anticipate what UIC course credits they may be able to receive for the courses they take abroad and how those courses will work into their degree requirements. Before students depart for their program overseas, they are required to attend a pre-departure orientation where academic regulations about course approval, adding, and dropping are repeated.

How much does it cost?

Every program has a separate cost structure depending on the program provider, country, and length of program. All inclusive costs range from approximately \$5,000 for a six week / six credit summer program, to \$18,000 for a twelve credit semester program. In comparing study abroad costs to those for studying on-campus, there is not as large a difference as one might think once travel, housing, food, and incidentals are taken into consideration. Studying abroad is in the general range of what an out-of-state student would pay if they lived on-campus.

Some key points to remember about cost are:

- ❖ There is no UIC tuition and fees paid while studying abroad. Students only pay their direct program costs.
- ❖ Students are responsible for paying the program fee directly to their program provider.
- ❖ Students are assessed a \$65 administrative fee charged by the UIC Study Abroad Office.
- ❖ Financial aid 'travels' with the student and is available for study abroad as it is for on-campus study.
- ❖ There are many generous scholarships available specifically for study abroad.

What can parents do to stay informed?

A large part of enjoying your student's experience is to stay informed about current events in the country or region where their student is studying. The internet is one place where information can be readily gathered or monitored. Many countries now have a variety of information online, ranging from official government statements and statistics to unofficial web-guides and online newspapers. In addition, many English-language newspapers publish in-depth articles about events in international areas. The Study Abroad Office website has active links to hundreds of English and local language newspapers around the world.

What is ‘Culture Shock’?

When abroad, students are often challenged by a barrage of new things: language, food, dress, daily routine, etc. The elements of ‘culture’ once so familiar at home become unfamiliar. The reaction some have has been called ‘culture shock’. The article below describes this phenomenon and was adapted from Robert L. Kohls, *Survival Kit for Overseas Living*, chapter on "Culture Shock: Occupational Hazard of Overseas Living."

All students, regardless of maturity, disposition, previous experience abroad, or knowledge of the country in which they will be living, experience some degree of culture shock. Culture shock is a term used to describe some of these more pronounced reactions to spending an extended period of time in a culture very different from your own. Culture shock can be characterized by periods of frustration, adjustment, and even depression.

The worst homesickness often occurs two to three months after students leave home, frequently arriving just in time for the holidays. It is common for students to call or write home during moments of low morale, but not when they are busy and things are going well. Consequently, families often picture a more negative situation than actually exists.

Not everyone will experience culture shock. However if your student does, it is helpful to be able to recognize when it occurs so you will understand what is really happening. The following breakdown of the four stages of cultural adaptation will help you recognize the process as it happens with your student.

1. Honeymoon Phase

Adjustment to a new culture tends to occur in stages. Initially, there is a honeymoon phase. Your student is in a new country, and everything is exhilarating and exciting. Perhaps they are involved in a flurry of orientation and getting settled, getting hosted around the town or city. The sights, sounds and tastes are all a new adventure. And, at first, your student may even see more of the similarities between the host country and the U.S. than the differences.

Suggestions for support:

Listen to the student's exciting stories and appreciate the unique experiences he or she has the opportunity to enjoy. Remember these good experiences to use when times become more challenging. Some cultures are so different from America's that it may be difficult for the student to put it into words. Ask your student specific questions about the country, culture, and people in order to make the experience clear to you.

2. Irritability and Hostility

After the first couple of weeks, the initial excitement might pass and your student may begin to confront the deeper differences in their new location. Maybe he or she will be tired of the food or struggling with the language. Maybe the university seems incomprehensible and bureaucratic. Maybe he or she will be tired of long commutes whenever going somewhere. Maybe everything is much more expensive than the student originally anticipated. Or perhaps things are less expensive, but not of the quality or variety that is customary at home. The initial enthusiasm has drifted away and the student has entered the stage of irritability and hostility. Worse, the student may just feel like he or she doesn't really belong.

Suggestions for support:

During the first few weeks, it is not uncommon for students to contact home upset about some aspect of the new culture, people, and program. It is important for parents to remember that students may initially focus on what is going wrong in the program, rather than right. Find out

exactly what is frustrating your student, but avoid judging the cultural differences. Be supportive of your student and encourage him or her to discuss these issues with the resident director. The on-site staff has dealt with many students in these situations and is well prepared to help your student during the initial adjustment period.

3. Gradual adjustment

Be patient. Almost always, the initial struggles will disappear with time and the student will experience a stage of gradual adjustment. A sense of humor will reappear. Things that seemed strange or just inconvenient will gradually become familiar. The student will be able to function more easily within the culture. When contacting home, the participant will begin sharing the enjoyable experiences with you again.

Suggestions for support:

Listen to your student's stories with interest. Congratulate him or her for understanding the social norms, making local friends, and other such successes. Your student is slowly adapting to new surroundings.

4. Adaptation or Biculturalism

Lastly, there is the stage of adaptation or biculturalism. Your student has managed to retain his or her own cultural identity but recognizes the right of other cultures to retain theirs. The participant has a better understanding of him or herself and others, and can communicate easily and convey warmth and understanding across the cultural barriers.

There is no one way to experience culture shock. It may be acute or barely noticeable. You may find it returns once after you thought your student had already passed through all the stages. As a parent, you may not even be aware that your student is going through culture shock, or to what extent. Simply be aware that culture shock exists, that it will probably affect your student in one way or another, but that it doesn't last forever. Culture shock can be a very valuable experience, which can leave people with broader perspectives, deeper insight into themselves and a wider tolerance for other people.

What is 'Reverse Culture Shock'?

Although it may seem like a long way off, we suggest that you start thinking now about your student's return to the United States after the program ends. Students often go through a phase of "reverse" or "re-entry" culture shock when they come back home, sometimes more challenging than what they went through overseas. They expect to go through adjustments in foreign countries, but do not always realize that life has continued on without them at home and there may be changes for which they were not prepared.

As with culture shock, one way to alleviate the difficulty of re-entry shock is to keep your student aware of what is going on at home through consistent communication. Students often go through periods of mild depression once they return home because of feelings that no one is interested in what they experienced in their time overseas.

Faced with questions such as "How was your time in xxxx?" a student often can only answer "Great!" before conversation moves on to another subject. Encourage friends and family members to ask more specific questions like "What were the best things about living abroad? The most difficult? What places did you visit? Are people's daily lives the same as in the United States? Do you have any pictures? Etc., etc."

Have a party where your student can show off food, customs and souvenirs from his or her travels. Not only will such questions and activities remind students they had a worthwhile experience and help them to readjust, it will help others in your community or family learn more about the world around us.

Communication with your student while s/he is abroad

One way to get a more complete picture and help reduce feelings of homesickness is to write to your student regularly, and encourage him or her to do the same. A letter that a student can read and reread in quiet moments is always appreciated.

Communication should be easy if you and your student have access to e-mail. At the same time, please understand that access to e-mail overseas is not always as readily available as it is in the U.S., even in parts of Western Europe where you would expect access to be comparable. In addition, daily e-mail contact is not always desirable. Students need to separate themselves a bit from their home support networks as they build a local one, as they immerse themselves in the local culture.

Visiting

If you want to visit your son or daughter overseas (and we hope some of you do), it would help if you could arrange your visit to coincide with vacation times or after the program has ended. Then your son or daughter does not have to make the difficult choice between academic work and having fun showing you how competent he or she has become in a new environment.

Staying healthy

❖ *Dietary Needs for Vegetarians*

Vegetarians or students on a special diet should be aware that their dietary needs might not be easily met in some countries. Students should be sure to discuss this with their medical provider.

❖ *Alcohol*

As with many customs, cross-cultural differences exist in the consumption of alcohol. Depending on the host country, students may find the availability and public consumption of alcohol greatly increased or decreased. Often, rules about the acceptability of alcohol use in certain situations or contexts are very different than at home. Students are expected to maintain appropriate behavior at all times.

❖ *Food*

Although in many countries food safety is not an issue, students should still exercise caution, avoiding uncooked food purchased from street vendors and being sure about the quality of drinking water.

❖ *Illegal Drug Use*

Illegal drug use and possession are serious crimes. While drugs in some countries may seem easily available, this does not mean they are legal. Penalties for use or possession of illegal drugs can be extremely harsh for Americans abroad. If a student is arrested, he or she is subject to the host country's laws and neither UIC, the Study Abroad Office, nor the U.S. Embassy can protect the student from the local legal consequences. In some places, even association with people possessing or using illegal drugs is considered the

same as personal use or possession. If SAO hears reports that participants on its programs are using drugs or breaking other local laws, they will be confronted with the issue and may be asked to leave the program.

❖ *Eating Disorders*

There are many cross-cultural differences in the meanings of food and in standards of beauty. Students with eating disorders may find these differences create additional challenges for them. Students with eating disorders should be sure to discuss their plans to study abroad with health care providers before leaving.

Medical insurance

Medical insurance is not always valid outside the United States. U.S. Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide for payment of medical services outside the United States. Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate cash payment for health services. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas may face extreme difficulties. That is why the University of Illinois has mandated that all UIC students studying/traveling abroad under a UIC approved program must enroll in group health insurance through Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI) through the Study Abroad office – or show proof of comparable coverage with another provider.

Advice for parents: FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)

This article is reprinted from the Center for Global Education's Newsletter (Volume 2, Number 1, Winter 2000 - Summer 2001) http://www.globaled.us/safeti/v2n1_hoffa.html. It was written by William Hoffa, the Principal Consultant of Academic Consultants and a leader in the field of study abroad.

Why is study abroad so popular these days?

At the beginning of the 21st century, in a world becoming every year more interdependent, the ultimate educational value to students of pursuing at least some portion of their undergraduate years living and learning in another country is no longer really debatable. Not only is the global competence and alertness gained by such an experience crucial to American national and international interests, but students who leave college without having had a significant 'globalizing' experience as part of their undergraduate education, many educators now believe, will increasingly be thought of as not fully educated for the world they will enter. Your son or daughter understands this.

Indeed, the proverbially well-rounded education in preparation for living and working successfully in the 21st Century needs not only to be 'higher,' but also deeper, broader, and less nationalistic and monocultural than that which has served past generations. As stated by national report after national report, we now live in a global society in which knowledge, resources, and authority transcend national and regional boundaries. The knowledge, skills, and attitudes it takes to understand and prevail in such a society can be best achieved by living and learning through direct experience in a culture beyond one's own.

But why does one need to go far away to learn these lessons?

Don't nearly a half million students from other countries come each year to study here? It is important to learn about the 'foreignness' of other lands, cultures, and people, but it is also important to learn invaluable lessons about what it means to be an 'American.' Students studying abroad learn how to distinguish those parts of themselves which are products of their time and

place in American society from those parts which are universal to all of humankind. This degree of personal and national self-knowledge simply cannot be gained at 'home.' Whatever the resources of their college or university and however high their motivation, students' perspectives remain limited by the blinders of being only in their own culture.

What would a summary of all the reasons for studying abroad look like?

- ❖ First, study abroad enriches and diversifies undergraduate education by offering courses, programs, and academic learning of a sort not possible on the home campus.
- ❖ Second, study abroad provides U.S. students with a global outlook, which emphasizes the contemporary inter-relatedness of nations and cultures, the universality of human values, and the necessity for working together.
- ❖ Third, study abroad enhances career preparation by teaching cross-cultural and work-place skills of value to today's employers, often through internships and other hands-on experiences.
- ❖ Finally, study abroad deepens intellectual and personal maturity, fosters independent thinking, and builds self-confidence.

What are our roles as parents in helping select the right program?

There seem to be hundreds to choose from! Following are important considerations that must be factored into your daughter's or son's choice of a particular program. In order to be able to provide the requisite confirmation and support, which she or he might need, it is important for you to have a basic grasp of the following:

- ❖ How does study abroad resemble and differ from domestic study?
- ❖ How it is structured, in its many varieties in duration, location, and program type?
- ❖ How is credit earned and used toward degree studies?
- ❖ What will the full costs will be?
- ❖ What financial aid resources are available?
- ❖ How will safety be maximized?
- ❖ How does the admissions process work?
- ❖ What are the primary causes of health and safety problems that students might face overseas?

Many of the health and safety problems that students find abroad are similar to those that they find on US college and university campuses. Anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that individual student behavior (sometimes misbehavior) is the cause of most illnesses, injuries, and fatalities. When students don't prepare themselves properly, ignore the advice and counsel of campus and overseas personnel, or act naively or as if they are invulnerable, they can get into a lot of trouble. This is especially true when they travel excessively on their own or engage in dangerous social behavior, such as binge drinking or hanging out in unsavory local nightspots. Your daughter or son is considerably less likely to be the victim of a natural catastrophe, of social violence, of disease, or of program negligence than of being victimized by her or his own poor judgment, exercised in unfamiliar surroundings.

However, there are health and safety problems that are not the direct responsibility of students themselves, but which can victimize them. These involve modes of travel (airplane, bus, van, taxi, car, etc.); criminal behavior directed against them (theft, sexual assault); and permanent or evolving health and safety conditions in the local environment (disease, natural catastrophes, political upheaval). In order to be prepared to meet the challenges specific to particular programs

and locations, it is important that you and your daughter or son learn from information provided by the program sponsors, as well as, if possible, from the experiences of students who have participated in all programs being considered. Make sure to cover not just what's what during the 'program' of the program, but what can happen on excursions, as well as during independent travel. Obviously, there are many variations between countries, regions, and programs.

Are there any program types or locations which should be avoided?

Many people believe that, more critical than the location of the program per se (apart from countries about which the State Department provides absolute prohibitions or unequivocal warnings), is the program itself. Many programs with excellent health and safety records occur in places which some observers would say present more than average risks, because they are well-planned and overseen.

Conversely, accidents and injuries can certainly occur in 'safe' countries, if program activities are themselves risky or badly designed and managed. Your questions should, of course, cover where a program takes place, how it is run, and what, if any, potential dangers exist. You should also use extra scrutiny to investigate brand new programs and those run by colleges or agencies without much history of overseas programming.

Finally, it is important to note that established on-going programs, a semester or more in duration, with permanent staff "on the ground" might be inherently safer than short-term, one-time, traveling programs led by an accompanying faculty or staff member not thoroughly familiar with the program site(s), especially if there is little or no on-site coordination.

How do we know that study abroad will be safe for our child? Recent newspapers and TV accounts suggest that overseas risks may be great. Is this true?

Established overseas study programs fully recognize their responsibility to provide a secure and unthreatening environment in which your daughter or son can live and learn safely. Responsible campuses and programs consult regularly with colleagues around the country who are involved in the administration of study abroad programs, with resident program directors, with responsible officials of foreign host universities, with contacts in the U.S. Department of State, governmental and non-governmental agencies, and with other experts, including faculty who are well-informed on issues and events. It is in no one's interest to risk student safety or well-being. If a program is brand new or seems to be hosted by a campus which has not been involved in study abroad programming in the past, you might want to be cautious and ask the questions that need to be asked.

How do we identify a 'responsible' program?

In 1998, an Inter-organizational Task Force on Safety and Responsibility in Study Abroad published Guidelines for the study abroad field. These Guidelines can be found on the [NAFSA: Association of International Educators Website](#). They include fourteen suggestions of policies and/or procedures that institutions should have in place to maximize the health and safety of their students. Responsible programs should have reviewed the Guidelines and developed comprehensive health and safety policies and procedures to support students studying abroad. However, since this is a voluntary process, and there is no national enforcement of the Guidelines, individual programs can vary according to the experience, integrity, and foresight of their sponsors, domestic and foreign. As a result, it is critical that you and your daughter or son

take the time and effort to learn in advance as much as you can about the academic, health, and safety standards in place for the specific program(s) being considered.

You should also know what communications exist to assist program sponsors not only in planning programs, but in their operations. The ability to communicate almost instantaneously worldwide via fax machines and electronic mail enables campuses, third-party program sponsors, and parents to obtain and share information quickly and accurately in planning programs. Modern telecommunications also allows for the monitoring of evolving events. In the event of an overseas emergency that may have repercussions for study abroad programs and students, it is possible to take immediate action. Most campuses and programs have an effective system of consultation in place for these purposes. They are thus able to make proactive and reactive decisions concerning the safe operation of their programs. Finding out about the level and quality of all communication systems between 'here' and 'there' is something every parent should pursue before the program begins, and all reputable programs should assist you in.

The programs look a lot alike from the materials we have seen. No hint of danger is evident in the fliers.

You are right that few promotional materials give mention of potential health or safety risks. While most programs are run by responsible sponsors and do not consciously send students into harm's way, their promotional materials necessarily accentuate the positive, especially initially. But most programs send follow-up materials to clarify many potential risks to health and safety that come with program participation. If they don't, you should feel free to ask sponsors at any point about anything that concerns you. Make sure that this information is current. If you do not get thorough and forthright answers, you and your child should discuss whether this is the program to choose.

Aren't most countries just inherently dangerous to Americans?

America has a long history of isolationism, and most Americans know what they know, not from direct experience in other countries, but from the confines of our culture and from the mass media, which tends to sensationalize world events. Few countries, for instance, have as much street crime and the potential for stranger-upon-stranger violence as the United States. In this sense U.S. students may be statistically "safer" in foreign cities and towns than they are at home or on their own campus.

Many U.S. students report when they return from a period abroad that they had never felt safer in their lives. This does not mean that there is no crime elsewhere, or that a daughter's or son's personal safety is ever completely assured. Minor street crime (especially pick-pocketing) is a fact of life in many countries, especially in crowded cities that receive regular influxes of foreign visitors.

Further, students living or traveling in counties that are internally unstable or at odds with their neighbors of course need to be made aware of this by their campus and program. Usually risks are knowable well in advance and precautions are taken. When a situation gets truly dangerous - that is, when visiting students could in fact be in danger, which can be quite different than the perceptions given in the media - departing programs are cancelled, and groups are brought home. This is standard operating procedure.

Aren't Americans often the target of terrorists?

There are very few documented instances in the history of study abroad when it has been apparent that American students have been the specific targets of political violence. However, carrying a U.S. passport, in and of itself, is no guarantee of safety or absolute security. In certain places and at certain times, it is very possible to get caught in the midst of forms of political strife that may or may not be directed at foreigners generally or Americans in particular, but nevertheless can be very dangerous.

Who can help my student if trouble erupts?

In those few locations where even remote danger might occasionally exist, program directors work with local police, U.S. consular personnel, and local university officials in setting up whatever practical security measures are deemed prudent. In such places, students will be briefed during orientation programs and reminded at times of heightened political tension about being security-conscious in their daily activities. Terrorism is a twentieth-century reality and is not likely to diminish (or increase) significantly. To succumb to the threat by reacting in fear may well be the objective that terrorists seek to achieve. On the other hand, no one wants to make this point at the expense of the health and safety of your daughter or son. It is important to ensure that your son or daughter has sufficient insurance, which would include major medical, evacuation, repatriation, and 24 hour emergency assistance.

Surviving Re-entry: A Readjustment Manual for Parents

This manual was written by a highly experienced international educator who has been a program academic director in Ecuador for many years. But its inspiration came after her own daughter participated in a study abroad program. The manual can be accessed by clicking [here](#).