

# Study Abroad Handbook for Parents

Washburn University



International Programs  
Study Abroad

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## **Congratulations!**

You are supporting what may be one of your student's most life-altering experiences. Beyond the cultural and linguistic gains typically linked to study abroad, important changes occur in how students think and act that can have an impact on their education and lives, student's critical, intellectual, creative and ethical development can result from study abroad. Your child will return from their experience with a worldly education. This may be a challenging time for you. You are sending your son or daughter to live in a culture you may not have experienced yourself. Your reservations are quite normal and to be expected. Your child's upcoming adventure is something new and different from what he or she has ever experienced before.

This information packet has been designed to help parents understand the step-by-step process of study abroad at Washburn University. It also includes useful information about the stages of adjustment students encounter while abroad and answers to frequently asked questions.

Washburn University believes each student is ultimately responsible for his or her experience abroad. This encompasses a wide range of responsibilities from personal safety and paperwork to being a responsible representative of WU and the United States. The Office of International Programs is here to guide your student through the process. Your support throughout the entire process is extremely important as well. Your student is embarking on an incredible journey rich in personal, professional and academic rewards that will last a lifetime.

The WU Office of International Programs Staff, Study Abroad Program Coordinator, and Advisors are here to help you and your student. The following people can answer most questions or concerns. Please feel free to contact us if we can be of more assistance.

### **Office of International Programs**

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## **The Study Abroad Process at Washburn University Before, While Abroad, Returning**

- Students visit the Office of International Programs and learn about different program opportunities, scholarships, and the application process.
- After researching programs, students meet with the Study Abroad Coordinator, and the Program Coordinator or Advisor. This person can help the student decide on a program, review funding and scholarships, look at courses and credit, and help the student start the application process. The academic advisor helps students choose classes.
- Students submit the WU Application by Oct. 15 or March 1. Some programs may have an earlier date. The application fee is \$75.
  - The application process has four different phases: 1.) Pre-Decision, 2.) Post-Decision, 3.) While Abroad, and 4.) Returnee.

### Pre-Decision Phase (Pending):

During this phase, students complete various materials noted on the application page of the Bods Abroad website. All materials and questionnaires must be submitted by the stated application deadline to guarantee that the application will be considered. Below is a list of typical documents that are included in the application process:

- Study Abroad Scholarship Application & Scholarship Terms
- Study Abroad Program Application
- FERPA Release Form
- Study Abroad Code of Conduct: Expectations and Consequences (Parent's/guardian's signature required if student is 17 years of age or younger.)
- Study Abroad Consent, Release, & Assumption of Risk Form (Parent's/guardian's signature required if student is 17 years of age or younger.)
- Faculty Recommendations (these will be requested and submitted online)
- Various learning documents regarding scholarships, health consultation, application fee, minimum requirements and disability resources.
- Additional forms and questionnaires required for specific programs. The forms will be viewable as soon as the application is created.

### Post-Decision Phase (Committed):

All students with approved applications will be required to complete any post-decision questionnaires and material submissions before departing on the program. The amount and type of post-decision items will vary depending on the type of program. Items include:

- Contact Information (during program)
- Health Self Disclosure
- Passport Copy

- Visa Copy (if applicable)
- Host University Acceptance Letter (if applicable)
- Travel Plans (if applicable)

### While Abroad Phase

Students can access their online application at the Bods Abroad website during this phase to refer to any important information.

### Returnee Phase

During this phase, students will be asked to complete a Post-Program survey and review located inside their online application.

- Applications are reviewed and sent to host institutions, when required. Once students are accepted into the program abroad, they are notified of their acceptance status.
- Once accepted, students then attend a mandatory study abroad orientation, where the following topics are discussed: academics and enrollment abroad, health and medical matters, cultural adjustments, travel safety, money issues, travel preparations and more.
- Students enroll in the appropriate WU Interdisciplinary Studies Course, 12-15 credits for the semester or 6-9 credits for the summer. Some programs may require a specific WU course. Course enrollment identifies students and enables them to receive financial aid, and scholarships if eligible. This does NOT necessarily mean students take 15 credits abroad (they may take more or fewer credits, it depends on the program). Students going on faculty-led programs enroll in the indicated courses.
- Students on WU programs are billed accordingly at the normal time tuition is billed at the beginning of the semester. Students on affiliate programs are billed by the host or sponsoring institution.
- Students going on WU programs with a host that does not include health insurance will enroll in the WU Study Abroad Insurance Plan and will be billed for the number of days requested.

## **Going Abroad**

Before your student leaves to study abroad, please request a copy of the following travel documents to be left at home with you, the parent(s). Students should also take copies of all travel documents with them and keep them in a separate place. These items can be more easily replaced if students have proof of each one. Make sure that all names, numbers and dates are readable.

## Travel Documents

- Passport
- Plane tickets or electronic confirmations
- Credit card
- ATM/Debit card
- Driver's license

Be sure to take time to sit down and talk over plans you and your student have during the period away. Below are some things to discuss:

- Your student's departure information. Arrange how you will communicate with them (phone, e-mail, social media). Set a time to hear from them within a day or two of arrival. Have dialing instructions including the country code?
- Know the difference in time between the U.S. and where they are going.
- Program dates and any travel they plan to do before the program, during or after.
- How to send money in an emergency?
- Contact person in the country (program director, liaison, or someone else).
- How to contact your student's study abroad advisor and financial aid advisor.

Your child has also received the following information:

“For your safety and security while studying abroad, please notify your bank and credit card company that you will be studying abroad so companies are not suspicious of fraud and strange activity, which may result in the cancellation of your account. It is also recommended that someone else be allowed access to your financial accounts while you are studying abroad. If travel documents are lost or stolen, many times a signature from the holder of the bank accounts is needed to issue replacement documents. Also, credit card companies are unable to freeze accounts for customers unless they are notified by the card holder or someone who has access to the account.”

Note: It is a good idea for another family member to have a valid passport, in case it becomes necessary to travel overseas in an emergency.

## Stages of cultural adjustment

Study abroad students will experience a wide range of emotions once they leave home. It is important for parents to understand what their child is going through and to be patient and supportive as their child adjusts to the new culture. Most study abroad students spend the first few days settling in and getting adjusted; however, adjustment is not accomplished in a few days. Adjustment is an on-going process demanded by one situation and then another. What follows are the four stages of cultural adjustment identified by Gregory Trifonovitch.

- **The Honeymoon Stage**  
Characterized by exhilaration, anticipation and excitement. The study abroad student is fascinated with everything new. The students are embarking on their “dream come true,” which is to study in a foreign country. These students are delightful to work with and to work for; BUT

in their enthusiasm to please you, they frequently nod and smile to indicate understanding when in fact they have not understood. When their misunderstandings mount up, they are likely to experience the second stage of adjustment.

- **The Hostility Stage**

Characterized by frustration, anger, anxiety and sometimes depression. Following the initial excitement, frustration comes with the college bureaucracy and the weariness of speaking and listening to another language every day. Students are upset because, although they have studied the language, they don't seem to understand anyone. Students react to this frustration by rejecting the new environment in which they feel discomfort. The internal reasoning might be, "If I feel bad it's because of them." The students blame their external environment for their bad feelings. Some of these hostilities are translated into fits of anger over minor frustrations, excessive fear and mistrust of locals, frequent absenteeism, lack of interest, lack of motivation, and, at worst, complete withdrawal. Many academic problems begin at this stage.

- **The Humor Stage**

Follows when the student begins to relax in a new situation and begins to laugh at minor mistakes and misunderstandings, which, in the hostility stage, would have caused major headaches. This more relaxed state of being occurs after the student has made some friends and is able to manage the university, understand his studies and begins to pass tests.

- **The Home Stage**

Occurs when students not only retain allegiance to their home culture, but also "feel at home" in their newly acquired one. Students have successfully adjusted to the norms and standards of the university and should be commended for the ability to live successfully in two cultures.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

By William Hoffa, Academic Consultants International at the School for International Training

- **Why is study abroad so popular these days?**

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> 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 awareness 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 professional world they will enter. You student understands this. Indeed, the proverbially well-rounded education in preparation for living and working successfully in the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs not only to be "higher." But also deeper, broader and less nationalistic and monocultural than that which has served past generations. We 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 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 American students with a global outlook, which emphasizes the contemporary interrelatedness 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 experience. Finally, study abroad deepens intellectual and personal maturity, fosters independent thinking and builds self-confidence.

- **What are the primary causes of health and safety problems that students might face overseas?** Many of the health and safety problems students find abroad are similar to those they find on U.S. college and university campuses. Anecdotal evidence strongly suggests individual student behavior (sometimes misbehavior) is the cause of most illnesses, injuries and fatalities. When students do not 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, social violence, disease, or program negligence than if 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 the 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 specific to particular programs and locations, it is important that you and your daughter or son learn from information to cover not just what's what during the academic portion or the study abroad programs, but what can happen on excursions, as well as during independent travel. Obviously, there are many variations between countries, regions and programs.

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

Established overseas study programs fully recognize the responsibility to provide a secure and unthreatening environment in which your daughter or son can live and learn safely. Responsible campuses and programs regularly consult with colleagues around the country who are involved in the administration of study abroad programs, with resident directors, with responsible officials of foreign host universities, with contacts in the U.S. Department of State, with 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 wellbeing.

- **How does WU's Office of International Programs know what is going on overseas?**

The ability to communicate almost instantaneously worldwide via cell phones, fax machines, email and social media enables campuses, third-party program sponsors, and parents to obtain and share information quickly and accurately in planning programs. Modern communications 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.

- **Aren't most countries just inherently dangerous to Americans? What do U.S. embassies do to guarantee safety of American citizens?**

Most Americans know what they know, not from direct experience in other countries, but 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. 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 your daughter or son's personal safety is ever completely assured. Minor street crime (especially pick-pocketing) is a fact of life in many countries, especially crowded cities that receive regular influxes of foreign visitors.

- **Who can help my daughter or son if trouble occurs?**

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 means 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 20<sup>th</sup>-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 that your son or daughter has sufficient insurance. Be sure to talk to your child about alternate insurance plans if your current family plan does not cover your son or daughter overseas.



- **If our child is abroad when something dangerous develops, how can we make contact? What if something happens here, and we want to communicate immediately?**

Don't let your child leave home without having as many reliable means of contact as possible in place- a mailing address, an e-mail address, social media contact and phone/ fax number. As noted, overseas programs and home campuses are likely to have set up regular and reliable means of communication, so it may be best to utilize these systems as a first resort, rather than trying to make direct contact with your daughter or son overseas. Nevertheless, you should develop a family communication plan for regular telephone or e-mail contact, with contingencies for emergency situations. With this in place, in times of heightened political tension, natural disaster, or other difficulty, you should be able to communicate with each other directly about safety and wellbeing. On the other hand, responsible programs may even anticipate your concerns, and make contact with you immediately. Instant international communication in emergency situations continues to improve with easy access to e-mail and international cell phones.

- **Can anyone absolutely guarantee our child's safety?**

No. Nor can her or his home college or university guarantee safety on-campus in the U.S. As long as you have asked all the questions of the campus, of the program sponsor, of your son or daughter, and have answers you need concerning potential health and safety risks, you have done all you can do. If the risks are unacceptable, you have every right to find another alternative or decide not to support study abroad in any form. If they are acceptable, then only fate can interfere with what should be a great journey and return.