

INTRODUCTION

With the rising numbers of students participating in study abroad programs, University System of Georgia institutions, administrators, and faculty need to be mindful of the risk management issues that affect study abroad. Study abroad professionals and program directors are expected to make appropriate and effective decisions in light of relevant professional standards and ethics, institutional policies and practices and local, state, and federal laws and regulations. In addition, the professionalism of the international education field has led to the establishment of guidelines and accepted practices which aid in the development of institutional policies.

Although space does not permit an exhaustive examination of all of the risk management issues related to study abroad, basic elements of specific issues will be reviewed. The purpose is to provide guidance concerning the risk management issues which play a role in the overall planning, implementation, and execution of a successful and safe program. If the material presented generates specific legal questions for you, seek the advice of a campus attorney or attorneys who work for the University System of Georgia.

A preliminary set of guidelines concerning recommended practices for study abroad professionals is provided by NAFSA - The Association of International Educators. Its Interassociational Advisory Committee on Safety and Responsibility in Study Abroad publishes a document entitled "Responsible Study Abroad: Good Practices for Health and Safety". This document outlines, among other things, general guidelines and statements for good practice pertaining to the responsibilities of program sponsors and participants. This document can be found on the NAFSA website using the following link: http://www.nafsa.org/knowledge_community_network.sec/education_abroad_1/developing_and_managing/practice_resources_36/guidelines_for_health and is provided in its entirety in at the end of this chapter.

INSTITUTIONAL STUDY ABROAD COMMITTEE

Institutions should identify a campus based study abroad committee which specifically deals with addressing the particular issues pertaining to study abroad programs, including risk management. Such a committee or advisory board may consist of a combination of administrators from the following offices:

Office of International Education
Study Abroad Office
Office of Student Affairs/Student Life
Legal Affairs Office
Faculty/staff study abroad program directors
Disability Services
Health Services
Office of Counseling and Psychological Services

An institutional study abroad committee might be responsible for:

1. reviewing approval requests for new study abroad programs
2. evaluating existing programs
3. establishing emergency response procedures in the event of an incident which involves students on study abroad programs
4. developing institutional risk management policies for study abroad programs as necessary
5. developing study abroad policies based on established institutional policies for drug and alcohol use, disciplinary infractions, and other incidents
6. recommending suspensions or relocations of existing programs due to changes in program particulars

APPROVAL, INVENTORY AND DATABASE OF STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

Institutional Inventory and Approval Process

In an effort to centralize study abroad policies, procedures, and information as much as possible on a campus and in light of risk assessment and liability issues, it is essential that institutions establish a program approval process and conduct a campus wide inventory-taking of study abroad programs. There may be cases on a campus when a faculty member or academic unit proceeds with study abroad program development without requesting or after rejecting the assistance or input of the international office. There may also be no centralized international office on a campus to which faculty or departments can go for assistance. However, it should be an institutional priority to make sure that all study abroad programs are accounted for and that there are policies and procedures in place which provide consistent treatment of those programs, wherever possible.

USG System Inventory and Approval Process

The Office of International Education (OIE) of the University System of Georgia is responsible for maintaining a database of study abroad programs that are operated by USG institutions. Every study abroad program sponsored or approved by a University System of Georgia (USG) institution must be authorized by the president of the institution, or his/her designee, under the authority delegated to the institutional presidents by the Chancellor. In accordance with those procedures, a completed "Study Abroad Program Approval" Form (available on-line at http://www.usg.edu/oie/facstaff/policies/usg_rfa.pdf) must be submitted to the OIE.

In addition, the OIE maintains an on-line catalog which provides profiles of USG system study abroad programs. This catalog is accessible by the public and functions as a recruiting tool for system institutions which want to advertise their programs around the state and across the country. Information on how to submit materials for submission to the catalog is available from OIE at <https://www.usg.edu/oie/StudyAbroadCatalog/>.

The catalog is located at <http://www.usg.edu/oie/catalog/>

RISK ASSESSMENT AUDIT

Although a basic understanding of risk management issues related to study abroad is essential to establishing a successful and safe program, institutions should consider undertaking a risk assessment audit which consists of a comprehensive review of key health, safety, and liability issues and conditions of an education abroad program. The suggestions listed below, in addition to materials provided by outside sources, are tools for understanding risk and how to manage it. Faculty and staff can identify additional matters which apply to individual campuses and programs.

Some steps that are part of the risk assessment audit for study abroad programs may include:

1. Comprehensive review by in-house counsel of policies and procedures for program approval and management
2. To the extent possible, conduct a site visit at the location abroad which includes a walk-through of facilities, assessment of host country conditions, and review of overall safety and security issues
3. Review of host location policies and procedures with regard to their consistency with home campus policies and procedures, and compliances with US law
4. Review of orientation, promotional, and marketing materials for the program, as well as any agreements, contracts and waivers

The SAFETI (Safety Abroad First - Educational Travel Information) Clearinghouse Project develops and disseminates resources to support study abroad program development and implementation, emphasizing issues of health and safety.

SAFETI has developed a comprehensive Program Audit Checklist, the purpose of which is to provide a list of health and safety and study abroad issues that an institution can use as a guide to look at the current policies and procedures which it has in place. The checklist is linked to internet resource links which provide background information on each item and samples of policies and procedures from other study abroad programs as well as useful internet links. This material is provided as a guide only and any and all procedures developed should be subject to institutional or BOR review.

The SAFETI checklist can be found at the following website:

<http://www.globaled.us/safeti/auditchklst.html>

RESPONSIBILITIES OF PROGRAM/FACULTY DIRECTORS AND PARTICIPANTS

When considering risk management issues as they pertain to study abroad it is important to focus on professional management of the study abroad program, and adherence to

established institutional rules, regulations, and procedures. Study abroad programs should be designed with attention to the overall quality and safety of the program. In addition, all college and university personnel who lead programs should understand what is considered appropriate and inappropriate personal and professional behavior and be trained to deal with emergency situations and student issues as they arise and as they would be dealt with on campus.

In general, most legal standards are based upon what a reasonable and prudent person should do. Faculty and program directors are expected to use their best judgment in deciding what is appropriate conduct in a given situation. Program directors can best serve themselves and their students by careful pre-trip preparation. Once on site, they need to be alert to conditions and current events in the host country and region and to problems that students may experience. If all actions taken in the case of an emergency or incident are taken with the student's best interest in mind, most legal obligations will be met.

AGREEMENTS, WAIVERS AND OTHER DOCUMENTS FOR PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS AND LEADERS

There are a number of different documents and waivers that can be used in conjunction with study abroad programs. These documents, which generally require the signature of the participant, are designed to provide legal information to the participant in terms of obligations, responsibilities, and deliverables and to provide the study abroad office or program/faculty director with assurances that the participant is informed and aware of specific rules, regulations and procedures associated with participation. Please note: it is imperative that each institution's legal counsel or the BOR legal counsel review any forms, waivers, or applications.

Generally speaking, institutions will want forms in the following areas:

Participation Agreement

This document is signed by students as an acknowledgement that they are aware of financial and personal responsibilities and agree to abide by the program's rules and codes of conduct. This may also include clauses pertaining to academics, alcohol and drug abuse regulations, and disciplinary rules, cancellation/withdrawal policies and refund policies. Other conditions may be attached depending on the needs of the office and programs.

Release, Waiver of Liability and Covenant not to Sue

This document is typically drafted by university or college legal counsel and signed by the participant. Waivers and agreements should be adapted specifically for each program, mentioning the risks for each program's events and activities. It is also imperative that study abroad administrators and/or faculty directors review the documents with participants as part of pre-departure orientation and remind them of their responsibilities with regard to the agreement.

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All participants should be given one copy of the agreement and waiver to sign and submit and one to keep. Study abroad offices and program/faculty directors should have access to these documents as well.

Confidential Health Record/Medical Information Form

While study abroad offices cannot require students to provide medical/health information, this form provides students with an opportunity to disclose any existing medical conditions or concerns. It is useful in the case of a medical emergency and also as a main vehicle for disclosing any special needs a student may have. Students who seek accommodation must disclose any existing condition so the program providers may consider appropriate accommodation. This information typically is collected after the student has been accepted to a program to eliminate the possibility that a student is rejected because of a disability or chronic illness. Forms should request information about pre-existing medical conditions (physical and mental), medication, allergies, diet, handicaps, and emergency contact information. Another point to consider is that student health information is personal and private and appropriate methods should be taken to ensure confidentiality of records. Medical information should always be easily accessible to the program/faculty director while the group is abroad.

Emergency Medical Care/Contact Authorization Form

This form is essential for collecting emergency contact information in the case that parents or guardians need to be contacted. A list of all participants and their emergency contact persons and numbers should be submitted by the program/faculty directors or collected by the study abroad office prior to departure. A copy of this information should be distributed to any parties who may be involved in an emergency protocol plan.

Program Director Responsibilities Contract

In addition to signed forms that may be required of participants, study abroad offices and programs may want to require program/faculty leaders to sign a document which outlines expectations and responsibilities of on-site program/faculty directors. This document should be tailored to the individual program and provide specifics where necessary and pertinent. It should also make reference to on-campus policies that pertain to faculty and staff leading study abroad programs including alcohol and drug use, sexual harassment, and general codes of conduct.

Samples of all forms mentioned above are provided at the end of this chapter.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act provides civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities and guarantees equal opportunity for individuals in accessing public transportation, accommodations, employment, state and local government services, and telecommunications. An individual is considered to have a disability if he or she has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities

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such as seeing, hearing, speaking, walking, breathing, performing manual tasks, learning, self-care, or working. The ADA calls for reasonable accommodation to enable a disabled person to accomplish the same task as a non-disabled person.

For more information on the ADA and study abroad, please refer to NAFSA's *Best Practices in Addressing Mental Health Issues Affecting Education Abroad Participants* document, available at

http://www.nafsa.org/knowledge_community_network.sec/education_abroad_1/developing_and_managing/document_library_30/managing_programs/best_practices_mental

Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

FERPA is a federal law which protects the privacy of student educational records. In the study abroad context, administrators and faculty should understand their institutions' policy on how and under what circumstances information may be shared within the campus community and with parents or third parties. Learning how to talk to family members, friends, and third parties without violating data privacy is important within the context of FERPA regulations.

ORIENTATIONS

Detailed information on pre-departure orientations is provided in Chapter 7 of this handbook. However, it is crucial to stress the importance of providing for and requiring students and faculty members to attend pre-departure orientations. In addition to the benefit of increased student and faculty/staff preparedness, orientation programs can help to reduce institutional liability.

Make every effort to provide at least one pre-departure orientation meeting for students. Offices or program/faculty directors may also want to invite parents to attend. It makes best sense to have one general information meeting for all participants if there are a number of programs. It is also very useful to have individual program orientations lead by a faculty member, where appropriate.

In addition, institutions should make every effort to provide orientation and informational meetings for program/faculty directors prior to the student orientations. This provides program/faculty directors with an opportunity for discussion and consultation with various administrative offices including general counsel, counseling services, student affairs, academic affairs, disciplinary offices, and student life. It also promotes institutional support and collaboration in the study abroad process. Some topics for the program/faculty director orientation might include:

1. Program/faculty director responsibilities, responsibilities of others
2. Budget/finances policies and procedures

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3. Leading student orientations (pre-departure and on-site overseas)
4. Students with disabilities or special needs; handling disciplinary issues
5. Health/safety/liability issues and emergency response protocol
6. Group dynamics

It is also useful to have a program/faculty director handbook which leaders can take on programs for reference.

For more information, see Chapter 7 (Before and After Going Abroad) of this handbook. At the end of this chapter are comprehensive checklists of topics for orientations for students and program/faculty directors.

HEALTH AND SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Encouraging students to take responsibility for their health and well-being while abroad will assist them in maximizing their experience. To help them in this endeavor, program/faculty director and study abroad staff, should:

1. increase students' awareness of the health and safety issues that may affect them
2. facilitate students' understanding of the choices available and their respective consequences
3. explain the importance of taking responsibility for their actions.
4. identify the benefits to be gained from healthy and balanced living
5. encourage students to learn about the health and safety issues specific to the location of their program

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Health issues which affect students while abroad range from routine ailments (e.g., flu, toothache, broken limbs), to common travel disorders (e.g., diarrhea), to life-threatening world health concerns (e.g., HIV and AIDS), and to region-specific illnesses (e.g., malaria). Any students with pre-existing health conditions (e.g., diabetes, epilepsy) must also consider how their condition will affect or be affected by their overseas experience. In preparing students for programs, study abroad offices and program/faculty directors should:

1. Make students aware of the various illnesses which can affect them while abroad. The campus health service, public health service, and/or local health clinic may have free brochures to distribute to students. Staff members from these offices may be willing to attend your orientation program. Consult the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.org) for information about world, regional and local health issues and provide this information to students or require them to research on their own. Campus or the public health services in the community may assist you in explaining various illnesses and their transmission, prevention, and treatment. Check to see if there is a travel clinic in your area which can provide information on common travel disorders. Include information on protection against sexually transmitted diseases for your students at

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orientation.

2. Encourage students with pre-existing conditions to discuss their health needs so that appropriate accommodations may be researched. Be sure to follow ADA regulations about disability disclosure.
3. Advise students how to take proper precautions while overseas.
4. Inform participants how to locate medical and emergency assistance in a foreign destination.

NUTRITION

A different diet may affect students while abroad. Provide student with ways to supplement deficient diets and give advice on general nutrition. Study abroad offices and program/faculty directors should consider the following questions and prepare students accordingly:

1. Are students on the program following special diets to maintain their health? How will this diet be maintained in the foreign country?
2. Do any students have special nutritional needs? How will students fulfill these nutritional needs while overseas?
3. What are the basic staples of the foreign diet?
4. Is the host country diet deficient in any nutrients?
5. Are unsanitary food preparation or storage practices prevalent in the foreign country?
6. Is the water fluorinated, chlorinated, or does it need to be treated before it can be consumed?
7. What kind of water is recommended for drinking?

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Travel and the process of adapting to a foreign culture are inherently stressful. Initially the stress may be positive since new situations are often perceived as thrilling, adventurous, and fun. Over time, however, the newness dissipates. As people continue to respond to their changing environment, they do so by using acquired socialization processes and skills. Unfortunately, these familiar behaviors may fail to achieve desired outcomes. Consequently, people may feel fatigue, irritation, anger, frustration, and unhappiness. For most people, these feelings are temporary. Eventually they discover and accept new social solutions and support systems that help them successfully cope with their new environment. Others, unfortunately, react to change in maladaptive ways.

Stress and Culture Shock

Program/faculty directors should be aware of the physical manifestations of stress (e.g., headaches, gastrointestinal problems, weakened immune systems, and insomnia), and prepared to help students handle the stress that often accompanies change and may lead to culture shock. To support students experiencing stress, directors are encouraged to:

1. exhibit genuine interest in students, and attend to their needs
2. communicate expectations about appropriate behavior
3. provide effective role models

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For a more detailed discussion on dealing with stress abroad, consult the SAFETI (Safety Abroad First Educational Travel Information, <http://www.globaled.us/safeti>) Clearinghouse's adaptation of Peace Corps resources. See also <http://www.globaled.us/peacecorps> for more information.

Mental Illness

As societal stress levels have risen, so has the number of students with mental health disorders (e.g., clinical depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder). Because study abroad programs are microcosms of society and the campus, some program participants may have mental health disorders. Unfortunately, students may not be forthcoming about their disorders prior to departure. Study abroad programs and their administrators have an ethical and legal responsibility (as mandated by the Americans with Disability Act) to provide treatment and support for students with such disorders. Be sure that any insurance coverage selected includes treatment options for mental health (see specifics on Insurance later in this chapter).

This does not mean that study abroad professionals should become mental health experts. Consult the institutional counseling center or health clinic for assistance in developing and selecting appropriate services abroad for students who may have mental illness issues on-site. Most study abroad insurance providers have a referral service or materials about mental health issues as they specifically relate to overseas study and may be able to refer you to competent professionals abroad. Remember that other cultures often have different taboos, norms, and treatment methods for dealing with mental health conditions. Knowledge and understanding of these issues should be part of pre-departure preparation for the program/faculty director.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Some college students use and abuse alcohol and other controlled substances as a means of escaping the day-to-day demands of college life. Unfortunately, when such behavior violates host country norms and laws, disrupts the educational process, or threatens the welfare of the abuser or others, the abuse becomes a problem for the program/faculty director and study abroad office to resolve. Students should be cautioned about differences in customs and laws between the U.S. and the host country and the penalties for violating foreign alcohol and drug laws. Study abroad offices and program/faculty directors may want to have students sign a drug/alcohol policy statement. Samples of such documents are included at the end of this chapter.

PERSONAL CONDUCT AND ATTITUDES

Some students have unrealistic expectations and attitudes about living abroad. They may think the foreign country is safer (or more dangerous) than it really is. When away from home and their peer group, students may be more inclined to experiment with behaviors they would normally avoid. They may perceive the foreign environment as more restrictive or liberal in relation to individual freedoms and rights. Regardless of their perceptions, students will need assistance in confronting stereotypes and misconceptions, and replacing misinformation with accurate knowledge about customs and norms of the host culture. Here again, pre-departure orientations and preparation can serve to prevent

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students from misbehaving or putting themselves in compromising or dangerous situations.

BRIEFING STUDENTS ON HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES

Written materials, pre-departure orientations, and in-country orientations are the most common means of discussing health and safety issues with students. Students will need written information to refer to later so it is a good idea to develop a handbook or other written materials. More information on orientations and a comprehensive list of orientation topics can be found in Chapter 7 of this handbook and in the resource materials. Briefing materials should, at a minimum, address the following issues:

1. common adjustment issues, jet lag, culture shock, homesickness, loneliness, and changes in routine
2. customs, laws, and penalties in the host country regarding alcohol and drug abuse and how they differ from those in the U.S.
3. transmission, prevention, and treatment for various diseases endemic to the region (dysentery, hepatitis, malaria, AIDS, etc.)
4. preventative measures (dental and physical check-ups before departure, extra eyeglasses or contact lenses, copies of all prescriptions and the generic name of each)
5. emergency contacts and procedures
6. contact numbers for English-speaking medical and mental health professionals
7. the foreign equivalent of 911 and contact information for ambulance, emergency room, police station, and fire dispatchers
8. information on nutrition
9. information for disabled individuals or individuals with temporary disabilities
10. policies related to insurance
11. region-specific health information
12. region-specific crime and unrest information
13. tips for avoiding unrest, terrorism, and acts of criminal activity.

INSURANCE AND LIABILITY ISSUES

The types of insurance pertinent to study abroad include:

- sickness and accident insurance for students and employees of the program
- professional liability insurance
- trip cancellation insurance
- travel insurance
- liability insurance carried by independent contractors involved with your program
- insurance for medical evacuation and repatriation of remains

Health Insurance Coverage For Participants

It is imperative that students carry adequate health insurance coverage while abroad. A health policy should cover treatment for accidents, illness (including mental health illness), hospitalization, and medical emergencies. Students should also have a policy that

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covers emergency medical evacuation and repatriation of remains. Participants should be reminded that they should have insurance coverage for the periods before, during and after the program when they may be traveling without the group. This may mean that students will need to purchase additional coverage.

Students whose insurance policies are with health maintenance organizations (HMOs) may not have access to insurance benefits while overseas. Basic student medical insurance is insufficient protection for programs and sponsoring institutions.

Students must know the exclusions, benefits, and limitations of their insurance policy and should understand the claims submission process. They should be aware of the effects of pre-existing condition clauses and discuss this with carriers before purchasing a policy. In addition, a condition incurred abroad might not be covered upon their return to the U.S. These possibilities should be outlined by the program/faculty director or study abroad office during orientation sessions, and the student should make appropriate inquiries with insurance providers about such exclusions or policy limitations.

The USG has negotiated a study abroad insurance plan which is available to all USG study abroad participants at a pre-determined price. Cultural Insurance Service International (CISI) is the current contracted provider for study abroad participants (students and faculty/staff while on the program) . The CISI policy has been approved and endorsed by the System Council for International Education and is the recommended provider for the University System of Georgia. For information about the current policy, go to http://www.usg.edu/oie/study_abroad/resources/health_safety.phtml

Health Insurance For Program Staff/Employees

Program/faculty directors and study abroad program staff should maintain their own health insurance coverage. Check with your institution's staff benefits/risk management office to determine whether any existing faculty/staff plan will cover medical treatment overseas, repatriation, and emergency evacuation. If your health plan does not include repatriation and emergency evacuation, determine whether workman's compensation insurance provides these services or consider the purchase of a supplemental policy.

In addition, the CISI insurance mentioned previously is available to faculty/staff for purchase.

Personal/Professional Liability Issues

Depending on the individual circumstances and facts of a case, employees of the University System of Georgia are generally covered by the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia's liability insurance policy, assuming the employees are acting within the scope of their employment.

Because the facts of individual legal liability cases vary widely and because the Board of Regents' policy might include certain exclusions, program/faculty directors might consider obtaining a separate liability insurance policy that would cover them while they are involved with an overseas program. Professional associations can provide information

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about liability insurance, and may offer personal liability plans to their members at reasonable costs. Also, consult attorneys as well as risk management and liability insurance experts at your campus or at the Board of Regents if there are specific questions.

Trip Cancellation and Travel Insurance

Trip cancellation insurance can be purchased through travel agents and will provide protection in the event that the trip must be canceled. Note that any trip cancellation insurance arranged by the program director for the program itself might not apply to individual participants. Students can purchase trip cancellation insurance for themselves should unforeseeable circumstances bar them from participating in or completing the program.

Students and staff may also purchase travel insurance for lost baggage and other travel assistance services. Determining whether the insurance benefits outweigh the cost is a matter of individual preference, as this coverage may exclude an extensive list of items.

Liability Insurance of Independent Contractors

If programs enter into agreements with independent contractors to provide services, they should be advised that these parties will not be covered by an institution's or the Regents' liability insurance policy. These agencies and organizations, however, may have their own liability insurance to handle unforeseen interruptions in service, accidents, negligence, or cancellations. Therefore, contact risk management officials at your campus and campus attorneys to discuss the merits and issues related to third parties and their liability insurance plans. Program organizers should do this before entering into agreements with independent contractors.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANNING AND PROTOCOL

Real And Perceived Emergencies

Program directors and study abroad offices must be prepared to handle both real and perceived emergencies, as both can be threats to a study abroad program. A real emergency is a genuine or an immediate threat to students or staff, while a perceived emergency is a potentially risky situation that poses no immediate threat.

Examples of real emergencies:

- political coup
- civil unrest
- natural/manmade disaster
- physical/emotional illness
- kidnapping

Examples of perceived emergencies:

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- sensationalized reporting of an event abroad
- distortion of information provided by a participant

Both types of emergencies can affect students, faculty, staff, family members and others in the US and should be treated seriously and responded to in a timely manner.

Emergency Management in Study Abroad

To prepare for potential problems and to respond to incidents as they happen, institutions should designate individuals and offices which would be called upon to act. Institutions may rely on their Institutional Study Abroad Committee or have a subcommittee designed to deal with any emergencies that arise in conjunction with study abroad programs. Teams may vary according to individual situations and institutional resources, but should include a subset of individuals from the following offices:

Study Abroad Office

Dean of Students

Public Safety/Campus Police Office

Counseling Office

Institutional Legal Counsel

University Communications/Public Relations

Provost's Office

This team should also be charged with developing response plans for potential situations, taking into account cultural and political considerations, legal issues, and available resources. It should also determine a communication method and/or initial protocol for contacting individuals and/or convening a meeting in the event of an emergency.

Emergency Response Plan (ERP)

Although no single plan can address all types of emergencies that might occur during a study abroad program, it is important to establish, in advance, consistent and predictable policies and procedures designed to safeguard the welfare of participants and an institution. Emergency procedures need to be identified and followed in order to assist staff and faculty in reacting in a responsible and considered manner when emergencies do arise.

Having an ERP helps eliminate the chaos that often surrounds any type of incident. Planning allows institutions to establish clear communication channels to address crisis situations. Such plans can provide a legal basis for institutional and individual actions in an emergency situation.

An ERP provides the institution with the “who, what, when, where and how” needed to handle situations that require notification, consultation, and action. It is important to remember that ready availability of information is crucial to the proper execution of an ERP. A generic plan will assist those involved in responding appropriately on a case by case basis, both on site and on campus.

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It is wise to have materials that are available to all parties so that information and protocol can be referenced easily and quickly. This material should be in the form of a handbook and/or available electronically.

In general, in the event of an emergency or crisis abroad, the program/faculty director or other staff person on site should notify the home institution immediately and the initial contact person at the home campus needs to be designated in the ERP. Often times, that first contact is the university or college police or public safety office. The campus police or public safety office will then refer to a designated list of individuals who need to be contacted in succession. The campus police should make every effort to obtain as much information during the initial conversation. In some cases, the study abroad office may want to provide the police office with a script including questions that should be asked of the caller. Those individuals will then determine who from their respective staffs need to be notified.

A basic outline of an ERP might look like this:

Phase 1 – Emergency is reported. Involve members of the Institutional Study Abroad Committee or emergency sub-committee.

Phase 2 – Determine whether the emergency is real or perceived. Gather as much information as possible from individuals on-site, contact or investigate sources for detailed and accurate information.

Phase 3 – Take action as warranted and according to any established action plan.

Phase 4 – Record the chronological sequence of events in writing leading up to, during, and after the crisis. Maintain good records, including an Incident Report for future reference. A sample of an Incident Report is included at the end of this chapter.

Phase 5 – De-brief with all involved individuals. Make changes to emergency protocol where warranted.

Sample ERP documents are provided at the end of this chapter to help guide international educators in asking questions about the following in case of an emergency:

- Initial information to collect
- Specific information to obtain regarding names, times, places and witnesses
- Specific contact information for future communication or reference
- Double checking facts
- Executing an action plan
- Post-crisis follow-up

Civil Unrest and Political Disturbances

Political and social unrest as well as terrorism are part of our modern world. In general, students should be advised on ways to minimize risk and avoid dangers related to such issues. This may mean giving advice on travel, dress, behavior, avoidance of places that cater to Americans, and avoidance of mass demonstrations. Should a specific threat be

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received, emergency procedures should be implemented immediately. Students should be trained in emergency procedures before it becomes necessary to use them.

Additional Pre-Departure Preparations

There are a number of steps that study abroad offices and program/faculty directors can take to prepare for dealing with crisis situations on study abroad programs. In addition to conducting thorough pre-departure and on-site orientations for students, faculty, and staff, designing an ERP, and providing students with emergency information, study abroad programs and directors should do the following in preparation for sending students overseas:

- Contact the U.S. embassy or consulate nearest the program site. Alert them to the presence of program participants and staff. Confirm that all participants on the program are registered with the US embassy. For details on the registration process, see: http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/registration/registration_1186.html
- Be familiar with calling procedures from the host country.
- Know the foreign country's toll-free numbers for connecting to a U.S. operator.
- Maintain a listing of the daytime and emergency numbers for the U.S. embassy/consulate, Red Cross, Peace Corps, and other study abroad programs in the area.
- Maintain a listing of local numbers for fire, police, ambulance services, hospitals, medical professionals, and insurance companies.
- Regularly update all contact and resource information and place it in an easily accessible location known by all program staff. Keep a copy of the information accessible at all times.

Study Abroad Security Issues and the US State Department

The U.S. Department of State website is an invaluable source of information for those planning study abroad programs. The main Internet site is at <http://www.state.gov> and the site specific to Consular Affairs is <http://travel.state.gov>. Some of the most important information to be found on these websites includes:

1. **U.S. Department of State Country Specific Information Sheets** which are available for every country of the world and which contain entry requirements, currency regulations, unusual health conditions, crime and security statistics and special situations, political atmosphere and areas of instability and drug penalties, among other things. These information sheets also provide addresses and emergency telephone numbers for U.S. embassies and consulates. This website is: http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html
2. **U.S. Department of State Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts** are another means of securing information about terrorist threats and other short term and or transnational conditions posing risks to the security of travelers. Announcements are issued when there is a perceived threat. This website can be found at:

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html for the travel warnings and at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/pa/pa_1766.html for the travel alerts.

Travel Warnings are issued to describe long-term, protracted conditions that make a country dangerous or unstable. A Travel Warning is also issued when the U.S. Government's ability to assist American citizens is constrained due to the closure of an embassy or consulate or because of a drawdown of its staff.

Travel Alerts are issued to disseminate information about short-term conditions, generally within a particular country, that pose imminent risks to the security of U.S. citizens. Natural disasters, terrorist attacks, coups, anniversaries of terrorist events, election-related demonstrations or violence, and high-profile events such as international conferences or regional sports events are examples of conditions that might generate a Travel Alert.

Institutions should develop policies concerning the establishment and running of study abroad programs in countries which have travel warnings and travel alerts.

3. Another good source of information from the U.S. Department of State is the **International Travel Safety Information for Students** at: http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/safety/safety_2836.html
While this information is provided for travel in general it has some good tips and ideas concerning any type of experience in a foreign destination.
4. Institutions may want to refer and subscribe to **OSAC, the Overseas Security Advisory Council**. (OSAC) is a Federal Advisory Committee with a U.S. Government Charter to promote security cooperation between American business and private sector interests worldwide and the U.S. Department of State. OSAC provides, among other services, regular updates on security issues around the world. To register for updates or to review their services, the website is <https://www.osac.gov/>.
5. The U.S. Department of State has a website devoted exclusively to students' safety abroad. This campaign is a public affairs initiative which targets American college students and young people studying and traveling internationally and is designed to promote safe, smart travel to college students and spring-breakers. It includes a website, flyers called "go! guides," and posters for on-campus and individual use. The website for this program is www.studentsabroad.state.gov

Suspending or Cancelling a Program

In the event of a terrorist attack or other event which jeopardizes the health and safety of program participants, it may be necessary that a program be cancelled. If appropriate and feasible, moving the group to a different site might be an alternative to cancellation. The

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decision will be made by the study abroad administrators in consultation with on-site program/faculty directors, university officials at partner institutions, institutional or BOR legal counsel, and ERT members. Efforts should be made to ensure that students in a crisis situation not be unduly penalized either academically or financially.

If program cancellation occurs before or soon after the program begins, every effort should be made to refund recoverable costs to the participants. If the emergency occurs toward the middle or end of the program, it may be best to evacuate the group back to the US but to make arrangements to continue the coursework through a form of independent study, rather than cancel the program altogether.

If a program is not cancelled but an individual student feels uncomfortable about going or remaining abroad as a result of terrorist attack or other incident on location, he/she should be allowed to withdraw. Again, arrangements to return recoverable costs and complete academic work should be pursued.

1. [Responsible Study Abroad](#)
2. [Agreement and Waiver](#)
3. [Application Template with Authorization](#)
4. [Assumption of Risk and Release Form](#)
5. [Physician's Form](#)
- 5a. [Physician's Certificate Form](#)
6. [Student Liability Waiver](#)
7. [Emergency Contact Forms](#)
8. [Expectations for UGA Study Abroad Directors](#)
9. [Student Orientation Checklist](#)
10. [Faculty Orientation Checklist](#)
11. [Alcohol Policy Clarification for Student Abroad](#)
12. [Alcohol and Drug Policy](#)
13. [Acknowledgement of Alcohol and Drug Policies](#)
14. [Emergency Response Protocol](#)
15. [Crisis Response Checklist](#)
16. [GT SA Emergency Response Plan](#)
17. [Incident Report](#)