



STUDY ABROAD PRE-DEPARTURE GUIDE

FIU Sponsored Programs

Summer 2011

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Congratulations!!

If you are reading this, it means that you have made the decision to study abroad on an FIU Sponsored Program! This is going to be an incredible journey for you and we want you to get the most you possibly can out of your experience abroad.

Whether you are going out of the country for the first time or the fifteenth, **STUDYING** and **LIVING** abroad can be a completely different kind of experience. We recommend that you take this guide with you as a reference for important information and helpful hints on your semester or year abroad. Best of luck with your time abroad and remember, it's about the journey, not the destination! Safe travels!!!

Sincerely,

The Office of Education Abroad Staff

I. ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

This section of the Pre-departure Guide addresses details that must be attended to in order to make your study abroad dreams reality.

i. Health Insurance:

Health and accident insurance is mandatory for all Florida International University students (or students of other institutions) participating in study abroad activities. Students participating in study abroad activities must hold health and accident insurance for the duration of their time overseas; this is a required insurance policy provided through the OEA. Your insurance will cover you for the duration of the program (start date through end date). You will be given a brochure with the details of your coverage, and are encouraged to register with the provider online before departing on your trip.

ii. Passport copies:

A passport is a valuable document, especially abroad. You must be careful with your passport since it is the document that allows you to travel. Since it is possible to lose your passport while abroad, the OEA requires that you provide a copy of these pages so that it is on file. All students must check with the relevant consulates to make sure they are eligible to travel to the host country for the study abroad program. It is important to have at least 2 passport copies for yourself, leave one with your family, and leave one with your program's Faculty Director or Host Institution's Program Coordinator.

iii. Registration Issues

Registering for classes overseas

Each institution and study abroad program has its own unique way to register its foreign students for courses. You will be registered at FIU for your FIU courses. The registration process for FIU Sponsored programs is handled through the Office of Education Abroad. Check with your faculty director to be sure that you understand the registration procedures and policies for your program and that you have submitted the course enrollment form that is required for your registration.

Remember, you must be enrolled as a full-time student during your semester of study in order to retain your visa status (if applicable) and remain eligible for Financial Aid.

Do not register for classes in the U.S.

Once you are certain that you are studying abroad, be sure to cancel any registration you made for classes here in the U.S. for that semester. It is your responsibility to do so as early as possible to prevent being fee-liable for courses you will not attend.

Make sure that you do not have any holds that will prevent your class registration.

All participants are responsible for paying, by the deadlines published in the FIU Academic Calendar, all associated FIU instructional fees for the study abroad courses in which they are enrolled.

Students are subject to FIU enrollment, add/drop, and payment deadlines. Students registered or reinstated AFTER the registration deadline, may incur late registration fees.

Students who do not adhere to the FIU payment schedule, may be dropped from their course(s) and will be assessed a \$100 late payment fee plus a \$100 late registration fee for reinstatement.

Should a student cancel his/her participation in the program, he/she must notify the Faculty Director and must request to be dropped from my study abroad course(s) immediately. Notification of cancellation must be received by the OEA prior to the university deadline for add/drop. Failing to notify the OEA prior to this deadline will hold the student liable for course fees.

Payments for instructional fees are made to the FIU Cashier in PC 120 or online via PantherSoft and NOT in the Office of Education Abroad.

Students must be in good academic standing and free of conduct probation, and will make the OEA office aware of any charges pending against them. If a student provides false or misleading information or his/her conduct status should change prior to program departure, his/her admissions to the program will be rescinded and any program fees paid will not be refunded.

Students must also meet minimum cumulative GPA requirements for the program.

iv. Tying Up Loose Ends

There are a few more things you should arrange before leaving FIU to ensure that administrative paperwork goes smoothly while you are away.

Arrange for Direct Deposit

So that you can receive financial aid for your study abroad program in the quickest and easiest manner, you should arrange to have Direct Deposit. Check with the Financial Aid office if you have questions about how to do this. Remember, if you don't have direct deposit, any financial aid you receive will be sent in your name, in the form of a check, to the address you have listed with the Registrar and Financial Aid offices (via PantherSoft). If your parents receive the check, will they be able to deposit it and get you the money? How long will it take to reach you? Direct deposit usually appears in your account the morning after it is disbursed.

II. IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS AND INFORMATION

i. International Travel Documents

In most cases, you will be requesting admittance to a foreign country where you are not a citizen. To do this, you must make sure that you have the correct documentation before you leave. Many of these documents may take months to process, so begin this process as early as possible. Allow ample time before your planned departure date to complete this process.

a. Passport

To travel outside of your home country, you must have a passport. You should already have applied for a passport if you don't have one, but if you haven't, you must apply for one immediately.

If you already have a passport, check 1) that it is valid for six months past the last day of your program abroad; 2) that you have signed it; and 3) that you have one open page for every country you plan to visit.

If you do not yet have your passport, it is crucial that you sign it immediately upon receiving it, and then make at least four (4) copies of the signature and photo pages in case your passport is ever lost or stolen. Submit one to OEA to be kept in your file; submit one to your faculty director; keep another packed separately from your passport in your luggage; and give the third to a parent or spouse for their reference. You will need the passport number for various reasons during your travels, so keep it handy or memorize it.

b. Visa

A passport is an international document that is recognized by all countries. Visas represent each individual country's way of regulating visitors' passage through their borders. Each country varies with regard to its entry restrictions.

If you are required to have a student visa for the country in which you plan to study, you must apply for it at the embassy, consulate or representative agency of the country where you are planning to study or visit. OEA does not process visas, but we do provide needed support documentation, such as letters of acceptance, declaration of finances, medical information form and/or health insurance verification so that you can apply for the proper visa.

The easiest and most direct way to have your questions answered about visas is to contact the consulate or embassy of the nation where you plan to study or travel; talk with the Visa Officer if possible. It is best to contact the consulate directly since they offer the most current and detailed information. Rules and regulations may vary from consulate to consulate, so be sure you speak with the consulate that handles Florida residents. Many consulates provide visa applications on their web sites. Check <http://www.embassy.org> to find your consulate's website.

Visas are normally only needed for long stays in a country (greater than 90 days) but are often not necessary if you are a tourist with a U.S. passport. Always check first since visa rules are constantly changing. If you are not sure what countries require a visa for U.S. citizens, check the State Department's travel website, <http://www.travel.state.gov>, and click on the link for "Visas". If you do not have a U.S. passport, you should check the Consular website for each individual country you plan to visit.

In many cases getting a visa is a cultural experience in itself. It will be your first introduction to some of the bureaucratic processes you may experience when working with a different culture or country. OEA will assist you in every way possible, but please keep in mind that ultimately you are responsible for making sure that you get the proper information from the respective consulates of the countries you plan to visit.

Allow ample time to apply for and receive your visa. You must have it in hand before you leave. A visa may take a few days or several months to receive. You must also submit a copy of any required student visas to the OEA and your faculty director **BEFORE** your program begins. Failure to do so may result in your cancellation from the program.

For NON-U.S. Passport Holders or those with Green Cards

Special visa regulations apply depending on your home country and the passport or travel documents that you will be traveling under. Please look into this as soon as you decide to go overseas.

U.S. citizens definitely must have student visas for programs in the following countries: Argentina; Brazil; Chile; China; France; Italy; Japan; Spain; Russia (for any length of time), and some other countries when your program is over six weeks in length. Always check first!

c. Copies of Birth Certificate and Driver's License

Once you have left the United States, you must have proof that you are a United States citizen or resident, or have a visa to return. There are certain documents that provide this proof. The most important one is your passport. As previously discussed, you should keep this safe. United States citizens are granted easy access to many countries that restrict other nationalities from entering. This means that passports, especially U.S. passports are very valuable and in high demand. If you are careful, you should not have a problem, but if something does happen to your passport it will be important that you have other documents with you to prove your

citizenship. A notarized copy of your birth certificate is one such document. Other useful items are a copy of your driver's license and, if appropriate, your Residency card. You may not want to carry the originals with you, but copies may prove helpful. If you lose your passport you will have to go through a complex process to get another. Having these documents on hand can speed it up.

Special Note for International Students: International students should meet with the FIU Office of International Students and Scholars to be sure that their immigration paperwork is complete and updated so that they may return to the United States. Please note: International students who are outside of the United States for more than 5 months will require a new I-20 in order to be admitted at the U.S. port of entry. Failure to obtain a new I-20 may result in deportation. Please be sure you have discussed your plans with ISSS.

d. International Student Identification Card (ISIC)

You can purchase the ISIC card online at www.myisic.com

The ISIC costs \$25 and offers benefits such as low fares and worldwide discounts for everything from museums to hotels to public transportation. It is the world's most widely accepted student identity card and is issued in over 90 countries to almost two million students a year. This card is not required, but may be useful. In addition to the benefits mentioned, the ISIC carries limited travel insurance that can be useful in the case of a cancelled flight or lost luggage. If you purchase the ISIC, please submit a copy to OEA

ii. Financial Aid

Disbursement

By Federal law, no type of Financial Aid can be disbursed until after the start date of the FIU semester (i.e. the on-campus start date)!!! Since not all aid disburses at the same time, you may receive several disbursements throughout the semester. Be prepared for this when planning your finances.

Scholarships

Bright Futures will pay toward hours taken on FIU sponsored study abroad programs during the fall and spring semesters, as long as you are enrolled full-time. Bright Futures will pay the same amount as if you were studying on campus. **Bright Futures does not currently pay during summer semesters.** Please note that if you are studying abroad on a Non-FIU program for the fall, spring or academic year, Bright Futures will not pay (unless the program is sponsored by an institution in the State of Florida that accepts Bright Futures, e.g. FSU, UF, etc.).

If you receive any scholarships other than Bright Futures, you must notify the Financial Aid office. Please be aware that FIU awarded scholarships will **not** be applicable to NON-FIU programs. If you are receiving an institutional scholarship and you decide to participate in a NON-FIU program, you may lose your scholarship permanently.

Florida Pre-Paid College Program (FPCP)

If you are attending a FIU sponsored program, your FPCP will be processed through the Bursar's Office just as if you were attending classes on campus. Please make sure that you have checked off on your program application that you are planning to use your Florida Pre-Paid benefits.

If you are attending a program offered through another State of Florida University system institution, contact that university for collection of prepaid benefits.

III. THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO ABROAD

i. Preparing to Travel

Travel Abroad

One of the most exciting parts of study abroad is the opportunity to travel. Not only can you travel around the region and throughout the city where you are studying, but you also have the chance to explore other areas. Travel is one of the best parts of studying abroad as long as you know the right way to do it.

Travel Resources

Libraries and bookstores have hundreds of travel books. There are books for every region, every budget and every style of travel. They are extremely helpful and informative. If you are going to go to the trouble of studying abroad, you should also go to the trouble of researching the area where you will be staying. Travel books are a great way to do this. They can tell you the places to see, where to stay, where to eat, and other helpful information. Read as much as you can before you leave but you should also invest in buying a book to take with you.

Let's Go and *Lonely Planet* are popular books for college students because they focus on the low budget options and cater to the interests of younger travelers; they are written by college students and updated annually. Another popular option for budget minded (and more adventurous) travelers is the *Rough Guide* series. There are many other options as well, so be sure to browse the travel section of your local bookstore before making your final decision about which to purchase.

Another great travel resource is a country's tourism office. Practically all major cities in the world have these and they are great ways to collect information about an area at no cost to you. They typically offer free brochures, posters, and other publications. Many also offer services such as selling show tickets, train tickets and organizing group sightseeing tours.

A lot of the information that you will need for planning your trip can be found online through the various country/city tourism offices.

Overseas Flights

Make sure to find out the travel plans specified by your program before you start looking into flights. You do not want to make a flight reservation if you have already paid for one through your program. Also, make sure you find out when and where your program wants you to arrive. Changing tickets can cost you anywhere from \$200 to the cost of another ticket. We recommend that all students traveling abroad purchase travel insurance. In some cases, programs have changed their start date or have been canceled due to various circumstances. Travel insurance can cover the cost of any unexpected changes in plan. Talk to your travel agent about this insurance.

Airports

Airports can be confusing places. This is especially true when you are in a country where you do not speak the language fluently or understand the culture yet. There are a couple of things that you can do to help yourself. One is to travel with other people going on the same program if possible. Another hint is to get a copy of the layout of the airport you will be arriving at, which you can do online. If you

are making a connection in a foreign country, find out what gate you will be coming into, what gate you will be going out of and how to get from one to the next. Even if you do all of the pre-planning in the world, complications will likely come up. Almost all airports have information counters where the staff will often speak English. You must also keep in mind that airports are potential crime areas. Please be careful with your baggage; never leave it unattended, and stay away from any unattended bags or packages in public places. Do not check luggage for anyone else onto airplanes, railroads, or buses. Do not borrow suitcases and do not allow anybody, not even a new friend, to put anything in your luggage if you want to avoid the risk of becoming a carrier of bombs or drugs.

Host Program Orientation

Most programs begin with a required orientation program. During orientation, your program should cover topics such as academics, location of contacts, safety and security, illness procedures, location of the nearest U.S. consulate or embassy, and other pertinent information.

Consulate Information

A consulate or embassy is a country's office abroad. For instance, the United States has consulates in almost all foreign countries to help deal with issues that may arise abroad. Consulates and embassies are your liaison should you encounter any difficulties. It is important that you register with your consulate or embassy online before departure (see enclosed information from the Department of State). If you encounter any problems while abroad, contact your home country's embassy or consulate. (For most of you this will be the United States.) It is important that within a few days of arrival you become familiar with the location of your home country's consulate nearest to your program site.

ii. Packing and Baggage Tips

OK- so you've got your flight, you've completed all of your forms, you've got a passport and visa, student ID and hostel card, and taken care of all your academic stuff—you think "Hey, I'm ready to go!" Well, not quite. You still have one huge obstacle to overcome...PACKING! You must put time and thought into what you are going to pack. Remember whatever you bring with you, you must carry around. So pack smart.

Here are some suggestions for packing:

- REMEMBER THE GOLDEN RULE: LESS IS BEST!
- REMEMBER THE SILVER RULE: IF YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE IT, DON'T BRING IT!
- Make sure your luggage is durable, as well as easy to pack, pick up and throw on in a hurry, and to carry for long distance. Always check the handles and seams and buy locks that meet the TSA guidelines. Locks that do not meet the TSA guidelines may be cut off when your luggage is inspected. Remember soft luggage with zippers is lighter and easier to pack than a hard case.
- Large travel backpacks are preferable to suitcases. Suitcases, even those with wheels, do not fare well on gravel roads or cobblestones, which you are bound to encounter in nearly any country you visit. It is much easier to throw on a backpack if you're running late for a train, maneuvering around people and objects, or squeezing through tight spaces, than to drag your suitcase behind you.
- Bring a mid-size daypack. They are light, easy to pack, easy to carry and great for weekend trips and can also be used during the week to carry books and lunches to class.
- Pack categorically. Put clothes, toiletries, maps and guide books into separate compartments so that you can find them easily. Pack the heaviest items in the bottom and close to your back (in a travel backpack), for better balance.
- Pack only what you can carry and run with. Porters are scarce and luggage-carts are prohibited in some parts of the airport, so don't depend on them. You will be responsible for carrying your own

luggage. This is a chaotic time, and having an unmanageable amount of luggage only makes things more difficult.

- Identify your luggage. Always put tags on the inside and outside of each piece of luggage, identifying your name and address abroad. Make sure, however, that the tag has a flap covering your information so others do not have easy visual access to it. Always remove old tags with incorrect information, especially airline destination tags.
- Since there are a million brown and black bags, it makes things much easier if you put an identifying sign on your bags such as a red bandanna or a piece of brightly colored tape. It will make it much easier to find your bags.

Transatlantic Baggage Regulations

Airlines provide a limited amount of space for luggage and have specific regulations for their size and weight on overseas flights as people often carry a lot with them. Please be aware of these, because if you chose to ignore them, the airline may refuse your baggage or charge you extra to transport it. If you have any questions contact your airline.

Checked Baggage

Individual airline regulations are constantly changing. Be sure to provide your airline or travel agency with your contact details so that they may notify you of any changes that happen after you have purchased your ticket. Since every airline is different, it is recommended that you visit the airline's website ahead of time to confirm that your baggage will meet required specifications.

Carry-On Baggage

You may only carry on one piece of luggage. It must fit in the overhead compartment or under your seat. Most airlines require that it not exceed 45 inches/114.3 cm or weigh more than 22 lbs./10 kg. All liquids, gels and aerosols must be in three-ounce or smaller containers. Larger containers that are half-full or toothpaste tubes rolled up are not allowed. Each container must be three ounces or smaller. All liquids, gels and aerosols must be placed in a single, quart-size, zip-top, clear plastic bag. Gallon size bags or bags that are not zip-top such as fold-over sandwich bags are not allowed. Each traveler can use only one, quart-size, zip-top, clear plastic bag. Each traveler must remove their quart-sized plastic, zip-top bag from their carry-on and place it in a bin or on the conveyor belt for X-ray screening. X-raying separately will allow TSA security officers to more easily examine the declared items. There are exceptions for baby formula, breast milk, and other essential liquids, gels, and aerosols, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines. Often there is a special rack at the check-in counter where you can test the size of your carry-on luggage. Try it; if it doesn't fit, check it. It is vital that you keep your luggage receipts until you claim your bags. Since it is possible luggage will be lost, keep in mind these receipts are your only claim to that luggage.

What should you pack?

The following suggestions have been made by former study abroad students.

- If you will have a kitchen facility, be aware that in many countries spices and certain ingredients to which you are accustomed may be expensive or unavailable. Some students bring their own. For example, some students may bring ingredients to make an American specialty, like PB&J sandwiches, to share with their host family or new friends. It may be possible to find the necessary ingredients in your host country, but you might have to visit a specialty store and pay a premium price.
- If you bring plug-in appliances, like hair dryers, keep in mind that voltage in many countries is 220 volts. Your appliance will not work without a voltage converter and/or adapter set (since plug shapes also vary from country to country). You can buy these at most stores and should look into it before

leaving. It is often cheaper and safer to buy small appliances (e.g. hair dryers, irons, etc.) once you are arrive in your host country.

Checklist of basic items to bring:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shampoo/Conditioner | <input type="checkbox"/> Clothing for a range of temperatures (items that can be layered are great) – They should be easy to wash by hand and line dry quickly. Also, should mix & match. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Toothbrush/Toothpaste | <input type="checkbox"/> Plenty of socks and underwear |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shaving Cream & Razor | <input type="checkbox"/> Long underwear (according to weather) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Soap | <input type="checkbox"/> Comfortable walking shoes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plastic soap dish | <input type="checkbox"/> Bathing suit and cap |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deodorant | <input type="checkbox"/> One dressy outfit and shoes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Travel alarm clock | <input type="checkbox"/> Hat |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cosmetics | <input type="checkbox"/> Scarf (if weather is applicable) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prescription medication | <input type="checkbox"/> Feminine hygiene products and birth control pills |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Glasses/Contacts and lens supplies | <input type="checkbox"/> Condoms |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Photos of family and friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Shower Shoes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Journal | <input type="checkbox"/> Sewing Kit |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Passport pouch | <input type="checkbox"/> Translation dictionary (if you are not fluent)/ Phrase book |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Copy of passport and visa | <input type="checkbox"/> Travel books with maps of the region |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Twin (long) sheets for linens for hostels or dorms | <input type="checkbox"/> Mosquito repellent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Towel(s) for the shower and the beach | <input type="checkbox"/> Small Flashlight |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Backpack/Daypack | <input type="checkbox"/> Batteries (lithium for cameras) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camera/film | <input type="checkbox"/> School shirts (e.g. FIU t-shirts) for gifts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sun Screen | <input type="checkbox"/> Zip Lock Plastic Bags |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Umbrella or Rain Poncho | <input type="checkbox"/> Your address book (don't forget e-mail addresses) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sunglasses | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A couple of good paperback books (esp. for the planes, trains & buses) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MP3 or IPOD | |

Things NOT to bring:

- Too many clothes or shoes
- Anything that you are too attached to...jewelry, valuables...Remember the silver rule!! If you can't afford to lose it, don't bring it.
- Food except maybe spices or special things you fear you cannot purchase overseas
- Musical instruments that cannot take a beating
- Too many dressy outfits or dry-clean only clothing

What to pack in your carry-on:

- _____ Copies of your important documents: passport and visa, ID's, and directions to your destination and important phone numbers (program contacts and emergency numbers)
- _____ One complete change of clothes (underwear, shirt, pants)
- _____ Jacket or sweatshirt (planes get cold on long flights)
- _____ A good book, magazines, a travel guide, a portable music player

- _____ Pencil and pen to complete arrival documents or write letters or write in your journal
- _____ Any prescription medicines in original bottles (including contacts/glasses)
- _____ Snacks (It will be a long flight and you may get hungry)
- _____ Camera (You may want access to this as soon as you get off your flight)

Helpful hints:

- Carry your passport and other important documents in a security wallet rather than your carry on bag. Keep copies in your carry on bag. Be sure to spread out your sources of money with some in your security wallet, some in your carry on and some in a purse or wallet / pocket.
- Roll your clothing when you pack it. You can fit more in your suitcase and your clothes will be less wrinkled.
- Pack an extra bag in your luggage to use on your way home. You will usually leave with more than you came with and an extra bag folded flat in the bottom of your suitcase often proves to be invaluable.

iii. Money and Finances

Students can find themselves short of cash if they do not plan ahead. Check with OEA and your faculty director to find out exactly what is covered by your program fees. A good rule for planning is to estimate what you'll spend and then add 10-20% of that to the final figure. Many factors, such as exchange rates, can affect your budget.

Exchange Rates

Exchange rates can affect the amount of money you actually have. If the U.S. economy is strong, the dollar will be worth more. The opposite may also be true, so be prepared for changes during your stay. You can find currency exchange rates in the Sunday newspaper travel section. You can also buy exchange rate charts in many luggage or travel stores. A helpful web site for exchange rates is The Universal Currency Converter at <http://www.xe.net/currency/>

It will take a little time to get used to exchange rates. Just stay aware of them while you are abroad, and pay special attention if you plan to travel outside your host country. Also, remember that exchange rates fluctuate daily depending on the world economy. The longer your stay, the more drastic the changes can be.

Within the first two weeks of your program abroad, you will be able to average out what your weekly expenses are and then budget yourself for the duration of the program.

Transporting Money

If you are traveling on weekends, banks and currency exchange agencies may be closed. You will most likely be able to find various exchange companies that do remain open every day, but they can have poor exchange rates or charge high commissions, and they may be difficult and time consuming to find.

To get foreign currency while you are still in the U.S., inquire at your bank about whether this service is available. Many times it will take a week or more for the bank to get the foreign currency for you, so plan ahead. There may be a small fee associated with ordering foreign currency from your local bank.

You can always exchange money at the airport from which you are departing. Airports generally have poor exchange rates, but if you are only exchanging a small amount of money, it is a minimal difference. It is worth it to have some of the local currency with you when you arrive at your host country. If you

are returning to the U.S. through the same airport, keep your exchange receipts as agencies will often waive their normal exchange fee if you originally exchanged your currency with them.

There are several options for transporting money abroad:

Cash

You should take approximately \$150 USD in the local currency of your destination country with you on the flight. This will save you time and trouble once you arrive. This money might be used for transportation from the airport to your program site and it will also be helpful if you want to purchase food or drink upon arrival. Having this cash will prevent you from scrambling around looking for a currency exchange booth. This is especially important if you plan to arrive on a Sunday. Aside from this initial \$150 USD in the local currency, **DO NOT** take too much money in cash. Carrying cash is the most dangerous way to carry money because it cannot be replaced.

Credit Cards

We suggest that if you do not already have a credit card, you get one. Most major credit cards (especially Visa and MasterCard) are accepted worldwide. American Express is widely recognized but is often less favored by smaller shops (even if they say they accept it). Discover Cards are generally not accepted outside the United States.

Even if you do not plan to use it, a credit card provides a safety net in case you have an emergency or just need money that you did not budget for. These cards may also allow you to write personal checks at banks or, if you request this service, you can get cash advances on your card at ATMs and in banks around the world. It is always a good idea to call your credit card companies prior to your semester abroad to let them know that you will be using the card abroad. If you haven't advised them of your intended use of the card overseas, they may block it thinking it has been stolen. By taking a few minutes to call them, you can save yourself a lot of frustration.

ATMs

ATMs offer a number of advantages. It is no longer difficult to find ATMs around the world, especially in Europe. They are often open 24 hours and the fees are minimal. The exchange rate is immediate and often favorable. However, if you plan to count on this as a means of organizing your funds overseas, you will want to be certain your card can be accepted overseas.

The most common use for ATMs abroad is with a debit or check card (usually a Visa or MasterCard secured card) attached to your U.S. checking account. It works just as it would in the U.S., but there may be additional fees attached for making withdrawals. Using your Visa or MasterCard **debit card** is very handy since it will be accepted internationally as both a credit card and an ATM card just like at home. Make sure that you know your PIN numbers before you leave, and be sure to check with your bank about whether or not your card can be used on the network in your host location. In addition to debit cards, there are ATMs worldwide that accept Visa, MasterCard, and American Express and allow you to make a cash advance with a PIN number. Debit cards attached to a savings account will NOT work in ATMs abroad.

Talk to your bank about the options open to you while overseas. Some banks even offer a listing of all ATMs in the area where you will be studying. As with credit cards, inform your bank that you will be using the card abroad. If you haven't advised them of your intended use of the card overseas, they may block it thinking it has been stolen. Be sure to have the customer service phone numbers that you will

need to contact if your card is blocked. (You should ask your bank for the number to contact a person rather than an automated menu if possible.) Pre-planning can make all the difference.

Contact your bank and make sure you know the ATM fees and exchange fees that you will be paying for ATM transactions abroad. Make sure you know the associated fees with debit transactions, if any.

Helpful websites:

Cirrus ATM locator: <http://www.mastercard.com/atmlocator/index.jsp>

Plus ATM locator: http://visaatm.infonow.net/bin/findNow?CLIENT_ID=VISA

The best advice is to plan on having money available in a few different forms (some cash, credit cards & ATM cards). Create a plan and be certain you have access to enough funds to secure your lifestyle abroad.

Securing your money

Most travel or baggage stores sell security wallets (also called passport wallets). There are carrying cases which you wear underneath your clothing to store valuable documents such as passports, credit cards and money. Pick-pocketing is, unfortunately, a worldwide problem. To help protect yourself from this crime, carry your money, and passport, in these security wallets. There are many different styles; they are easy to access and surprisingly comfortable. Another safety tip is not to carry all of your money in one place. Have a spare \$20 or \$50 in a separate pocket or another area of your suitcase.

iv. Language Preparation

If you are traveling to a country and you do not have a strong grasp of their language, it is very helpful to learn some basics before you depart. The most helpful method is to take a course in this language. Another way to try to pick up the basics and to get a peek into the culture is to watch films from that country or in that country's language. Most video stores have a foreign film section.

Living in a culture where a different language is spoken is extremely exciting. It will make your experience even more significant if you try to use and understand the language. Once you are abroad it is good to seek out experiences that allow you to use it, such as ordering food in the language, spending time with local residents, seeing plays or movies in the language or just paying attention to the signs and conversations around you. It can be frustrating but the experience is well worth the struggle.

Even if you do not have time before you leave to do extensive language study, attempt to familiarize yourself with some of the most often needed words. You can purchase an inexpensive phrase book at most book stores that will provide you with the basics. Most good travel guides will provide you with a list of the translation of several key words as well as their pronunciation. This is information that you might want to carry around with you.

IV. ISSUES YOU WILL FACE ABROAD

i. Conduct

The FIU Student Code of Conduct

Remember that while you are studying abroad you are a representative of Florida International University and are held to the Student Conduct Code of this University just as if you were here. . You can find a copy of the student code of conduct in the FIU student handbook or by going to: http://www2.fiu.edu/~sccr/standards_of_conduct_code.html. You are strongly encouraged to review the student code of conduct before you depart and to consider bringing a copy with you. You are also expected to follow the rules and regulations of the program you are enrolled in overseas. Please be aware that you may face academic or judicial sanctions at FIU, including expulsion, for infractions to the Code of Conduct made abroad. While the age of legal consumption of alcohol is different in many countries, the FIU alcohol and substance abuse parent/guardian notification policy and the alcohol and drug-free workplace and campus policy remain in effect.

You will be given additional rules by your faculty program director or program provider. It is your responsibility to abide by the rules of the program. These policies and procedures are meant to protect all student participants and provide for a meaningful academic experience. Failure to do so will result upon your being dismissed from the program. Any student who is dismissed from a program will not receive any refund or academic credit.

If you are unable to resolve a dispute with your faculty program director, you may contact the Office of Education Abroad. The OEA will assist you in communicating with the participating academic departments in resolving disputes of an academic nature. The OEA will work with Student Affairs for any other type of dispute.

ii. Your Health

It is important that you take some simple precautions to ensure that you have a safe and healthy experience abroad. It is always a good idea to see a doctor before traveling abroad. Your physician will be able to answer specific questions that you may have related to the part of the world in which you will be traveling.

Immunizations

Immunizations are an important part of staying healthy while studying abroad. Some countries have immunization requirements. Check with your physician or the State Department Travel website, www.travel.state.gov , to find out what vaccines are required and/or recommended for the country in which you will be living. Since some immunizations must be administered in stages, make your initial appointment as soon as you make your travel plans to ensure you have adequate time to receive the needed immunizations. No matter where you are going, a tetanus immunization within the last ten years is highly recommended.

Medical Conditions and Medications

If you have any medical conditions, it is recommended that you bring a letter from your physician detailing your condition and any treatment that you are undergoing. Give a copy of this information to your faculty director and roommate, if you have one.

You may have difficulty getting prescriptions filled while abroad so it is best to plan ahead. Have all prescriptions filled that you will need during your stay. If you are going on long-term program, make plans to have your prescription filled well before your supply runs low. (This may require approval from your stateside insurance provider, so do not delay in making the necessary arrangements). If you wear glasses or contacts, bring a backup pair in case your primary pair is damaged and make sure that you have your prescription with you.

Also bring any preferred non-prescription medications with you. It may be difficult to obtain American-name brands when abroad. If you think that you may need these, bring a supply of them with you so you will not have to struggle to find a foreign equivalent.

Precautions

Remember tuberculosis, hepatitis, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS are a worldwide problem. In the case of HIV and STDs please be aware that the quality of prophylactics, like condoms, varies dramatically worldwide. As with all personal hygiene items, you should bring with you anything that you think you will need to ensure that the quality will be what you are accustomed to.

Illness

If you encounter any illness while abroad, you must take certain steps to ensure your health. Remember, you are not at home any more. You cannot run down to the corner drug store and pick up your favorite medicine. You must think ahead and be prepared. At the first signs of illness, take steps to find treatment and do not forget preventive measures. Staying warm, dry, eating properly and getting enough sleep will help your system fight off illness.

In the event that you do become ill while abroad:

1. Illness is defined as not feeling well, depression, headache, stomach upsets, diarrhea, flu/common cold or any other condition that makes you feel that you would like to seek professional care.
2. Report any illness to your faculty director, local host coordinator, roommate, OEA or local faculty and ask for assistance. You have every right to see a physician and should take extra care while abroad, as any common illness can become much more serious when under stress.

Food and Water

When you visit a new country, you will want to try all of the local cuisine. This is part of the cultural experience, but let it be gradual. Don't feel that you have to try every new dish or drink during your first day. Give your system time to adjust. Make sure that you investigate the purity and safety of the drinking water in your host country. In most cases it will be best to drink and cook with bottled water, but some countries have safe water supplies. Even if the water supply is "safe," your body may not be accustomed to some of its minerals, etc., so take it easy when you first arrive. If you want to check on the condition of the supply, contact the Center for Disease Control on the web at <http://www.cdc.gov> or by phone at (404) 498-1515/ (800) 311-3435.

Keep in mind that the food abroad can be dramatically different from what you are used to. Also remember that even if you have been to a restaurant in the U.S. that specializes in your host country's cuisine, it still may be dramatically different from what you expect. For example, food at a Mexican restaurant in the U.S. is very different from the food in Mexico. There is always an adjustment period when eating items that you are not accustomed to; be prepared for it. Many travelers experience traveler's diarrhea during their initial time of their stay abroad.

Pepto-Bismol is difficult to find abroad so it is best to bring it with you. During this adjustment period it is crucial that you consume large quantities of bottled water—but stay away from caffeine and alcohol—they hurt more than they help. You can become dehydrated with very serious consequences. You should always notify your host of any medical problems, even if you believe them to be minor.

You must also be very careful with alcohol. If you choose to consume alcohol do so wisely and with caution, and remember that many countries allow higher levels of alcohol in their beverages. This means that fewer beverages will cause you to reach your tolerance level, so if you choose to drink, drink intelligently. You can put yourself into a dangerous position by consuming too much alcohol.

iii. Your Safety

As in other settings, the decisions you make before and during the program, as well as your day-to-day choices and behaviors, can have a major impact on your health and safety abroad.

In general, you should:

- Read and carefully consider all materials given to you that relate to safety, health, legal, environmental, political, and cultural conditions in the host countries.
- Consider your own personal health and safety needs when accepting a place in a Florida International University program.
- Make available to OEA and your faculty director accurate and complete physical and mental health information and any other personal data that is necessary in planning for a safe and healthy study abroad experience.
- Assume responsibility for all the other elements necessary for your personal preparation for the program.
- Participate fully in orientation programs.
- Maintain appropriate insurance policies and abide by any conditions imposed by the carriers.
- Provide your family with emergency contact information, and keep them informed on an ongoing basis.
- Understand and comply with the terms of participation and codes of conduct of the program, and obey host country laws.
- Be aware of local conditions and customs that may present health or safety risks when making daily decisions. Promptly express any health or safety concerns to the program staff or other appropriate individuals.
- Behave in a manner that is respectful of the rights and well being of others and encourage others to behave in a similar manner.
- Accept responsibility for and consequences of your own decisions and actions.
- Become familiar with the procedures for obtaining emergency health and law enforcement services in the host country.

With regard to Personal Health & Safety:

- You should expect to feel jet lag upon arrival overseas. It will take a few days for your system to adjust to the time and climate changes, so pace yourself. Get plenty of sleep before you travel and drink lots of fluids before and during the flight to prevent dehydration. Don't overestimate your level of energy in the first few days!
- Protect yourself and your belongings. Do not leave your purse or wallet accessible to thieves or pickpockets. Be especially careful in crowded areas such as airports, train stations and big department stores.

- Avoid threatening or dangerous situations, e.g. walking alone at night or going to an unknown area of town at night (even in pairs or in a group).
- Do not hitchhike.
- Avoid large crowds such as demonstrations or political rallies.
- If you become sick, or have to have medical attention for whatever reason, inform the program director on site.
- If you choose to engage in sexual activity, practice safe sex.
- Whenever you leave the program site and choose to travel on your own for whatever length of time, leave your itinerary with the program director AND a friend or roommate. This should include information on where you are going, how you are going to get there, where you will be staying and when you expect to be back.
- Using illegal drugs (including marijuana) during the program will result in immediate dismissal and judicial sanctions when you return to FIU. If you see illegal drug use, remove yourself immediately from the situation.
- Abuse of alcohol is not permitted. If alcohol consumption affects your participation in the program (including day-after syndrome), or reflects in a damaging way on the program, you will face the possibility of dismissal.
- Use the same common sense that you would use here at home when meeting new people.

Safety and Security: All students participating in FIU Sponsored study abroad programs are required to review the US Department of State Consular Notes for the country in which they will be studying abroad. Please pay close attention to sections on Crime and Safety and host country government regulations, customs, and laws. These sections will include not only information on how to be safe in your host country but also on how to ensure that you follow your host country laws and policies during your stay there.

Health: All students participating in FIU Sponsored study abroad programs are required to review the Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports for the country in which they will be studying abroad. Please pay close attention to sections on required and recommended vaccinations and immunizations, as well as general health guidelines.

Department of State Travel Warnings: As a study abroad participant, you may be traveling to or through countries that have security risks. Information about the State Department Country Specific Information and Travel Alerts and Warnings can be found at <http://travel.state.gov/travel/>. If circumstances change and the State Department changes the status of any country to a travel alert or travel warning, FIU may, in its sole discretion, terminate the study abroad program that you are on and require your immediate return to the United States. FIU and/or agents will undertake the travel arrangements for the return to the United States, and will attempt to arrange other academic studies for you so that you can complete that portion of your program. Should you refuse to return to the United States when requested due to a program cancellation as described in this paragraph, your financial aid, insurance (which includes medical and political evacuation coverage), and academic credits for the study abroad program may be negatively impacted.

iv. Travel Issues

Excursions

Many students take the opportunity to travel around the region in which they are studying while abroad. This is especially true in Europe, which has an extensive and efficient railroad system and very inexpensive air travel. If you are considering doing this, you should plan ahead. The first step is to look

into any excursions that your program may offer. You might also want to travel independently. Speak with a travel agent or your program advisor about making arrangements.

A travel agent will be able to suggest reliable modes of transportation for travel, areas of the region that are popular, travel restrictions and where to get information about places to stay and things to see. You should look into this before going abroad since things like Eurail tickets must be purchased in the United States. It is advisable to ask students from the area what is the best way to travel, what the deals are, and where to go.

Hostels

Many college students choose to stay in hostels while traveling. Hostels are inexpensive hotels where a group of people share a room and bathroom. Although they can be of a lower quality than a hotel, they are cheap and a good way to meet other young travelers. You can get a listing of hostels in your region from a travel agent, and you should also look into purchasing a hostel card that entitles you to discounts at hostels. While a hostel card is not necessary for all hostels, it is worth investigating. Contact Hostelling International at www.hihostels.com for more information.

Many hostels are beginning to require reservations, especially during high traffic periods. Check for the dates of any local holidays or festivals before you go; this may impact availability in particular hostels. It is also important that you do not leave any valuables in a hostel, as they are potential crime areas since they are fairly open and unrestricted. Take any valuables that you have with you while you sightsee, and look into locking your things up when you are asleep or away from your room. Hostels often provide lockers or safes for this purpose.

Modes of Transportation

Public transportation in many other areas of the world is much better than in the United States. This is especially true in Europe. Many Americans go abroad with prejudices against public transportation. Public transportation can be the cleanest, cheapest, fastest way to get around. It is also a good way to get know the culture of your country.

When you arrive in your country investigate the options for transportation. Many train or subway systems offer monthly passes at a discounted rate for students. Due to the many variations in driving laws, insurance, speeds and even on which side of the road to drive, we do not recommend renting or driving any personal vehicle. Even if the public transportation is great, don't forget to walk sometimes. Walking is often the best way to get to know a city, not to mention good exercise. Bicycles are another very good option. In many cities, they can often be rented or purchased inexpensively, and they provide a fun alternative to walking. Biking is very popular in many European and Asian countries and may be one of the primary modes of transportation in your host country. Be sure to check on bicycle safety laws in your area.

v. Communicating with the People at Home

You are about to embark on one of the most exciting adventures of your life. You are going to want to share these experiences with friends and family back in the U.S. However, other countries have different systems of communication so it may take you a little bit of time to adjust. Read through this section to examine the different options for communicating.

Mail

Overseas mail is famously slow and unreliable. It can take anywhere from six days to six weeks (or even months!) to reach its destination, if it gets there at all. It is also expensive to airmail a lot of things

home. This does not mean that you should not use this service. It may be your only choice, but it is important that you know up front that this is an unpredictable system and that you should not count on the service overseas being as consistent as mail is in the United States.

All U.S., and most overseas, post offices sell aerogrammes. An aerogramme is a single, thin sheet of paper that you write on and then fold to send. Often included in their cost is postage, which makes them the cheapest, most convenient way to send overseas mail. Postcards are also a great way to communicate with friends and family. Sending a postcard per week, or one from each of your travel destinations, makes for great memories when you return.

Make sure that you take all addresses of friends and family with you. Once you are settled at your program you should also give your address to them. Remember that since airmail can be inconsistent and can take a long time to get to you, if it is crucial that you receive something, sending things via fax or express mail is a better choice even though it may be more expensive. Express mail charges include a tracking service that can locate a package if it does not arrive in the expected amount of time. Keep in mind, however, that although FedEx or other express mail services sound fast, what is “overnight” in the U.S. may take days or even weeks depending on where you are. All mail, including “overnight” and “express,” must clear customs, so it may be delayed for several days or even weeks. Inquire about delivery times and guarantees before you spend the money.

Telephone

Everyone wants to hear a friendly voice from home every once in a while. Thanks to better telephone service and new ways to transmit calls, it is easier than ever to call home, but remember that it is still a complex process. Here are some things to remember:

- You may not have a telephone that can call overseas in your living accommodations. In this case, it may be necessary for you to use public phones or a cell phone. With public phones you need a method of payment. The best way to call from a public phone is to get a calling card. You may do this before you leave, or use calling cards purchased in your host country. Contact your long distance service in the U.S. to see if they offer a calling card you can use abroad, and then check with other companies to compare prices.
- When calling overseas you need a ‘country code’ and ‘city code.’ The country code is the international equivalent of an area code. The city code is the area code. Many long distance services can give you a card that has all country codes on it. There is also a listing of the country codes in the phone book. The country code for the United States is 1.
- Different countries will have different ways to call out of the country. In some cases you may need to call the country operator and have them place an international call, but this varies. For example, to call out of Europe to the U.S., you can dial direct. The ‘dialing out code’ is “00,” so you would dial 00 + 1 + area code + number. Talk to your program coordinator or resident director to determine what the process is for your host country.
- Before your departure, research prices of U.S. calls to your host country, and calls from your host country to the U.S. For instance, it is very expensive to **make** calls on cell phones in Europe, whether you are calling a local number or a destination abroad. (You should **never** call home from a cell phone – get a calling card for this purpose.) However, **receiving** calls to your cell phone is often free. The same applies to sending and receiving text messages.
- You will most likely be in a different time zone while living abroad. Remember this if you are calling home and remind those calling you of the same. Your host family in Spain would be very unhappy, for example, to get a phone call at 2 a.m. from your little sister back home (where it is only 8 p.m.)

Cellular Phones

Your U.S. cell phone may or may not work in your host country. If you prefer to use your U.S. cell phone, check with your U.S. cellular service to determine whether or not your phone will work abroad. If your phone will work, you might opt to add international calling. The rates per minute vary by cell service but can vary from \$.99 / minute to over \$3.00 per minute. According to past participants, a cell phone can be purchased for 29 Euros from Vodaphone for a phone that will work on the GSM system (but not in the United States). Cell phones that would work in the United States are more expensive (approximately 75 Euros). Cell phones usually do not operate as they do in the U.S. In most countries, you purchase a chip (SIM card) that gets inserted into the phone itself and which operates like a prepaid, declining balance account. Once your minutes have been used, the phone stops working until you replenish or get a new chip. Incoming calls to your phone are sometimes free but you pay for each call you make and your calls to voicemail.

Students who are participating in summer programs may prefer to purchase an inexpensive cell phone in their host country and recharge it with calling cards.

E-mail

Some programs provide their students with access to an e-mail account for free or for a nominal fee. If your program provides you with this service, this is the cheapest and most effective way to communicate. The transmission is virtually instantaneous and convenient for most of your friends back at school and your family if they have internet access. Getting access to computers abroad may be limited to a certain time of the day and may only allow you to be on the computers for a limited amount of time.

Most cities now have cyber-cafes where you can pay by the hour for Internet access, or often this service is available at public libraries.

Be sure to have your FIU web mail forwarded to whatever email address you will be using abroad. This is the only address that the offices at FIU will use to communicate with you (Registrar, Financial Aid, etc.), so you are responsible for checking that account even while you are away.

vi. Living Accommodations

There are many different options for accommodations depending on the program you attend. You may live independently in an apartment, with a host family, in a hotel, or in a residence hall. Regardless of which situation you are in, it is important to remember that living conditions in other countries will be different from those in the U.S. The point of living abroad is to immerse oneself in the lifestyle of another culture. Living as the citizens of that country do is the first step in achieving this. So, be open to differences in living accommodations, and remember that it is all part of the experience of being abroad.

Living with a host- family

If you are living with a family, learn to respect their rules. They are opening their home to you. Respect this commitment and generosity by taking the time to get to know them and to follow the rules they give you. Living with a foreign family can be an incredible experience if you open yourself up to getting to know them and understanding their customs. Ask them about what you can and cannot do. Telephones for instance may be available, but limited. You may have to pay a deposit up front. Mealtimes are often set. If you plan on being out, let them know. If you have special dietary needs be sure to notify the program and include any special needs on your housing applications. It is customary to bring gifts to your hosts, especially treats for the children. If any problems with your host family

arise, talk to an on-site coordinator or contact OEA immediately. It is always better to talk to someone about a potential problem sooner rather than later in order to reach a resolution. It is important to make the most out of this opportunity; communicating and working on the relationship is the only way to make it work for everyone.

Living with other students

Many of you will have the opportunity to live with other students. Whether they be citizens of the host country, other international students, or other FIU students, this experience comes along only once in a lifetime. As with any living situation in the U.S., you may run into clashes and differences. Be sure to handle these times with respect and maturity. Living with other students gives you an insight into the city, culture, and sense of humor of the people that is nearly impossible to tap into otherwise. Sometimes you can get the names and numbers of roommates before you leave for your program; you may want to think about contacting them and talking beforehand.

Living with an American group of students

Most likely, if you are going on a summer program or a program where your professors are all American, you will be housed with other US program participants. You will probably get to know each other very quickly and share one of the most amazing times of your life together.

Although exploring and experimenting in your new setting with your peers is exciting and enriching, be sure to take time to get into the culture you are visiting. If your goal is to learn a language, make an effort to use the language with other young people in your city or in classes. You will probably regret spending all your time abroad with Americans, so make an attempt at meeting new people and really giving your new surroundings a chance.

A good way to make your accommodations feel more like home is by getting to know the area in which you live. Take the time to meet local shop owners or neighbors. Take a long walk around your area. (You'll be surprised at all of the interesting things you'll find.) Locate a grocery store where you can buy food for lunch. Find a spot near your home where you can go to think or write in your journal. Find a cafe that can be your local hangout. By simply getting to know the area you'll begin to feel like it is home. The key is to always seek out new experiences.

vii. Participating in a Faculty-led Study Abroad Program

Participating in study abroad programs differs substantially from other circumstance that you may be accustomed to. You will be spending a great deal of time with other participants as well as living with them and spending a lot of time with your faculty director. It can be a very intense situation and lead to tension and disagreements. Thus, the importance of the underlying issue of respect for others cannot be overstated, and is an overriding policy of FIU Study Abroad Programs.

Host culture

Although you may not agree with how things are done in your host country, you must strive to respect that it may simply be different than what you are accustomed to, and accept it without judgment. Expressing such judgment through public ethnocentric remarks or other inappropriate actions is not acceptable.

Accommodations

Whether or not you are in agreement, the customs of your hosts should always be respected. Inappropriate activities that offend your hosts are not acceptable. Also, for both safety and cultural reasons, always inform your faculty director as to your whereabouts; especially when you will be traveling.

Program director & other faculty

Participants must treat the program director and other faculty with respect at all times. This includes the following: a) Participant recommendations, questions, clarifications, or complaints are always welcomed, but must be brought directly to the person in charge by the affected individual/s; b) Flagrant neglect, tardiness, or disruption of classes or other program activities will not be tolerated; c) Participants must accept and implement the final decision of the person immediately responsible (director or other faculty) at any given time whether or not they are in agreement with the decision; d) Although every reasonable effort will be made by the director or other faculty to be available for consultation and to attend to participant needs, students will respect limitations of availability which may require attention to other program business or personal matters at any given time; and e) For safety reasons, always inform your faculty director or other designated faculty member (whichever is appropriate), when you leave for personal travel. At a minimum, this must consist of leaving a message of where you are going, and, if possible, how you may be contacted in the case of an emergency.

Other group members

At times, participants may not agree with how other participants in the program behave. Depending on the severity of the action (and its legality, or whether program policies prohibit it) there are acceptable manners of addressing these situations. Minor issues may not warrant your attention (e.g., individual personality differences), whereas more serious issues might. Should this happen, you may either respectfully communicate your concerns directly to the relevant individual (if appropriate), or to the director or other appropriate faculty. At no time are the following behaviors acceptable in the program: a) Yelling at, putting down, making fun of, hitting, or any other physical conflict with another group member; b) Gossiping about third-party group members and/or intentionally spreading rumors or false information; or c) Passing judgment about the acceptability of the behavior of other group members. Such concerns should be brought to the director's attention.

viii. Miscellaneous Additional Issues

There are various hints that we have learned after years of sending students abroad. We hope they can assist you in your adventures.

Disability Issues

Students with disabilities (physical or learning), should be aware that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) that provides reasonable accommodations here in the U.S., does not extend beyond our borders. While many of our partner institutions do have student services units that may address disability issues, this may not be true in every case. Please be aware that even if we notify your host institution of your needs, they may not be able to provide the same level of accommodations you are used to here in the U.S. It is a good idea for you to speak with your host institution coordinator, as well as your faculty members, to let them know of any special needs you may have and see if those can be accommodated.

Mobility International is a U.S. based organization that provides resource materials related especially to students with physical disabilities. For more information, please visit their web site at www.miusa.org

LGBTQ Issues

It is very important that students be aware that cultures can vary greatly with regard to how sexual identity and sexual orientation are defined, understood, and accepted. Before you leave the U.S., it is a good idea to do some research about any culture-specific norms of friendship and dating (between people of any sexual orientation) that may exist in your host country. As with all types of communication in an unfamiliar environment, it is important to pay attention to social cues to understand how certain behavioral signs are understood. What means one thing in the U.S. may mean something completely different in another culture. The consequences of a misunderstanding can be serious for both men and women. All students should be aware of legal issues related to sexuality in their host country.

For more information and helpful resources, please visit the web site of the “Rainbow SIG” of NAFSA: Association of International Educators at www.indiana.edu/%7Eoverseas/lesbigay/student.htm.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is a global issue. It can happen at any time and at any place, in our culture and abroad, at our school and other institutions. How it is dealt with varies from culture to culture. Be aware that sexual harassment laws are not the same in every country and that you will be expected to follow the rules of Florida International University with regard to sexual harassment.

Here are some actions you can take if you are the victim of sexual harassment:

- Keep a written record, noting incident(s) as they occur and any witnesses present. Keep any physical evidence (notes, letters, etc.) and anything else that may corroborate your story. When the harassment occurs, many people think they will never report it, but it is crucial to keep a record as you might decide later to come forward and complain.
- **If you experience problems abroad – on an exchange program, an FIU Sponsored program or a program through a non-FIU provider - please contact OEA immediately! We will arrange for communication in a manner that is best suited to the situation.**
- Tell somebody. Tell a trusted friend or administrator about the situation. When you inform someone in a position of authority of the problem, it is important to provide them with a factual and chronological account of what happened in as much detail as possible, a description of how you feel about what occurred, and a statement of what you want to happen next.
- If possible, speak up when the incident occurs and tell the perpetrator to stop the offensive behavior in a clear and firm manner.
- Report the complaint to the police or administration. As mentioned previously, laws vary around the world, but in most countries sexual harassment is a crime taken quite seriously.

Political Activity

From time to time, every country in the world undergoes political change. This can result in changes in leadership, variations in the economy, and even social unrest. Such political changes may occur from the national level to the local and even institutional levels. In some parts of the world universities themselves may become the foci of such political changes. Specifically, you may encounter political party campaigning, student strikes or union demonstrations, or issues campaigning. It is quite common for visits by U.S. politicians to result in anti-American demonstrations. Although it may be tempting to participate in such activities, you must stay away from all demonstrations and large gatherings. These activities can often lead to unpredictable violence, and if you become involved, there is no way to ensure your safety. Follow all instructions from your host university; and most importantly, stay in touch with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate as well as OEA.

Student Life

You will only be living abroad for a limited time. Make the most of your experience. Discover the region in which you live. Be sure to get to know the **city** in which you live. Many students hop trains every weekend and explore all the sites around them and leave without really knowing the town they lived in. Meet the locals. Go to cultural activities like operas, plays, fairs and concerts. Visit the historical sites and museums. Discover the art houses in your city. Hike around the area. Go to sporting events or even enroll in intramural activities. Look at the architecture. Eat at local restaurants. Investigate the nightlife. Find activities and festivals that are unique to your area and attend them. Take part in campus organizations and events. Especially take advantage of activities specifically organized for international exchange students on your host campus.

Even if you are on a limited budget, you can do most of these things. Use your ISIC card to look for student discounts, and be willing to put the time into finding these opportunities. Don't return home without feeling like you know the city you were living in. You will forever regret it if you do not make the most of your time.

Tipping

Tipping customs vary as do other cultural customs. Each country has a different code of conduct when it comes to tipping. For instance, in Austria you round up your bill at restaurants. Only small tips are expected, but there is not specific percentage. It is just expected that if your bill is the equivalent of \$9.30, you would leave \$10.00. Remember that some form of tipping is expected in most countries for services rendered. Ask your new friends or someone in your host institution's International Office for guidelines on this, or consult a guidebook for information.

Shopping Hints

Each country specializes in its own unique items. Switzerland is known for its knives and watches; France for its wine; Mexico for its pottery; Japan for its silk and kimonos; Morocco for its henna art and fabrics, etc. Find out about the specialties of your country, and the areas to which you will be traveling, before you leave. Make a list of what you plan to buy. It will be tempting, once you get there, to purchase everything you see. If you have a list it will help you stick to your budget and will make shopping easier. Remember that whatever you buy will have to survive the rest of your time abroad and, ultimately, the overseas flight home, so be careful about buying fragile, perishable or bulky items. Remember, one can get all kinds of neat trinkets and gifts in unexpected places. Shop at small stores, check out markets and craft fairs as well as the malls and store fronts in the center of town. Don't forget about customs (see Section III.i., "Preparing to Travel"), and remember that some items may be illegal to bring back, such as items made from endangered species, antiques, certain foods, drugs, etc. Just because you can buy something legally in one country does not mean you can transport it legally to another.

Packing for your Return

Packing for the return can be much easier and at the same time much more difficult than packing for your program abroad. It is easier because you do not have limitless possibilities of what you can bring. You may face a space crunch when you attempt to pack all of the treasures that you have collected while abroad.

If you are like other students traveling abroad, you will have gathered a large collection of souvenirs/gifts for friends and family, memories for yourself of different experiences and other things obtained during your travels. The problem is that these memories and gifts take up VALUABLE SPACE.

Here are some tips:

1. Any toiletries that you brought from home - give them away or throw them out. Don't bother to bring back the extra soap and cotton swabs with you!
2. Any clothes that you just may be ready to part with can stay abroad. Look into international equivalents of Goodwill and make donations.
3. Take a long, hard look at those "memories" that you are taking home with you and only take those things that are most important to you. Many of these things are not important and are better left overseas.

Customs

The U.S. Customs Agency regulates what enters the United States. Upon arriving in the U.S. you will have to pass through customs and have your baggage checked. Please follow the U.S. Customs laws carefully. You can face criminal charges if you attempt to bring illegal materials into the U.S.

During your flight you will be given a form to fill out where you declare all items that you purchased abroad and are bringing back into the country. Any traveler may bring in up to \$400 worth of goods tax-free. If the amount you are bringing in surpasses \$400, you are responsible for paying tax on it. An easy way to keep track of the amount you spend on your purchases abroad is to keep an envelope with your receipts of purchases in it. Write on each receipt a short description of what you purchase if the receipt is not in a language you understand. This will make it easy for you to accurately complete the customs declaration forms. You are also responsible for tax on any single item valued at over \$100. You can be charged between 5% and 35%, depending on the item. There are other regulations as well. You may not bring illegal materials into the United States such as narcotics, animals, animal skins, plants or produce. Please do not attempt to bring any of these things with you. There are also regulations on cigarettes and alcohol. If you are of legal age you may bring up to one quart of liquor into the country and up to 100 cigarettes. Be aware of customs regulations and respect them. Fraudulent claims can result in legal action against you by U.S. Customs.

V. Understanding Culture

Adjusting to a new culture is one of the most critical parts of the overseas experience. Each individual will have a different reaction to cultural adjustment, but there has been a documented process that most students experience. The following section explains that process. Reading and understanding these stages will ease your adjustment to a new culture.

Each of us has experienced the feeling of being a stranger in a new situation. For you it may have been going to summer camp; moving to a new city with your family; or during your first semester at college. Making the transition to a new environment (city, school, etc.), can be difficult on two levels.

The first level of adjustment relates to the transition into a new situation. Although it can be difficult at first, you will find that understanding the various components of your new experience will help you greatly. You will be spending a semester or summer session, or possibly a year, with a new group of people in a different culture. Even if you know some of the other participants, it will not be like it is at your home institution. You will be meeting new people and leaving your comfort zone. Keeping an open mind and being willing to get to know new people is the key to making this transition. This is the level that most of us experienced when we came to college.

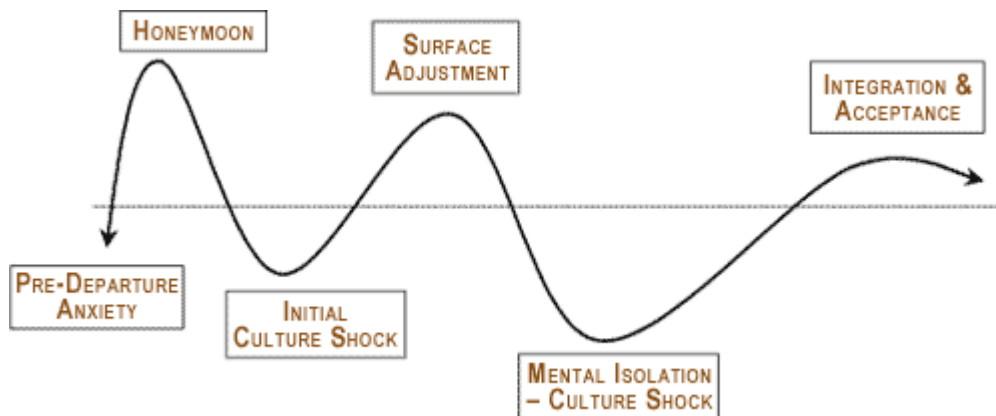
The second level of adjustment has to do with studying in a different culture; with a different home; and possibly in a different language than the one you are used to. Unless you have lived abroad before, you will not be able to truly understand the impact of this change until you get there. There are things that we each take for granted on a day to day basis: fast food; ice in drinks; ATM machines in every store and on every corner; convenience stores; air conditioning; elevators; the telephone - and this is just the tip of the iceberg! There are a million things that are specific to the U.S. and American culture that we take for granted each day. Going overseas can be a wake up call to this. Getting used to these differences will be a stress on your system if you are not ready for them, but it is part of what makes going abroad such an incredible learning experience.

Everyone goes through this - you must remember this - but it is crucial that you know what to expect before you begin to experience it. Even if you choose to ignore this section before you leave, keep it handy once you arrive overseas and read it once you begin going through your cultural adjustment. You WILL experience this cycle, so educate yourself beforehand and know what to expect.

Cultural Adjustment Cycle

The following information is adapted from *Bring Home the World* by Stephen H. Rhinesmith.

When you move from one culture to another you will experience culture shock. This is the condition that occurs when you experience anxiety after moving to a new culture. The intensity and length of this anxiety will depend on the individual and the situation that they are experiencing. To overcome this anxiety you must go through an adjustment cycle. Take a look at this table representation of the adjustment cycle:



1. Selection/Pre-departure Anxiety
2. Honeymoon
3. Initial Culture Shock
4. Surface Adjustment
5. Mental Isolation
6. Integration/Acceptance (Duration of Program)
7. Return Anxiety
8. Reentry Shock
9. Reintegration/Readjustment

1. *Selection/Pre-departure Anxiety*: After an applicant is accepted to their program, there is a feeling of excitement and anticipation as the experience draws closer. They begin to make preparations for the term abroad such as travel arrangements, passport applications, and purchasing items they will need. Expectations are high during this stage which continues until just before departure when some anxiety can return. INDICATORS: insomnia, less interest in current activities.
2. *Honeymoon*: Positive feelings of excitement return during the initial time abroad. Changes in routine are exciting and the new world is fascinating. Expectations for the experience are high. With lots of arrival introductions, the visitor is often overwhelmed with being the focus of attention and activity. S/he is shown a level of respect and concern which might be quite uncommon back home. INDICATORS: insomnia, stomach queasiness.
3. *Initial Culture Shock*: After the initial fascination and excitement subsides, the stress of overseas living begins to manifest itself physically. The constant differences wear on the students making them tired and anxious. They experience changes in their eating and sleeping habits, difficulties in dealing with others, language struggles, and mental fatigue. Everything seems new and the student longs for the comforts and familiarity of home. To help get through this stage it is helpful for a student to investigate the city and find places to which they feel some attachment. It is important that students find people with whom they feel comfortable during this stage. INDICATORS: tired, restless, irritable, crying, impatient, minor health problems.
4. *Surface Adjustment*: Students begin to adjust to the new environment. Things that seemed different and new begin to feel familiar. Students discover the area they are living in and start to feel like it is home. A big part of this stage is feeling a connection to the country and people. Language begins to get easier in this stage. INDICATORS: sense of accomplishment.
5. *Mental Isolation*: After the novelty wears off completely, students begin to feel the difficulties again. These become very frustrating, and a desire to be in control of the situation can lead students to isolate themselves. This can be a very lonely period. Some might feel that they have discovered the area and are no longer interested in it. Everyday struggles affect the student greatly and can become larger issues. INDICATORS: fatigue, colds, headaches, boredom, lack of motivation, hostility towards local people and customs, crying, lack of self-confidence.
6. *Integration and Acceptance*: Students get tired of these negative feelings and begin to explore the country and culture on a deeper level. They start to feel more at ease with their surroundings. Differences become understandable and they enjoy finding ways to work with them. Students feel at home. INDICATORS: normal health
7. *Return Anxiety*: For many students, it seems that just as they adjust to their host culture, their return home sneaks up on them. They are faced with the reality of leaving the friends and home that they have made. The student starts to process the experience and realize the changes and growth that they have experienced. The student is split between some interest in returning home and yet wanting to stay abroad. They may feel guilty about the desire to remain abroad and not return to friends and family. This is a time of confusion and considerable pain due to the breaking of close bonds with no promise of renewal in the future.
8. *Reentry Shock*: There will be some difficult times when the student first returns home. They will feel loss at the friends and experiences that they have left behind. They will feel some isolation because their friends and family cannot understand their experiences or the way they have changed. There

was an adventure every day while they were abroad and home seems boring in comparison.
INDICATORS: depression.

9. *Reintegration*: Eventually the student begins to integrate their overseas experiences into their home life and they realize the impact of the experience and yet the importance of being home.

Dealing with Culture Shock (Stages 1 – 6)

This is just an introduction to what you may go through. Remember that everyone experiences this cycle differently, but even the most experienced travelers go through this when living, working or studying in a new place. Be open to new experiences and the feelings that go with them. **Most importantly, talk about what you are going through with other participants or your program advisor.** Since everyone goes through this, it is helpful to share your feelings so you and the other participants can learn to cope with them. Here are some useful hints from *How to Adapt to a New Country* (Adapted from work by Kay Clifford, University of Michigan, International Center, 1991):

1. Explore: Get a sense of the physical environment and norms of behavior.
2. Be slow to judge: If you do not understand a behavior, ask a local resident about it and remember that American culture is only one of hundreds of different cultures. The way Americans do things is not the only way – or the best way - to do things.
3. Go to school and community events: These will allow you to observe the culture and more importantly, meet people.
4. Read local publications: Reading the local newspaper is one of the best ways to get to know a culture.

Other books that may be helpful to read:

Survival Kit for Overseas Living, L. Robert Kohls, 1984

Culture Shock: Psychological Reactions to Unfamiliar Environments, Adrian Furnham

Developing Intercultural Awareness, L. Robert Kohls

Design for Cross-Cultural Learning, Mildred Sikkema & Agnes Niyekawa

Dealing with Return Anxiety (Stage 7)

As you near the end of your program abroad, you may become anxious about returning home. How will things have changed while you were away? Will people notice how much **you** have changed while you were away? Here are a few things you can do to ease the transition back home:

- Keep a diary, journal or scrapbook. You will feel like these experiences are so incredible that you will never forget them, but you will. Put them down on paper while they are fresh in your mind.
- Take a look at the Miami Herald (www.herald.com), the Sun Sentinel (www.sun-sentinel.com), the local news station (www.nbc6.net) and the Beacon (www.beaconnewspaper.com) online. This will keep you “in the loop” on local activities and events before you get home.
- Read the International Herald Tribune. The Tribune is an American paper that combines the Washington Post and the New York Times and is circulated abroad. By reading it, you will keep up with what is going on at home. It is fascinating to read the Tribune and then read one of the foreign papers and compare the content.
- Write a lot of letters/e-mails home so people at home will be kept up on your experiences as they happen. It will help you when you return because they will have an idea of what has been going on in

your life while you were abroad. It will also help your friends and family because they will feel like they were part of your experience. Sending postcards is also nice because you can look at them when you get home and relive the experiences you had.

Re-entry into Your Home Culture (Stage 8)

Re-entry is the stage of travel when you return home. Believe it or not, this may be a more difficult time than when you left home to study abroad. The greater the impact your experience abroad has had on you, the tougher the time you will have returning home. You will most likely experience some of the same feelings you had during your initial time abroad, often to an even greater degree, so even though you already “know” your home culture, it may be helpful to re-read that section of this guide to refresh your memory and to remind yourself that you survived that period and you will survive this one also.

Typical Problems Students Face When They Return Home

The return to your home culture will bring some very strong feelings with it. There will be feelings of alienation. Even though you are returning home, home is not the same as when you left it. People have changed, things have happened, people you love have memories that do not include you. To add to this, you are not the same. You have changed even more dramatically than home has. You will want to share your experiences with friends and family, but stories and pictures will not do them justice. It takes a while to realize that no one will truly be able to share your experience. The feelings of alienation may manifest themselves in a number of ways:

- Your old friends and college campus may seem “unexciting” in comparison with your overseas experience. This may frustrate and disappoint you.
- You may feel ordinary again. You were special while you were abroad and now you’re just one of the gang again.
- You may feel that friends and family are uninterested in hearing your stories. You will want to share everything with them but they may seem bored.
- You may long to return to the happier time abroad and feel frustrated at having to be at your home institution again. This may disrupt your studies or ability to function well at college.

There is a great amount of anxiety that goes along with re-entry, both positive and negative. You will be comforted by a great deal of things, like old friends, familiar places, and your favorite American things you could not have overseas (like ice in your drinks). Studying abroad is about being independent and learning to adapt to new and different experiences. Just as you had to adapt to the foreign culture when you first arrived, you now must adapt to the “foreign” culture of home. Many of us in International Studies have been through this period and are available to talk about it with you, if you would like.

[Adapted from the University of Florida Pre-Departure Guide]

[Culture shock information adapted from Johnson & Wales International Center website:

<http://www.jwu.edu/international/studyabroad/prepare/adjust.htm>]

Counseling

You are encouraged to utilize the resources of the FIU Counseling Center or other mental health providers if you are having serious trouble readjusting. The Counseling Center offers group, individual, and couples counseling and all services are free to FIU students. Look into it! It can only help.

Final Thoughts...

You are about to embark on the journey of a lifetime. We hope that the information in this guide is helpful to you as you prepare, and throughout your semester abroad. If you have any questions or need assistance from OEA while you are abroad, you can always reach us at 305-348-1913 or via email at educationabroad@fiu.edu .

Safe travels & BON VOYAGE!!