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# WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY STUDY ABROAD HANDBOOK

STUDY ABROAD SELF-ORIENTATION CHECKLIST

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(incl. Daily Life Abroad, Local Students & Academics, and Appropriate Dress)

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LIST OF STUDENTS ABROAD: FALL 2008 AND YEAR 2008-2009

## Checklist for Self-Orientation: Study Abroad

Your attitude and level of preparedness, more than *anything* else, determine the quality of your study-abroad experience. We suggest that you work through this list to be sure that you're ready to make the most of it!

- **FIRST THINGS FIRST**

Have I thought about, and written down, my goals in embarking on this experience? Have I listed my expectations, both the ones I've said out loud and the hidden ones? Have I thought through the attitudes, both academic and cultural, that I'm bringing with me? Don't rush through this.

- **TRAVEL AND ARRIVAL**

**PASSPORT** Is my passport valid for the extent of my stay abroad plus three months? Have I left a photocopy of it (and of my visa) at home, made a second copy to give my program director, and kept a third for myself, to keep in a *separate place* from where I'll be carrying the passport? Do I know how to get a new one if it's lost or stolen?

**VISA** Have I checked out the visa situation for any countries I'll be visiting? And followed up?

**LUGGAGE** Do I know how much luggage I'm capable of carrying *myself*, and what weight/size limits the airline(s) allow? Have I packed a change of clothes, toothbrush, and ALL my medications (in original bottles with my name on them, and an original of my prescription) in my carry-on bag?

**ARRIVAL** Have I checked arrival details for trains and buses? Do I know how I'm getting to my housing? Do I have an emergency plan if something goes wrong? Do I have all the phone numbers I might need right there with my ticket and passport?

**MONEY** Have I checked the rate of exchange, whether I'll be able to get local currency upon arrival, and what forms of payment are acceptable there?

**ID, MEMBERSHIPS, DISCOUNTS** Have I gotten whatever ID cards, rail passes, hostel cards, and other documents I need to get before leaving the US? Do I have adequate student identification?

- **SITE ISSUES**

**WEATHER** Am I clear on what weather to expect, and have I packed the right clothes (but not too many)?

**HOUSING** Do I need linens? What's the laundry situation? If I'm living with a family, have I brought small gifts? Do I have the (family's names,) address and phone number with my ticket and passport?

**LOCAL TRAVEL** Have I calculated the cost of local transport? Have I checked out whether I need an international driver's license if I intend to rent/buy a car?

**MONEY** Do I know how I'll get money and how long it will take to get it? Have I researched the banking situation? Do I have the numerical PIN code for my ATM card? Do I know how to replace my travelers' cheques if they are stolen? Have I divided up my cash so that it's in different places on my person? Have I contacted my bank and credit card company to let them know I'll be living in my host country?

**TELEPHONE** Do I have a calling card or an international cell phone? Have I thought about how else to make phone calls if necessary? Do I have the access codes? Do I know how the phone system works there?

**APPLIANCES** Do I know the voltage of the country/ies I'll be in? Do I have adapters? Do I know what will/won't work? Can I live with wet hair? What about plug size? How do they charge for utilities, if I'll be paying my bill or if it will be a concern for my host family?

- **GENERAL ISSUES**

**INFORMATION** Do I have a good guidebook? Have I gotten lists of things to read (especially fiction and contemporary history) that will help me prepare? Have I been reading local newspapers online?

**GENERAL KNOWLEDGE** Have I read up on the political situation so that I don't come across as an idiot or get into a fight? Do I know about current local and national issues? What's the national leader's name?

**HEALTH** Do I have my insurance information (including policy number) safe with my passport, and do I know what it covers? Do I know exactly what I would do if I got sick or had an accident? Do I know what illnesses/conditions are prevalent in the host country? Do I know my weight in kg and my height in cm?

**SEX** Have I brought condoms? Am I aware of the local situation in regard to STDs and HIV/AIDS? Do I know about sexual norms and expectations in my host country?

**PRODUCTS** Do I have my contact lens supplies and medications in sufficient supply for the whole time away? Will I be able to get tampons, condoms, vitamins, and other health-related products in the host country?

**BUDGET** Do I know and understand my budget? Am I ready and able to stick to it? Have I set aside funds for an emergency?

**CONTACTS** Do I have the addresses, telephone numbers, and emails of everyone in the known universe (including academic advisors and even siblings) I might want to contact? Do my parents and friends know how to reach me?

**LAWS** Do I have a clear idea of what's legal and illegal in the host country regarding alcohol, drugs, premarital sex, and other potentially relevant topics?

- **SCHOOL ISSUES**

**FINANCIAL AID** Am I all squared away with Financial Aid? What about forms for next year? Have I made arrangements for what to do about forms that arrive after I've left?

**CLASSES** Do I know when classes start, where and to whom to report, and how to register?

**COURSE CHANGES** Do I know what to do if I end up with courses other than the ones for which I have gotten pre-approval? Especially courses related to my major?

**EVALUATION** Do I know how I'll be evaluated, and what I need to bring back (syllabi, papers, finals, etc.)?

**WESLEYAN** Have I checked with OIS about my NRS (non-resident study) status and transfer of credits?

**BOOKS & SUCH** Do I know what the library situation will be in the host country, and whether I should take or buy books, live on photocopies, or find resources in the library there? What's the computer situation? Have I left at home a back-up copy of everything on my computer in case it is lost, stolen, or corrupted?

**DICTIONARY** Do I have a good pocket dictionary, bilingual or otherwise?

**VACATIONS** Do I know when the school/program vacations will be, and have I made plans for what I'm going to do and how I'll pay for it?

**THESES & ISPs** Have I made arrangements for a thesis advisor? Am I sure about whether/how independent study/research, internship, or service learning will be evaluated or given credit?

**COURSES** Have I thought through the courses I'll need to take when I get home? Do I understand what to do about registration and such when I get back? Have I made sure my advisor knows what I'm doing?

## **SAFETY PRECAUTIONS**

1. Do not leave your bags or belongings unattended at any time. Security staff in airports and train stations are instructed to remove or destroy unattended luggage. Do not agree to carry or look after any packages or suitcases for anyone. Make sure no one but you puts anything in your luggage.
2. Don't keep all your documents and money in any one place. It's best to carry your travel documents and some money on your person in a place inaccessible to others – and keep it with you when you go to the bathroom on the plane. Keep a photocopy of your passport and visa in a separate place from the originals.
3. If you find yourself in uncomfortable surroundings, try to look as if you know what you're doing, and stay in well-populated, well-lit areas. Try not to draw unnecessary attention to yourself. Always show respect for the culture and laws of other countries.
4. Use caution when traveling alone. Women especially should not walk alone at night. Be responsible for your safety and well-being. Learn from locals what behavior might put you at risk or call attention to you.
5. Keep the on-site program director(s) informed of your whereabouts and any health problems. When you travel, be sure that the program director knows where you are and how to reach you.
6. Have cash or credit card on hand for emergencies like illness or an unexpected need to get home via taxi.
7. Be alert to your surroundings and the people with whom you have contact. Be wary of people who seem overly friendly or interested in you. Be cautious with new acquaintances – don't give out your address or phone number, and always meet in public places. Be discreet in giving out information about other students or group events. Report unusual activity near your classes or home to the program director.
8. Don't hitchhike, even if the locals do, and even if it means not traveling.

### **In times of political conflict involving the United States, these additional precautions are advisable:**

1. Stay apprised of the current political situation by listening daily to television or radio news; this is also a good way to learn more about your host country. In the event of emergency, advisories may be made to the general public through the media. In this situation, stay in contact with the on-site program staff, who then can contact authorities locally and at home, as well as parents and Wesleyan.
2. The on-site program director should register all participants with the nearest US Embassy or Consulate, and you should make sure that you are so registered, even if you are not a US citizen.
3. In large cities or popular tourist destinations, spend as little time as possible in potential targets for terrorist activities, especially places frequented by Americans: bars, discos, fast-food restaurants, and stores associated with the US, branches of US banks, American Express, and US consulates and embassies.
4. Keep away from areas known to have concentrations of residents aligned with interests unfriendly to the US and its allies. Always consult with the program director or other local staff before making travel plans.
5. Be inconspicuous in dress and demeanor. Avoid American logos and name brands on clothing and belongings. Avoid large or noisy groups. Do not flash money or bring out documents (especially your passport) in public places. Keep small bills in your pockets to pay for purchases.
6. Keep away from political demonstrations, particularly those directed toward the US. If you see a situation developing, resist the temptation to satisfy your curiosity or join the crowd. Walk away. Do not agree to newspaper or other media interviews regarding political conflicts.
7. Make a personal communication plan with your family and decide on methods of contact should an emergency arise. Ask your on-site program director about program emergency/contingency plans.

## Academic Adjustment Abroad

### **Wesleyan students most likely:**

- Have expectations about what makes a good class based on previous academic experiences in the United States
- Work best when the instructor gives them clear, precise guidelines on assignments and expectations, and encourages them to do their best
- Assume that the instructor will define the main ideas for the class, connect the outside-of-class readings to those ideas, and provide detailed syllabi and visual aids like PowerPoint presentations or overhead projections
- Expect the instructor to welcome and value student questions and opinions, even when they challenge what the instructor is saying
- Assume grading criteria to be spelled out clearly so that students who apply themselves and follow those criteria will be assured a good grade
- Expect to be tested and evaluated on a regular basis so that they can monitor their performance on a continual basis

### **Local university students in your host country most likely:**

- Expect the instructor to stand at the front of the classroom and give a lecture, considering it their job as students to connect the lecture to the readings themselves
- EITHER assume that they will have to figure out for themselves what the instructor expects, and that it is best to take copious notes, read every assignment, and memorize everything OR skip class and ignore readings until the last two weeks of class (this is particularly the case in countries where grades have no relevance in the job search process, so don't get sucked in)
- Regard the instructor as the authority, and would never consider challenging the instructor's point of view
- Consider themselves (and know their professor consider them) unqualified, at the undergraduate level, to know enough in order to form a valid opinion on the subject matter of the course
- Understand that it is their job to keep themselves motivated and on task. If they are good students, they will know what needs to be done and do it independently
- Know there will be one, maybe two, exams that will cover everything, and that they probably won't have a real idea of how well they did until grades are final
- Would never fault the instructor if the entire student body fails the course

### **What to do to adjust:**

- Treat learning in another academic culture like learning another language. Ask yourself, "What are the rules? How do I translate what I am experiencing into something I can understand?"
- Be more independent in your learning. If the lecture doesn't match the readings, ask yourself why. Make a connection, think about it on your own, or talk about it with your peers or resident director. If you need more input to understand the material, take the initiative: go to the library.
- Do not expect a syllabus – or, at least, not the kind of step-by-step syllabus you receive from instructors at Wesleyan. You may get one, or you may receive a list of 40 or 100 books that are

somehow relevant to the general discipline of the course you're taking, in which case it's up to you to figure out which, and how many, to read, and how to locate them.

- Ask for what you need from your instructors. They may know that they're teaching across a cultural divide. If you need clarification or extra help, ask.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions; just be diplomatic and monitor yourself. Because Socratic teaching is not the norm abroad, instructors will not automatically steer the class back to a point or thread. They will follow your questions graciously wherever they lead and not understand why you get upset when the class doesn't stay on point.
- Be prepared to memorize a lot more than you're used to doing – not a bad skill to pick up. Yes, the concept is critical, but even in the US you sometimes have to be able to rattle off the facts!
- Try, for just this semester or year, to focus more on learning than on your GPA. This is not to trivialize the importance of your grades to your future, but rather to encourage you to trust yourself, your hard work, and your intellect. If you accept that you won't be able to keep a running tally of your grade throughout the term, and instead focus on the subject matter and the experience, you probably will be happier and do better in the long run. Students who work hard, do the readings and homework, and come to class consistently nearly always do well.
- Remember that your program staff is available to help you with the transition and 'translation' process. They are both your support and your advocates, but can't help if you don't let them know what's going on.

#### **Study skills abroad:**

- Begin studying the assigned readings and materials prior to class. The material will be fresh in your mind, which will keep you from falling behind. If you don't study immediately, subsequent lectures will make little sense, and you'll fall further behind.
- Read widely in the field, beyond what is assigned, especially given the likelihood that there will be fewer readings assigned than at Wesleyan.
- Reading is not the same as studying. Studying involves thoughtful, careful, contemplative reading and analysis of the material.
- Study and work through both the instructor's lectures and the texts yourself. Make notes while doing so; connect the main ideas with the relevant facts. This will make it much easier to study for exams, and is particularly useful when you're studying in a language in which you are not fluent.
- Begin your homework immediately after it is assigned. The material will be fresh in your mind and you will retain it better. This is important because there are fewer exams, and you will need to remember material for longer periods of time.
- Review things on the weekend. Even a brief re-reading of notes will make it that much easier when exam time comes.
- Treat homework like a quiz. Relying on notes, learning aids, or friends has its benefits, but to really know your knowledge baseline, do at least 50% of homework assignments on your own.
- Don't be fooled into focusing only on what was discussed in class, or even what you reviewed there. Instructors generally expect you to have learned everything. Going over material is not the same as learning in a way that makes that knowledge usable and applicable.

## *Fitting In Without Going Completely Native*

Make every effort to immerse yourself in your new culture. Become more than a guest. You will be a resident...so act like one. Adapt to their way of life; don't try to change it. (That doesn't mean you need to compromise your own moral standards, but you might want to think about how something like, say, vegetarianism will appear to people for whom meat is a sign of health, wealth, or welcome.)

Be especially careful to be polite and to observe signs and regulations in public places.

Clothing that immediately identifies you as a US college student, like baseball caps worn backward, may hamper your efforts to blend in with new surroundings and peers. Further, criminals often identify tourists and international students by their appearance. Many returnees recommend dressing more formally. If locals don't wear white athletic shoes or shorts except for sports, don't wear them for daily walking around!

Whenever possible, travel with another person rather than alone. For each excursion, leave your program director the names of travelers, travel dates, names and phone numbers of where you'll be staying, and your cell phone number if you have one.

If you are staying with a host family, bring gifts from the US – inexpensive, lightweight, and representative of US culture, Wesleyan, or your home town. Consider calendars or postcard books with pictures of your home town, local treats (e.g., maple syrup and a pancake recipe), T-shirts from your favorite team, or jazz tapes or CDs (consider whether they'll have the technology to play these). If you'll be staying with a family that has children, consider baseballs, pickup sticks, Frisbees, children's books, or an empty scrapbook to be filled by you and the family together,

Don't be insulted or make a judgment until you have had time to think the situation over and discuss it with someone, preferably someone local.

Keep a journal or a blog while you are abroad. Journals provide a wonderful opportunity to record all of your adventures overseas and reflect upon them as you learn to interpret local actions and reactions. This often is one of the most valuable pieces of memorabilia to participants after they return to the United States. If you'll be blogging, be sure to print it upon returning home, as blogs are not forever.

Expect the unexpected. (So you get off the plane and your luggage isn't there! Have a few necessities in your carry-on bag, and try to roll with the punches.)

Flexibility, a sense of humor, patience, and counting to ten before you speak are all keys to a successful international experience!

Finally, think of yourself as representing Wesleyan and the United States. You may have not asked for that role, but people will see you as a spokesperson for both your home country and your institution, and will respond accordingly. **Take it seriously and act responsibly.**

## Daily Life Abroad

*Campus life* is an American concept, with few exceptions. Elsewhere, university buildings are often in the heart of a city and may be scattered over a considerable area, separated by apartment buildings, restaurants, and shops. You may live in one part of the city, attend classes in another part, work in the library somewhere else, and eat your meals in a student restaurant in yet another area. You will participate in daily local life, which may include mass transportation, pollution, strikes, impersonal attitudes, public lectures, different gender issues, etc. Generally, expect from your university or program abroad less planned or "pre-packaged" student life, fewer student clubs, fewer social affairs, and fewer organized sports than in the US. An exception to the above rule would be universities in smaller cities. On the other hand, study in a larger city offers greater varieties of independent cultural and social activities.

Most study abroad programs don't have a full array of student service offices, but all have a *program director* or on-site administrator. This is your academic advisor, residence director, counselor, professor, medical advisor, and tour guide all in one, and will be an invaluable resource throughout your program. Get to know him or her.

In many societies, especially in western Europe, it's not as easy to make *friends* as in the US. The concept of "friend" may be quite distinct from the concept of "acquaintance." It takes a long time to make a friend in some countries, but once a friendship is formed, it may well last a lifetime. If you are living with a family, your relationship may start off as that between boarder and landlord/lady. It will be up to both sides to create something more than this formal initial relationship. It may take time and conscious effort to adjust to the customs and habits of the family and to develop a warm relationship. Be patient: it usually does happen, but it takes time, flexibility, and effort.

### Local Students and Academics

Study abroad programs are in over 100 countries, so it's impossible to characterize the local students you might encounter. In some countries, students will have gone through a more specialized system of education than you, and may be somewhat older and better prepared to meet the academic demands of their university education. Most likely they will have begun studying their major subject earlier than their American counterparts, so expect them to have more extensive knowledge of the subject (albeit less breadth of knowledge in other fields). They may seem serious, formal, and reserved, even among their peers. You might sit next to a local student in class for a year without ever striking up a conversation. In other locations, local students may be much like Americans.

Students and others in your host country are likely to be politically knowledgeable; work on improving your own knowledge of history and politics of the United States and of your host country before you go. We recommend reading *The Economist*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Asian Wall Street Journal*, or *The International Herald Tribune*, and listening to the BBC and NPR. Many newspapers and news magazines – both American and from the host country – have Internet sites, and we strongly encourage you to read up on local and national host-country news. You can access them through the OIS web site at <http://www.wesleyan.edu/ois/otherresources/newspapers.htt>.

## HEALTH WATCH

Health care abroad can be difficult or inaccessible. With that in mind, **visit your doctor** before you go. Take advantage of your friendly English-speaking doctor while you are still here: ask every (relevant) question you can think of, and write down the answers! Planning ahead pays off. As you prepare to study abroad, be sure to complete the following health-related tasks:

1. Talk to your doctor about prescriptions you may need while away and about an easy way to contact him/her in case of questions or emergency (email, phone, fax, parents, mail).
2. **Plan to bring with you the *full supply* of each medication you take, whether for allergies, asthma, birth control, depression, or other medical conditions. This may entail writing your HMO or insurance company with a copy of your program acceptance letter, listing the dates of your stay abroad. Travel with an original prescription for each medication you take. All pills should be in their original containers with your name on them. Have this (with documentation) in your carry-on luggage for customs inspection. Do not pack the medications in your checked luggage.**
3. Find out exact details about your health insurance coverage in the host country. Many insurance companies provide information cards or booklets with emergency information, but most don't cover more than emergencies abroad, and that is not enough.
4. Go over the "health" and "warning" sections of your travel guide and your program packet together. Familiarize yourself with relevant health-related vocabulary in the host country language (even if it's English, they may use different words than in the US for certain key items or concepts).
5. If you take medication, know the generic name of the drug(s) in English and, if possible, in the language of the country where you will be studying.
6. Bring a downscaled version of your medicine cabinet in addition to your first-aid kit, because these items may be hard to find and/or expensive abroad. Stock up on non-prescription drugs you're likely to use, such as antacids, pain relief, anti-diuretics, anti-bacterial cream, condoms, contact lens solution, etc.
7. In addition to the physical exam required by your program, think about getting tested for HIV and other sexually-transmitted infections, because access to these tests and related counseling may be difficult, impossible, or expensive there.
8. **NOTE FOR WOMEN:** be prepared to fight off urinary tract infections and yeast infections on your own while away. Talk to your doctor about getting medication or filling prescriptions before you go (e.g., Diflucan or Monistat).

## **HEALTH CHECK FOR STUDY, WORK, AND TRAVEL ABROAD**

Before you study abroad, take a close look at the many factors that contribute to your physical and emotional well-being. Study abroad almost certainly will affect your health because so much of health has to do with lifestyle and environment. Conversely, the state of your health will have a significant impact on the success and “enjoyability” of your time abroad. With proper planning, study abroad can be a happy, health-promoting experience.

### **Assess your health and your health-related practices**

Going abroad is not a magic cure for issues at home. Both physical and emotional health issues will follow you wherever you go. In particular, *if you have trouble controlling your use of alcohol and/or other drugs, or if you have an emotional health concern or eating disorder, you should address it honestly before studying abroad.* Contrary to many people’s expectations, travel does not minimize these problems; in fact, it often exacerbates them to a crisis stage when you are away from home and support systems.

### **Identify your health needs**

Be clear about your health needs when applying for a program and when making housing arrangements. Describe allergies, disabilities, psychological treatment, and dietary and medical needs so appropriate arrangements can be made. Resources for people with disabilities vary widely by country and region. If you have a disability or special need, identify it and understand ahead of time just what accommodations can and will be made.

### **Check health advisories**

Find out about immunization requirements and recommendations for your host country, and check out any regional health or medical advisories. In particular, if you have special health needs, check on any particular conditions that may apply to your travel abroad.

### **Remember to ask questions such as:**

- What illnesses, if any, are specific or endemic to the region? What medications should I take to prevent them? Are these readily available in the host country?
- What precautions are recommended for sexual or other health practices?
- What kind of insurance do I need, and how much coverage? How does it work?
- What are the customs, beliefs, and laws in the host country concerning sexual behavior and the use of alcohol and drugs?
- What is the quality of water in the host country?
- What are the laws governing import of medications, medical supplies, and contraceptives?

This information can be gleaned from several sources, including:

- Family physician, campus health service, or local Public Health Department
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (800/311-3435 or [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov))
- World Health Organization international travel & health page ([www.who.int/ith/en](http://www.who.int/ith/en))
- **Study abroad participants with disabilities** can get more information from Mobility International ([www.miusa.org](http://www.miusa.org) or 503/343-1284)

**Find out from returned students or the program director:**

How long will the flight be, and how long can you expect to experience jet lag?

What are the local eating patterns? Are there dietary recommendations?

How does the culture differ from your own, and how can you adjust effectively to minimize homesickness?

**See your health practitioners**

Visits to your family doctor, gynecologist, and dentist will help ensure that you are in good health before you leave, and might prevent emergencies abroad. Get any needed immunizations and hepatitis protection. Update your health records, including eyeglass/contact lens prescriptions and regular medications. If you are on prescription medication, take with you the amount you will need for your *entire* stay (less only if you will return to the US mid-program, as some year-abroad students do). If you self-inject prescribed medication, you may need to carry needles and syringes with you. You'll need a physician's prescription – ideally in English and the host-country language – for medication and medical supplies to pass through foreign customs stations.

Take copies of all medical records, prescriptions (and a second copy in generic form, if possible), and all other pertinent information. Pack these in your carry-on bag. If you expect to need regular medical care abroad, bring a letter of introduction from your home physician, providing details of your medical condition, history, care, and specific needs.

**Pack a medical kit**

Don't underestimate the importance of keeping some basic medical supplies close at hand. You should always travel with a medical kit that includes the following items:

- |                                 |                           |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| *Band-Aids                      | *Rubbing alcohol          |
| *Sunscreen and sunburn ointment | *Anti-diarrhea medication |
| *Gauze and adhesive tape        | *Antibacterial ointment   |
| *Pain reliever                  |                           |

Depending on the region, you may also wish to include water purification tablets, antihistamines, salt tablets, skin moisturizers, eye drops, and insect repellent.

Be sure to pack your regular medications, contraceptives if you might need them, feminine hygiene products if you're traveling where they are not available, and any other routine health and medical products you may need. Check the expiration date of all medications before you leave. Where your health is concerned, better safe than sorry!

**Verify medical insurance coverage**

Check your own policy to see what coverage it provides for medical services abroad. In most cases, you have to pay the local provider and then seek reimbursement from the plan. Be sure you have coverage for medical evacuation, in case you need to be flown back to the US for medical treatment, and for repatriation of remains; the ISIC Card (see next page) will cover you for both. Check to be sure you will have coverage for continuing treatment of any newly-acquired medical conditions once you return home.

The **International Student Identification Card (ISIC)**, available at the OIS, is a useful supplement to a comprehensive insurance policy. Card holders have basic insurance coverage, including emergency medical evacuation and repatriation, and a 24-hour toll-free Help Line staffed by multilingual representatives who can advise travelers on required immunizations for travel abroad, as well as help in case of medical, financial, or legal emergencies abroad. **Wesleyan's Student Health Insurance Plan** can provide coverage overseas if your family policy offers no coverage or only emergency coverage.

### ***WHEN YOU ARRIVE***

Successful planning for a healthy trip abroad does not end once you board the plane. Because of the differences between cultures, many adjustments, concerns, and questions related to your physical and emotional well-being should be addressed after you arrive.

#### **Find resources**

Learn how to get medical help (routine or emergency) before the need arises. Is there a 911-style emergency number? What services does it access? Who provides routine medical care, and how can you reach him/her? If you need special resources for any health-related need, find out early how to find them. You can find local Alcoholics Anonymous chapters at [http://www.aa.org/en\\_find\\_meeting.cfm](http://www.aa.org/en_find_meeting.cfm).

#### **Give yourself time to adjust**

Jet lag and culture shock can sabotage your time abroad if you are unprepared, and their effects can be lasting if you don't take care of yourself. For jet lag, get plenty of non-alcoholic fluids, nutritious food, and rest. Time is the best cure.

Culture shock (the emotional effects of facing new values, habits, and lifestyles) can leave you impatient, bewildered, and depressed. You may experience confusing emotional highs and lows during this period. Remind yourself that these will pass, and that being well-rested and eating healthily will speed the process by giving you the stamina to work through it. If they persist, though, consider it a possible medical problem and seek assistance from a counselor or physician.

#### **Make your medical conditions and needs known**

If you require regular medical care for any condition, tell those in your host country who can be of assistance. This may mean identifying a doctor or other practitioner to provide care, or it may mean discussing your condition with people in your courses or housing situation to let them know you might need an emergency intervention during your stay.

#### **Ask questions**

Lifestyles and norms may differ from your own, maybe in ways you don't see right away. This is true even in cultures that seem relatively similar to the US. Ask about safety issues like local transportation, traffic patterns, swimming practices at regional beaches, and use of electrical appliances. Ask about security issues such as neighborhood or building security, personal safety during evening or other outings, and culture-specific behavior or security concerns related to gender. You can't assume that the expectations and practices you take for granted at home will be accepted in your host country. If you are not sure about something, whether it's a simple question about where a service can be found, or a more complex matter such as expectations about friendship and dating, ask someone you trust.

**Attend to your own well-being**

Despite the change in your environment, you can still keep some of your daily routines from home. Get enough rest – a challenge during the first few days! Eat nutritiously, which may mean trying some foods you're not accustomed to eating. Get plenty of exercise and fresh air to keep your mind and body working well. Don't isolate yourself. You will probably have to make the first move (or even the first five moves) in developing friendships, but they are an essential part of any overseas experience and, more importantly, of your emotional well-being.

***WHEN YOU RETURN***

You may think it will be “no sweat” to return home to family and friends, but that is not the experience of most study-abroad participants. Perhaps counter-intuitively, students report the same type of adjustment issues when they return as they had when they first arrived abroad. Remember that you've changed, and that time has not stood still in your absence. Friends and family also may have changed, along with your perceptions of them and theirs of you. You have a new set of experiences they have not shared, and may have acquired different ways of thinking about everything from world politics to friendship, higher education to your place in the world. Be patient with yourself and others.

Ask yourself how you have changed since you left Wesleyan and the US. How have your attitudes and values altered? How have you matured in your opinions and perspectives? How have your attitudes and expectations of friends, family, and faculty changed?

**Take care of yourself**

Your diet and exercise patterns will change again when you return. You may have jet-lag, and in any case you should plan to get plenty of sleep and maintain a healthy diet.

**Moderate your expectations**

Your time abroad does not change those who stayed behind in the way it changes you. Problems that existed when you left may still await you when you return, or change may have occurred in your absence. Be prepared to face realistically enduring issues or problems in both your circumstances and your relationships. Take time to share your overseas experience, as well as to listen to the experiences of those who didn't accompany you. If you feel like no one “gets it,” or you just want to talk more about your time abroad, talk to faculty, the OIS staff, and other returning students, all of whom can empathize. Share the most important parts of your trip, including pictures and mementos. But be prepared: some who haven't gone abroad may listen only for a little while.

## **Debrief and relive**

Take advantage of re-entry workshops and parties for returning study-abroad participants. You'll have a chance to meet new people and share your experience with others who will listen and understand. You can serve as a peer advisor for prospective participants, or meet up with international students at Wes from your overseas host country. These are great ways to keep alive one of the most exciting experiences of your life. You may want to write for one of the several journals and magazines for study abroad participants, organize a photo exhibit or panel discussion, or work with the OIS on other initiatives.

## **Personal health inventory for study/travel abroad participants**

These are potential issues affecting international students (hey, that's about to be you). Which ones concern you? Have you made necessary preparations to avoid problems?

- Ability/disability issues
- Allergies
- Asthma
- Contraceptives
- Culture shock
- Dental care
- Dietary concerns
- Emergency resources
- Exercise
- Eyeglass prescription
- Gender-sensitive health care
- Health advisories
- Hepatitis protection
- Immunizations
- Infectious diseases
- Insurance
- Medications and medical supplies
- Psychological, emotional, and behavioral issues
- Re-entry shock
- Regional health issues
- Sexuality
- Sleep patterns
- Smoking
- Support networks/friends and family
- Values

# A Proactive Approach to Learning About Your Host Country

These questions are designed to help spark your curiosity about the country, to direct your reading and research, and to sharpen your knowledge. How many can you answer?

## People:

1. How many people can you name who are prominent in the affairs (politics, athletics, religion, the arts, business, etc.) of your host country?
2. Who are the country's national heroes and heroines? What does this say about the culture?
3. Are other languages spoken besides the dominant/official language(s)? What are the social and political implications of language usage? Can you say basic things in each of the country's major languages?
4. What is taboo in this society? How do people greet and leave one another? What does any variation from the usual greeting or leave-taking signify?

## Customs:

1. Can you recognize the national anthem? Can you sing it? When is it played?
2. What are the most common forms of marriage ceremonies and celebrations?
3. What is the attitude toward divorce? extra-marital relations? plural marriages?
4. What are the attitudes toward drinking, drugs, smoking, and gambling?
5. Are merchandise prices fixed or do customers bargain? How is bargaining conducted?
6. If, as a customer, you touch or handle merchandise, will the storekeeper think you are knowledgeable, inconsiderate, within your rights, or completely inappropriate?
7. How do people organize their daily activities? What is the normal meal schedule? Is there a daytime rest period? What is the customary time for visiting friends?
8. On what occasions would you present/accept gifts to/from people in the country? What kinds of gifts would you exchange?
9. What are the important holidays? How is each observed?
10. How are children disciplined at home?
11. Are children usually present at social occasions? At ceremonial events? If they are not present, how are they cared for in the absence of their parents?
12. How does the society observe children's "coming of age?"

## Religion:

1. What is the predominant religion? Is it an official state religion? Are other religions accepted, tolerated, or illegal?
2. What are important religious observances and ceremonies? How regularly are they observed? By what percentage of the population?
3. How do members of the predominant religion(s) feel about other religions?

## Food and Entertainment:

1. What foods are most popular and how are they prepared?
2. If you are invited to dinner, should you arrive early, on time or late? If late, how late? Should you bring a gift?
3. What is the usual dress for women and men, and for different activities?
4. What are the favorite leisure and recreational activities?
5. What sports are popular?
6. What kinds of television programs are shown?

**Gender, Sexuality, and Minority Issues:**

1. What are the special privileges of age and/or sex?
2. What are the minority groups in your host country? Are you a minority in that country?
3. What are men's, women's, and minority roles (social, professional, religious) there?
4. Do men, women, and minorities have equal opportunity/protection under the law? Do men, women and minorities have the same educational and/or job opportunities?
5. Do women and minorities serve in the military?
6. Do women work outside the home?
7. What type of leadership roles do women and minorities hold?
8. How do men treat local women? American women?
9. How does your host country view minorities within the country and elsewhere?
10. Are pay scales equal for men, women, and minorities? Is there a women's rights or civil rights movement? Are there special concerns/issues that women and minorities should be aware of before they study abroad in your host country?
14. Where do women and minorities fall within the social hierarchy?
15. How is homosexuality viewed? How are gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals treated? Is it appropriate and safe to be open about sexual identity?

**Transport:**

1. What kind of local public transportation is available? Do all classes of people use it?
2. Who has the right of way in traffic: vehicles, animals, or pedestrians?

**Politics:**

1. Is military training compulsory? How are the military and the police viewed?
2. How does the press view the United States? How do the people see the US?
3. What is the history of the relationships between this country and the US?
4. How many people have emigrated from this country to the United States? To other countries? Are many doing so at present? What about immigrants to this country?
5. What is the political system of the country? What are its major parties? Who has the right to vote? How are laws made and enforced?
6. What are the major political issues in the local newspapers?

**Medicine:**

1. What kinds of health services are available?
2. What are common home remedies for minor ailments? Where can medicine be bought?
3. What are major health concerns? Is HIV/AIDS a crisis?

**Education:**

1. Is education free? Compulsory? Who participates, and to what level?
2. What kinds of schools are considered best: public, private, parochial?
3. Where are the important universities of the country? What is the purpose of higher education in the country? Is it state-sponsored and oriented toward national needs, or more focused on individual socioeconomic or intellectual advancement?
4. If university education is sought abroad, where do students go? Why?

**Economics:**

1. What are the country's major imports and exports? What's the division of wealth?
2. What economic structures are in place? Who pays taxes? How high is inflation?

# EMERGENCY LANGUAGE 101

Do you know how to say (out loud) each of the following in your host country? Even if it's an English-speaking country, the terms used may be different.

- A. Help! \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Emergency \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Accident \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Police \_\_\_\_\_
- E. I need to see a doctor \_\_\_\_\_
- F. Where is the nearest hospital/clinic? \_\_\_\_\_
- G. I am allergic to... \_\_\_\_\_
- H. What is this medication for? \_\_\_\_\_
- I. Leave me alone \_\_\_\_\_
- J. Go away (in stronger language) \_\_\_\_\_
- K. I'm not interested! \_\_\_\_\_
- L. Could you help me, please? \_\_\_\_\_
- M. Do you speak English? \_\_\_\_\_
- N. Does anyone here speak English? \_\_\_\_\_
- O. Have you been tested for HIV and other sexually-transmitted diseases? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- P. We have to use a condom. \_\_\_\_\_
- Q. I don't want to have sex. \_\_\_\_\_

We recommend going through these phrases with friends or a TA before you go away so that you don't end up learning these basic but crucial lessons after you were in a situation in which you needed them.



# CULTURE

# SHOCK



**Culture shock:** the anxiety produced when you move to a completely new environment. It's the feeling of not knowing what to do or how to do things in a new environment, and not knowing what is appropriate or inappropriate. It generally starts during the first few days/weeks of arriving in a new place.

Culture shock includes the physical and emotional discomfort you suffer when coming to live in another country or a place different from what you know. The way you lived before may not work in the new place. So much is different, from language to banking, from telephone etiquette to flirting, from how you behave with a professor or fellow student to how you schedule your day.

The symptoms of culture shock can show up at different times, and sometimes conflicting feelings overlap. Although you can experience real pain from culture shock, it also provides important opportunities to think about, and learn about, yourself, your own culture, and your host culture.

Symptoms may include any of the following, all of which are **NORMAL** early reactions to cross-cultural exchange:

- Sadness, loneliness, melancholy
- Preoccupation with health or sudden psychosomatic problems
- Aches, pains, and allergies
- Insomnia, or a desire to sleep too much or too little
- Changes in temperament, including depression or feeling vulnerable, powerless, or lethargic
- Anger, irritability, resentment, or unwillingness to interact with others
- Identifying with or idealizing the home culture or the host culture
- Loss of identity or confusion about who you are or who you should be
- Trying too hard to absorb everything in the new culture or country, or to abandon your own ways
- Inability to solve simple problems or to concentrate
- Lack of confidence or feelings of inadequacy or insecurity
- The development or acceptance of stereotypes about your host culture
- Obsessions such as fastidiousness
- Longing for family or homesickness
- Feeling lost, overlooked, exploited, abused, or misunderstood

# The Stages of Culture Shock

Culture shock has many stages, which may occur one by one or overlap. You may not even recognize them as they happen, but if you leaf back through these documents after a few weeks in the host country, bells are sure to begin ringing.

1. The **honeymoon stage**: you feel euphoric and pleased by all the new things you are encountering. Everything seems wonderful and exciting and possible.
2. You encounter some **difficult times** and crises in daily life. Miscommunication may occur. You feel discontent, impatient, angry, sad, misunderstood, or even incompetent. This happens when you are trying to adapt to a new culture that's very different from your culture of origin. The transition between your ways of doing things and the way things are done in the new country is a difficult process and takes time to complete.
3. You begin to gain some **understanding** of the new culture. A new feeling of pleasure and a sense of humor are experienced. You may start to feel a certain psychological balance, to feel less lost and to start having a sense of direction. You have begun to be more familiar with the environment and you want to belong. This can initiate an evaluation, or even a comparison, of the old ways versus the new.
4. You gain **perspective**, realizing that the new culture has both good and bad things to offer. Sometimes this occurs while you are still getting to understand the new culture, or even while you are still feeling off-balance. Integration is accompanied by a more solid feeling of belonging.
5. "**Re-entry shock**" can occur when you return home. You may find that things are no longer the same. Some of your newly-acquired customs are not appropriate at home. On the other hand, some of the things you remember most fondly might have changed, or you might not like them any more.

These stages are present at different times and each person has his/her own way of reacting to culture shock. As a result, some stages are longer and more difficult than others. Many factors contribute to the duration and effects of culture shock: mental health, personality type, past experiences, socio-economic conditions, familiarity with the language, family and/or social support systems, and level of education will all affect how you experience living in a different culture.

## **Ways to Fight Culture Shock: A Non-Exhaustive List**

Remember your strengths! Remind yourself of your talents and abilities.

Keep an open mind: different is not necessarily better or worse. Try not to be judgmental; maintain tolerance for otherness.

Rely on your sense of humor. If you can laugh (with – not at – yourself or others), you will be better able to fight off embarrassment, fear, shame, despair, exhaustion, and some of the other reactions people sometimes feel when experiencing culture shock.

Eat healthy foods and get enough rest.

Develop a hobby (also a good way to meet people).

Don't be shy about asking for help.

Be patient. Adaptation is a process, and it takes time. If you encounter a problematic situation and don't know how to handle it, ask someone you trust to help you understand it from a local perspective.

Don't try too hard to be like everyone else: you need to be flexible, but not to change your core self.

Stay away from alcohol and drugs, which can leave you physically and emotionally less stable just when you most need your wits about you to make sense of this new culture.

Learn to include a regular form of physical activity in your routine. This will help combat the sadness and loneliness constructively. Exercise, swim, take an aerobics class, or learn the local traditional dance.

Relaxation and meditation have proven to be very helpful for people who are passing through periods of stress.

Send a postcard to the Office of International Studies.

Be curious. Ask questions – this will get you using the local language and learning colloquial phrases while learning important cultural cues and norms.

Maintain confidence in yourself. Follow your ambitions and continue with your plans for the future.

Most important of all: Pay Attention! Notice differences. Think about why the host culture developed as it did – history? environment? politics? geography?

## \$ £ ¥ ¢ € Managing Your Money Abroad \$ £ ¥ ¢ €

Study abroad usually entails a drastic shift in the way you manage your money -- no more meal plan, for instance. Instead, you'll find yourself paying for daily expenses "out of pocket" with cash or credit. Many students find that the most convenient method of managing their finances while overseas is through the use of credit cards. The acceptability of credit cards varies greatly from country to country; in order to find out which credit cards are accepted in your host country, visit the web site(s) for your card(s).

Students frequently use ATM cards to withdraw cash in local currency from a money machine. Not all cards work in all machines: make sure that your ATM card has the "Cirrus" or "Plus" logo on the back. Parents or family here in the US may be able to monitor (or feed) the bank account from this end while you withdraw from abroad. Some students find it convenient to open an account at a major international bank with branches abroad, which might protect you from outrageous withdrawal fees, but this is not effective in all countries. Check with a bank before opening an account to be sure that you will be able to access your account in the country where you'll be studying, and to find out what you will be charged for overseas ATM withdrawals. Also, be aware that **the IRS 1040 forms ask whether you have a foreign bank account when you file your taxes; if so, you must file relevant additional forms, and may be subject to an audit.**

Just as you would in any unfamiliar setting here in the US, avoid carrying large amounts of cash with you. When you do carry cash on your person, divide up the money so that some is in a money belt, some in a pouch under your shirt, and some in a **front** pocket. This is a safeguard against theft. Don't carry your wallet in your back pocket or an open purse, and keep a hand on the zipper on your backpack or purse.

You may want to change some money into the foreign currency before you depart. However, if you're going to a smaller country, US banks may not carry the currency. Some students still choose to purchase travelers' cheques (such as American Express or Thomas Cooke). These are a safe way to carry your money, but they're not universally accepted, and not necessarily the cheapest way of handling your money (there is a fee for purchasing the cheques and, if you aren't at an official exchange site or bank, for exchanging them as well).

Credit cards can be as risky as they are convenient. Without some discipline and budgeting, you might return from abroad with staggering credit card debt. They are more commonly used in some countries than others, so consider your destination.

Be sure to set aside money to cover your extra expenses during any program vacations. You may have to spend more at these times to cover travel, hotel/hostel stays, meals, mementos, and so on.

Finally, make (and try to stick to) a budget. You are sure to run into extra expenses at the end of the program, whether they include travel, mailing books home, or buying that poncho or kimono you've been eyeing all semester. Keeping track of your weekly expenditures will help you know whether (and where) you need to cut back, and leave you plenty of margin for a worry-free end of the experience.

## The Afterlife of Study Abroad: JOBS JOBS JOBS

Most people who studied abroad say that it was one of the highlights of their undergraduate career, and that it changed their lives in profound ways. You may achieve the level of foreign language fluency for which you've been striving. New relationships may lead your life in unexpected directions. A newly-discovered academic topic may become the focus of your doctoral dissertation. You may find yourself navigating both physical and emotional geographies you never thought you could explore on your own.

Right now, you can't be certain what might come of your time abroad, but you can prepare yourself for this transformative experience. A key part of preparing is to consider how your studies abroad might affect your career and your life plans. You may seek employment abroad, be stationed overseas for employment or graduate study, or focus your professional life on the country in which you studied. If you remain in the US, you may find yourself interacting constantly with colleagues across national boundaries. Your study abroad experience will provide you relevant preparation for these and other challenges. Think about how to articulate this on your resume, and be prepared to make contacts abroad that can help you with your career plans.

Students often return from abroad only to begin scheming how to get back overseas again as soon as possible. The CRC and OIS have information on post-baccalaureate programs like the Peace Corps, international scholarships like the Rhodes, Marshall, or Fulbright, and professional opportunities abroad. Some of these programs have early application deadlines, and may require you to begin the process while overseas. The OIS and CRC also offer programs on presenting skills gained abroad to employers.

### *Before You Leave...*

- Clarify post-baccalaureate or summer plans, make contacts, and inform potential employers how to contact you while you are away.
- Make an appointment at the CRC before you go. Become familiar with the CRC website, including GoinGlobal, a resource for jobs and internships abroad.
- Ask the CRC about CRC programs in which you can participate while abroad.
- Create a resume to take with you. Once you add new experiences, update the document, and always feel free to use this networking tool.

### *While you are abroad...*

- Use the CRC website to search for student employment, internships, full-time and summer job postings, recruiting info, and keeping up on what's new at the CRC.
- If you're doing an internship abroad, get recommendations from your supervisor(s) **while you are there**. You'll be less likely to forget to follow up when you return home, your contributions will still be fresh in the recommender's mind, and you avoid the risk that the supervisor may not be there after you leave.
- Develop a network in your host country. **Collect contact information** from businesses, including those that may be of interest to you in your job search. Document your relationships via business card collection or e-mail mailing lists.

Dear Wesleyan students about-to-be-abroad,

While you're away, the US will be holding elections, and your vote is needed! The information below should help you register to vote via absentee ballot and stay educated about local, state, and federal issues while abroad.

1. The **Federal Voting Assistance Program** (<http://www.fvap.gov/>) provides an online version of the Federal Post Card Application for absentee ballots, as well as information on the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (which allows you to vote for federal offices if you aren't provided with an absentee ballot after making a timely request).

2. **Democrats Abroad** (<http://www.democratsabroad.org/>) and **Republicans Abroad** (<http://www.republicansabroad.org/>) have chapters throughout the world; both are active in registering overseas voters and offering advice and information. They frequently hold lectures, often with a focus on US foreign policy or relations with their host country, or other social activities. Additionally, Democrats Abroad sends delegates to the Democratic Party convention, so students and faculty residing overseas (who "uphold the principles of the Democratic Party") can opt to participate in their caucus in lieu of voting absentee in their home state primary. This will not affect where they vote absentee in the general election in November. Those of you who are members of other parties (**Green, Reform, Independence, Labor, Libertarian, Communist**, etc.) may be able to find information online about relevant activities of interest in the countries where you are studying.

3. The **US citizen services officer at local embassies and consulates** can provide information and write-in ballots. Before leaving in the fall, be sure to check with your county registrar or secretary about requesting an absentee ballot before you leave. Virtually every US citizen, aged 18 or over, living overseas during an election period is entitled to vote for federal offices **WITHOUT FEDERAL TAX IMPLICATIONS**. State tax implications vary, but usually can be avoided by voting for federal offices only (i.e. President, Vice President, Presidential elector, Member of the United States Senate, Member of the United States House of Representatives, Delegates from the District of Columbia, Guam, Virgin Islands, and American Samoa, and Resident Commissioner of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico). Specific questions can be addressed by any of the resources above.

Happy absentee voting,  
Carolyn Sorkin, Ph.D.  
Director of International Studies

# IDENTITY FACTORS

We are all unique combinations of habits, preferences, and group memberships. We may have a very clear sense of self in a familiar context yet, as you might remember from frosh orientation week, new settings and new norms can cause us to reconsider our priorities and our understanding of what matters to us.

Who we are, even in our own eyes, can change as context changes.

Circle the five factors that are most relevant to your self-definition, your identity, as you are today.

- Academic field of study
- Age
- College affiliation
- Community service involvement
- Ethnic group/country of origin
- Family role
- Friendships
- Gender
- Geographic location
- Health (physical, mental, emotional)
- Hobby/pastime/sport
- Home neighborhood
- Language(s) spoken
- Physical appearance (height, weight, skin color, hair color, etc.)
- Political beliefs/ideology
- Problem affiliation (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous)
- Race
- Religion
- Sexual orientation

**Now circle the five identity factors you think will be most relevant to your self-definition or identity abroad.**

- **Academic field of study**
- **Age**
- **College affiliation**
- **Community service involvement**
- **Ethnic group/country of origin**
- **Family role**
- **Friendships**
- **Gender**
- **Geographic location**
- **Health (physical, mental, emotional)**
- **Hobby/pastime/sport**
- **Home neighborhood**
- **Language(s) spoken**
- **Physical appearance (height, weight, skin color, hair color, etc.)**
- **Political beliefs/ideology**
- **Problem affiliation (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous)**
- **Race**
- **Religion**
- **Sexual orientation**

**Each affiliation, each piece of our identity, comes with a complete package of cultural programming, rules, values, and norms, some of which contradict one another.**

**The way we are perceived by others, and the way we perceive ourselves in different situations, is bound to vary because expectations and norms vary. What is normal at Wesleyan or in your home town may be completely out of place somewhere else.**

Adapted by Carolyn Sorkin, Director of International Studies, Wesleyan University, from: Lee Gardenswartz and Anita Rowe, *The Managing Diversity Survival Guide*, McGraw-Hill 1994, and The S.E.E.D. Project on Inclusive Curriculum (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity), Tel 781.283.2520, Wellesley Center for Women, Wellesley MA 02481

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