

W ILLINOIS WESLEYAN
UNIVERSITY
INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

STUDY ABROAD HANDBOOK



For

PARENTS AND FAMILIES

CONGRATULATIONS to you and your student for choosing to make study abroad part of your student's IWU experience.

By the time you read this, your student will have applied for, and perhaps already been accepted into, a study abroad program at IWU. As your student—and you— start the exciting process of preparing to go abroad, we know you will both have questions. The staff at IWU will work closely with your student to prepare them for departure, but we also know that families play an essential role in this process, and so we have designed this guide.

It includes basic information on study abroad and the application process; details on pre-departure preparations; a description of what your student can expect once abroad; and information on the re-entry process. We hope it will help to answer your question and offer suggestions for how you can help your student prepare for this amazing experience.

In addition to this guide, there are a variety of other resources you might want to explore. One we like—and regularly recommend to students—is the online “*What's Up With Culture*” series of modules offered by the University of the Pacific (www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/). Also useful is *What Families Need to Know!*, a guide published by NAFSA: Association of International Educators (available at shop.nafsa.org/).

While we attempt to provide as much information as possible to students and parents throughout the study abroad process, there are some limitations on what we can disclose. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) governs access to student educational records. In accordance with FERPA, we consider students to have primary responsibility for keeping parents and guardians informed about their study abroad plans. To this end, all program-related information and instructions will be sent directly to the student. We encourage students to regularly share this information with their families. But at any time if you have questions or concerns, do feel free to contact us.

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STUDY ABROAD: THE BASICS

We're confident that your student has been talking with you about their desire to study abroad and has kept you informed throughout the application process. Nonetheless, we thought we would open this guide with an overview of what study abroad is and why IWU believes so strongly that it can be an invaluable part of your student's education, then give you some details on the study abroad options open to students at IWU and an outline of how the application process works.

WHO, WHAT, WHERE, AND WHEN?

The Illinois Wesleyan University mission statement affirms that an IWU education is one that "deepens the specialized knowledge of a discipline with a comprehensive world view [and] affords the greatest possibilities for realizing individual potential while preparing students for democratic citizenship and life in a global society."

Study abroad is an essential tool in our efforts to achieve this.

So, what exactly is study abroad? Study abroad is distinct from international travel or tourism in that it is an educational experience abroad in which a student undertakes credit-bearing coursework that contributes to the student's degree progress.

IWU students have the opportunity to study in hundreds of locations in over 70 different countries in almost every region of the world. Whether it is for a single semester, a summer term, over the course of a May Term, or for a full year, we have a program that can fit any student's schedule. We also have programs suited to just about every discipline offered on campus and for students at various points in their academic career—from May Term of their first-year at IWU through the last semester before graduation.

No matter which type of IWU program your student has chosen, all credit earned will count toward their degree.

WHY?

We have all heard the comments about "a shrinking world" and "a global economy." We live in a world in which geographical distance isn't the same barrier it once was and in which the ease of travel and speed of communication have changed the way we live. Regardless of what field of study your student is pursuing

or what their career plans are, a study abroad experience can help them prepare for the future.

Academically, studying abroad makes the world into a classroom. It can deepen your student's knowledge and understanding and broaden their intellectual horizons. Pursuing

Eligibility

Eligibility criteria vary from program to program, but in general students must:

- Have a formally declared major.
- Have a cumulative GPA of 3.0.
- Not be on academic probation or under any judicial sanctions.
- Meet the minimum requirements of the proposed program.
- Not propose to study abroad in a location under a Level 3 or Level 4 State Department Travel Advisory.
- Not have a balance on their IWU account.

Academic Credit

Students undertaking coursework on an approved study abroad program will earn credit toward their IWU degree.

As part of the application process, students complete a Course Approval Form (CAF), which indicates whether or not any given course fulfills a major, minor, or Shared Curriculum requirement.

Grades

Students are required to take their study abroad coursework for a letter grade, and all grades—including failing marks—from a semester or academic year off-campus study program will appear on the student's university transcript and will be factored into the cumulative GPA.

their field of study in another country can afford your student the opportunity to learn about different aspects of that field; gain hands-on experience; strengthen their language skills; enlarge their understanding of international events; and prepare themselves for independent research.

Personally, living and studying in another country for a semester or year will change your student in ways both obvious and subtle. Certainly, the time abroad will form one of your student's strongest memories of their time at IWU; he/she'll return with new friends and a wealth of experiences. But more than that, your student will come back with a newly discovered sense of themselves and their abilities. Living abroad for an extended period fosters independence and self-sufficiency, and being exposed to new ways of living and thinking will give your student a new perspective on themselves—on how they want to live and what they believe. Whether the study abroad experience is your student's first time abroad or not, it won't be easy, but it will be well worth-while.

Professionally, the academic experience and personal growth will make your student more competitive in any field. Employers know that students who have successfully studied abroad are self-motivated, adaptable, resilient, and willing to take on a challenge. They know such students will likely bring to the job a broader perspective to both the work and the world and an ability to adapt to new circumstances. Moreover, students who have studied abroad in a foreign language possess second-language skills, and all study abroad students gain cross-cultural communication skills—both valuable assets in the marketplace. Finally, since many of our study abroad affiliates offer internships, many students can bring work experience in an international setting to the table when looking for a job.

How MUCH?

There is no denying that cost is an important factor in choosing a study abroad program—or choosing to study abroad at all. But as with a college education in general, you and your student are investing in their future.

How much will studying abroad cost? The short answer is that the cost of studying abroad generally includes

tuition + room, board, and program fees + anticipated expenses

The longer answer is that the cost depends on the program: on where the program is located, on how long the program lasts, on what is included in the program, and on what your student plans to do outside of the classroom.

So, for example, a program in London will be more expensive than a program in Ghana because the cost of living is higher and because you will need to factor in such things as public transportation costs. A summer program will often cost more than a program during the academic year, in part because IWU does not have summer financial aid and in part because you will pay the cost of travel during the high tourist season. And a student who plans to travel extensively during their free time will spend more than a student who dedicates their time to exploring their host city and host country.

In our advising meetings with your student, we will help prepare an estimate of costs for the program they are looking to study with. We encourage students to share these estimates with their families, but here is an outline of what you can expect.

For semester and year-long programs, IWU has a home-school tuition policy, which means that students studying abroad pay the regular IWU tuition—unless the study abroad tuition is higher, in which case the student pays that higher cost. IWU then pays tuition to the study abroad program itself on your student's behalf.

Students on semester and year-long program do not generally pay IWU room and board fees; rather, they pay the room and board costs of the program. Exceptions to this policy include students participating in the IWU

Financial Aid and Study Abroad

Students studying on an approved semester or year-long program will continue to receive federal and state aid, as well as any external scholarships. IWU financial aid can be used for one semester of study abroad.

Study Abroad Scholarships

As you consider the costs of studying abroad, know that there is financial aid available specifically for this purpose.

Most affiliated programs have both need- and merit-based scholarships. Some of our programs automatically match a student's Pell Grant. Others offer a savings program that matches the first \$1,000 deposited.

And, in addition to your student's regular financial aid package, they may be eligible for supplementary loans.

Spain and IWU London programs; students on exchange programs with Al Akhawayn University in Morocco; and students on the Pembroke Program, Oxford, England — all of whom will pay IWU housing and possibly IWU meal costs.

In addition to these fixed program costs, there are a number of other expenses for which you and your student will need to plan. Among these expenses are the cost of a passport and student visa, international airfare and ground transportation, immunizations and additional insurance, books and supplies, and personal spending money.

For May Term Travel Courses, costs cover tuition, airfare, housing, most meals, and ground transportation. Not included in May Term costs are the cost of a passport, student visa, books and supplies, optional trip cancellation insurance, or personal expenses.

As your student considers studying abroad, you can help by making sure they know exactly what kind of financial aid they receive and how much, helping your student to compare programs, working together to create a plan to save money or raise funds, and suggesting ways in which they can save money on discretionary expenses, such as personal travel.

CHOOSING A PROGRAM

In order to ensure that IWU students have access to the best possible program for their individual needs, we offer several options. Most are open to students with little or no foreign language skills, though we also have a wide range of programs suitable for students at an advanced level of language study.

TYPES OF STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

IWU Faculty-Led Programs

In faculty-led programs, a group of IWU students studies abroad under the guidance of an IWU faculty member. Semester-length faculty-led programs are the **IWU London Program**, offered each fall, and the **IWU Spain Program**, offered each spring. **May Term Travel Courses** are a form of short-term faculty-led study abroad, lasting a maximum of three weeks. May Term offerings change from year to year.

Our faculty-led programs are generally best suited to students seeking the Shared Curriculum or elective credit, though it is also possible for students to fulfill major or minor requirements, depending on the program and the student's course of study.

So, for example, all IWU London courses fulfill the Shared Curriculum requirements. IWU Spain offers the Shared Curriculum classes as well, but also offers courses for nursing majors and students pursuing a major or minor in Hispanic Studies. The kind of credit students earn on a May Term Travel Course varies from course to course.

All credit earned on an IWU faculty-led program is IWU credit.

Affiliated Programs

Affiliated programs are run by other US universities or by a not-for-profit education organization. IWU has carefully selected **several study abroad providers** with which to partner: Arcadia University, CIEE, College Year in Athens, DIS Abroad, IES Abroad, IFSA-Butler, and the School of International Training (SIT).

Through these affiliated organizations, we are able to offer our students study abroad options around the world and in a variety of formats.

Depending on the affiliate and each student's academic needs, IWU students can study with peers from other US universities at a study abroad center, can take classes exclusively at an overseas university, or can take a mix of classes at a study abroad center and local university.

In a **center-based program**, students take coursework designed specifically for US students and taught by local faculty. Students study at an academic study center rather than at a host university, and courses will be taught in English or another language, depending on the program location and each student's language proficiency. Examples of a center-based program include the DIS programs in Copenhagen and Stockholm and the College Year in Athens program.

For students who want more independence or self-direction, there are **direct enrollment** options through our affiliates. In these programs, students directly enroll in classes at an overseas university. All courses are taken at the university with local students. Arcadia and IFSA-Butler offer many direct enrollment programs.

Many students want to take classes both with other US students and at a local university. For them, our affiliates offer several **hybrid programs**, in which the student takes at least one course at the program provider's study center with other study abroad students and at least one course at a local university with local students. Examples of hybrid programs are IES's Study London Program and CIEE's program in Dakar, Senegal.

And for students who want more of a hands-on or field-based experience, there are **experiential programs**. These types of programs forego the familiar campus- or center-based model and seek to immerse students in the culture. Such programs will often have a "base" of study, but will take students to different locations throughout the country for extended periods, during which they will engage in field study. Students in such programs generally take all their courses with a cohort of students from different US universities, but they also work with not-for-profit organizations, community groups, and/or local researchers. SIT offers experiential programs.

All credit earned on an approved affiliated program is guaranteed to transfer to IWU. Students can have courses pre-approved as major, minor, and/or the Shared Curriculum credit; if a course is not pre-approved, it transfers in as elective credit towards graduation.

Exchange Programs

Exchange programs are a form of university-sponsored direct enrollment. In a traditional exchange program, students from the partner institutions "exchange" places, each paying the tuition and fees of the home school. IWU has exchange agreements with Keio University in Tokyo, Japan; Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco; and the Hang Seng University of Hong Kong.

Keio University is one of the top universities in Asia, and a semester or year at Keio allows IWU students to study Japanese language while taking English-language courses in Japanese culture and history, world politics, business, economics, religion, communications, and other subjects.

Located about one hour from Fez, **Al Akhawayn University** in Ifrane, Morocco, is a small American-style university—very similar to IWU. Al Akhawayn has particularly strong offerings in Arabic and North African Studies, business and economics, and engineering.

The **Hang Seng University of Hong Kong** is a specialized business college founded in 1980 with funding from Hang Seng Bank. With an undergraduate population of about 5000, it offers specialized coursework in various business disciplines (e.g., accounting, finance, management), as well as Chinese language and a select curriculum of the Shared Curriculum courses. Coursework is taught in English.

As with affiliated programs, all credit earned on an approved exchange program is guaranteed to transfer to IWU. Students can have courses pre-approved as major, minor, and/or the Shared Curriculum credit; if a course is not pre-approved, it transfers in as elective credit towards graduation.

Pembroke Program

IWU is among an exclusive group of US universities that send students for a year of study at Pembroke College, one of the 38 colleges that constitute Oxford University. Each year, Pembroke College accepts approximately 40 American students for a junior year of study.

The Pembroke Program is highly selective and best suited to students who are self-directed and both willing and able to dedicate a full year toward the study of only one discipline.

Credit earned on the Pembroke Program is guaranteed to transfer to IWU. Students can have courses pre-approved as major or minor credit; if a course is not pre-approved, it transfers in as elective credit towards graduation.

HOW TO FIND A GOOD FIT

As students begin to think about studying abroad, we encourage them to consider a number of factors in order to assess their academic objectives, language abilities, and

personal goals. During our advising sessions with each student, we prompt them to think about their academic needs, personal and career goals, and financial considerations.

You can help your student at this stage by discussing some of the following questions with them.

- Where do you want to go? Why do you want to go there?
- What do you want or need to study while abroad? Do you need to earn credits toward a major, a minor, or the Shared Curriculum while abroad?
- What length of study abroad experience do you want?
- Do you want to study with a group of IWU students and a faculty member, or do you want to break out of "the IWU bubble"?
- Is improving your language skills one of your primary goals? If so, are your foreign language skills strong enough to take all or most of your classes in a second language? Do you need a program that offers intensive language coursework?
- Do you want to live and study in a large city, or would you prefer something smaller and more intimate?
- How much structure do you want? How comfortable are you with being self-directed?
- Do you want to directly enroll in a foreign university? If so, would you feel comfortable in a very large university (30,000+ students) or do you want something a bit smaller?
- What kind of living experience do you want—living in a dorm with other American students? Living in an apartment and cooking for yourself? Staying with a host family?

May Term Travel Courses

Because May Term Travel Courses are organized by individual faculty members with the assistance of IWU's Mellon Center, the application process is different.

Students can learn about the Travel Course offerings at the annual Study Abroad Fair in September.

After that, students may want to meet with the faculty course leader before completing the course-specific application online, which they can get from the faculty leader.

Students will be notified of acceptance by the faculty leader and enrolled in the course.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Because IWU offers a wide range of program types, the application process will vary a bit from program to program. Students can search programs on our website abroad.iwu.edu and apply online.

Generally, though, students complete two applications: one seeking permission from IWU to study abroad, and one seeking admission to the study abroad program itself.

Here, then, are the steps most students will follow:

- **Make an appointment to talk with someone in the International Office.** In advising meetings, we will help the student sort through program options, go over the application process, and put together an estimate of study abroad costs.
- **Complete the IWU Study Abroad application** online on abroad.iwu.edu. This generally consists of an application form, a short essay, and at least one academic reference.
- **Complete and submit any program-specific application.** This generally will include an application form, a short essay, and some sort of approval or

nomination form to be completed by the IWU International Office. It may also require up to two academic references, a language assessment form, and forms from the overseas university.

- **Talk with referees and request a reference online as part of your application process.** We strongly encourage students to do this as early as possible, but no less than two weeks before the application deadline.
- **Complete and submit scholarship applications.**

Once IWU has received the completed IWU Study Abroad application and confirmed eligibility, permission to study abroad is granted. At this point, the International Office will complete any program-required approval or nomination forms and order an official transcript for affiliated or exchange program applications.

The International Office will send each student a Study Abroad Approval email, which confirms that permission to study abroad has been granted and outlines the next steps the student needs to take on campus.

Students applying to an IWU faculty-led program are generally notified about acceptance within 1–2 weeks of the application deadline. Students applying to an affiliated program, one of our exchange partners, or the Pembroke Program generally receive notification from the program within 3–4 weeks.

Deadlines
• Affiliated and exchange programs: March 1 and October 1
• IWU London: March 1
• IWU Spain: April 15
• May Term Travel Courses: November 1
• Pembroke Program: Early January

PREPARING TO GO ABROAD

With the application process completed and confirmation of acceptance in hand, your student—and you—will next turn your attention to pre-departure preparations.

Some of those preparations will be task oriented: completing post-acceptance paperwork for IWU and the study abroad program, securing necessary visas or permits, and, for your student, attending the mandatory IWU Pre-Departure Orientation.

However, to have a truly successful study abroad experience, your student will need to pay serious attention both to the details of **preparing to go abroad** and to **preparing to be abroad**. You can certainly help by making sure your student takes care of business (such as completing and submitting forms), but much more importantly, you can help your student prepare themselves intellectually, emotionally, and in practical terms for the time abroad.

Please remember, though, that **a little bit of help goes a long way**. It is important that, as your student prepares for an extended time abroad, they take responsibility for those preparations. It can be difficult to step back, but by taking the lead in the months and weeks leading up to departure, your student will be much better prepared for the opportunities and challenges that await them. So, while we ask you not to complete tasks for your student, we do hope you will support them in other ways: encourage them to ask questions, remind them of upcoming deadlines, and sit down to talk about goals and concerns.

ADMINISTRATIVE PREPARATIONS

IWU Paperwork

Once your student has received permission from IWU to study abroad, they will be given a list of additional forms and tasks to complete. Among those are the following:

A Note on Study Abroad Partnerships

IWU works closely with the student up through the advising and application processes, during which IWU staff are the students' main point of contact for questions.

During the pre-departure stage (that is, after acceptance but before the student leaves for the program), IWU works in tandem with the program itself to prepare students and answer questions.

Once the student is on-site, IWU steps back and the local program staff and faculty work most closely with the student.

However, IWU staff are always available to provide assistance.

- Read and sign electronically the IWU study abroad **Release, Assumption of Risk, and Indemnification Agreement**. Doing so indicates that your student understands the risks and responsibilities involved in their participation in study abroad.
- Complete a **Course Approval Form**, securing the necessary signatures for major, minor, and/or the Shared Curriculum coursework.
- Complete and submit IWU's **Medical Information Form** questionnaire and, if required, the attached **Physician's Report Form**. Your student's medical history will not affect their ability to study abroad, but having complete and accurate information will help IWU better assist your student in the case of an emergency. You can help by encouraging your student to provide complete information and to be transparent about any medical problems.
- Provide **Emergency Contact Information**. We ask students to provide detailed information for two individuals whom we can contact in case of an emergency overseas.

Depending on the program to which your student has applied, they may also need to pay a **deposit** in order to confirm participation and may need to provide a **photocopy of their passport**.

PROGRAM PAPERWORK

If your student is studying abroad with one of IWU's affiliated programs, on one of our exchanges, or with the Pembroke Program, they will likely need to complete paperwork for the affiliate and/or the overseas university.

Some of that paperwork may look very similar to forms your student is completing for IWU—a Release, Assumption of Risk, and Indemnification Agreement, a course selection form, and a medical history form, for example—but it is essential that your student complete both sets of forms, as the ones submitted to IWU are only for our internal use.

We are happy to help answer students' questions about paperwork required by our affiliates and partner universities, but students should also work directly with staff at the affiliated program whenever possible.

Registration

Students on semester or year-long programs or participating in a May Term Travel Course will need to register at IWU in order for IWU to process financial aid and for the student to receive credit.

Semester and year-long students register for Off-Campus Study (OCS 100). This is a placeholder course that keeps them registered as a full-time IWU student, even though they are not physically on campus. By being enrolled full time, your student will continue to receive their financial aid, will be covered by IWU's International Travel sickness and accident insurance, will receive credit for the coursework done abroad, and will continue to have access to The Ames Library's online resources.

Once your student has completed their program and IWU has received an official transcript from the study abroad program or the host university, the OCS 100 course will be replaced on the IWU transcript by the actual course numbers and course names for the work done abroad.

Students on May Term Travel Courses are registered directly for the travel course once they have received notice of official acceptance.

Pre-Departure Orientation

Students approved to study abroad on a semester, year, or summer program are required to complete an online pre-departure course and to attend a pre-departure orientation, which lasts several hours. May Term Travel Course students also attend a mandatory pre-departure meeting, plus any orientation meetings required by their instructor.

The online course covers academic policies, costs and billing, health and safety, cultural adjustments, registration from abroad, and much

more. At that meeting, each student receives a personalized pre-departure packet that includes information on the country or countries in which they will be studying, details on IWU's International Travel policy, and a wallet card with emergency contact numbers.

During the meeting, we delve more deeply into cultural differences and cultural adjustment, and offer students an opportunity to talk with and learn from study abroad alumni.

Students who fail to complete the online course and attend the required orientation can be removed from study abroad.

Billing

As with costs, billing will differ from program to program.

Affiliated Program Billing: For students studying with an affiliated program, IWU will issue statements using our regular billing cycle, and families can pay in monthly installments. Those bills include tuition, but not room and board, which are billed directly by our affiliates. Therefore, you should anticipate receiving two bills for studying abroad, which will be for different charges.

IWU London and IWU Spain Program Billing: A \$1,000 non-refundable deposit is required to secure a student's place on either IWU London or IWU Spain programs. This deposit will be credited toward the student's final bill. IWU will issue a bill of tuition, room, and board, plus a program fee (please contact the International Office for the most current program fees) using our regular billing cycle, and families can pay in monthly installments. The

A Note on Pre-Departure Orientations

Because of the large number of students attending each of these orientations and their interactive nature, we generally do not invite parents to participate. We know, though, that the information we convey in them is important to you, too, which is why we have created this handbook.

program fee covers airfare, a meal stipend, group excursions and admissions, ground transportation, and other expenses.

Pembroke Billing: Generally, students on the Pembroke Program will be billed IWU tuition and super-single room charges, plus a Pembroke Program fee of \$1000. The IWU will be issued on our regular schedule and can be paid in installments. Board is paid on-site to Pembroke College.

Al Akhawayn Exchange Billing: This is a full exchange, in which students pay tuition, housing and meal costs to their home school. Students studying at Al Akhawayn University will therefore receive their normal tuition bill.

Hang Seng Exchange Billing: These is partial exchange, in which students pay tuition and housing costs to their home school, and meal costs to the host university.

Keio Exchange Billing: In this exchange, students pay tuition to their home institutions, but not room or board costs, which are billed by the host institution. This means IWU students on the Keio program will be billed IWU tuition, but will pay for housing and meals in Japan.

May Term Travel Course Billing: Students participating in a May Term Travel Course will be required to pay a deposit in early December. Payment in full for the course is then due in late January.

TRAVEL LOGISTICS

Travel Documents: Passport and Visa

In order to study abroad, whether on a May Term Travel Course or a full year exchange program, your student will need a **valid passport**.

If your student already has a passport, please check that the passport will remain valid for at least six months after their program is scheduled to end. So, if the program is scheduled to end on December 14, 2021, the passport should be valid at least until the June 14, 2022.

If your student does not have a passport or needs to renew their current passport, then detailed instructions, the fee schedule, and the application paperwork can be found on the State Department website (travel.state.gov/passport/). While the application form can be completed electronically, it will need to be submitted in person to a US Post Office or county clerk's office.

We encourage students to begin the application or renewal process as quickly as possible. Normal processing time is 4–6 weeks, but can take as long

as 8 weeks. A two-week expedited service is available, but is significantly more expensive than the basic application.

Depending on the country or countries to which your student is traveling and the length of the program, they may also need to apply for an **entry visa**. A visa is official permission to enter a country for a certain amount of time and is granted by the government of that country. For most study abroad programs of more than 90 days, students will need

Passports

IWU strongly recommends that at least one parent or family member also has a valid passport for the duration of the study abroad program. In case of an emergency, that person would then be able to travel abroad.

to apply for and receive a visa before leaving the United States. Some countries require that US travelers apply for a visa even for short visits.

Documents Needed for a Visa Application

Visa application requirements vary from country to country, but commonly required documents include the following:

- An official letter of acceptance by a study abroad program.
- A passport valid for at least six months beyond the end of the study abroad program.
- Two passport-style photographs.
- A completed visa application form.
- Proof of financial support.
- Proof of insurance coverage while abroad.
- An application fee.

For students on IWU faculty-led and exchange programs, IWU provides guidance and assistance in the visa process. Our study abroad partners generally provide detailed visa guidance for students on affiliated programs, but the International Office is always available to answer questions and provide help. In the end, though, **it is the student's personal responsibility to complete and submit visa applications in a timely fashion.**

Visa regulations and application procedures vary by country, but the State Department website provides some guidance (travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas.html). In addition, consular websites for various countries generally provide detailed instructions on when a visa is necessary, what documents are needed, and how to apply. Please note that your student may be required to apply for the entry visa in person at the nearest consulate. The processing time for visa applications varies widely: some consulates are able to issue a visa the same day, while others are required to send the applications overseas for processing, which can take up to 6–8 weeks.

Applying for a visa can seem complicated, take time, and require that your student gather a lot of documents. **It may be tempting to step in and do much of the visa application work for your student, but we strongly encourage you not to do so.** While the process may be inconvenient, completing the visa application is an excellent learning opportunity and a necessary step toward the kind of responsibility your student will need to show while abroad. You can help, though, by making sure that they understand the process and requirements, by checking to see that they are completing the steps in a timely fashion, and by emphasizing the importance of securing this credential. If the government of your student's host country requires an entry visa, this is a non-negotiable requirement. Without the proper paperwork, they may not be permitted to board their departing flight or may be turned back upon arrival at the host country airport.

One final note: If your student needs to apply for an entry visa in order to study abroad, they will need to have the valid passport in hand at the time of that application. Depending on the country

Don't Forget to Pack

- A security purse/wallet or money belt
- Prescription medications
- Extra pair of glasses/contacts
- Portable MP3 player
- Alarm clock
- Basic first aid kit
- Adapter for your electronics
- Maps and guide books

to which your student is traveling, the visa application process can take several weeks; hence it is important that your student apply for or renew their passport quickly.

Travel Arrangements: Flights and Packing

Flights arrangements will be made for students on IWU faculty-led programs, but for all other programs, your student is responsible for booking their own flight.

We encourage students to wait until they have officially been accepted into their chosen program and have received confirmation of the program's start and end dates before making travel arrangements.

Resources include standard travel websites, such as Travelocity or Expedia; airline websites; and flight aggregators, like Kayak.com or CheapFlights.com.

Your student should give careful thought to their travel plans (for example, whether they want to extend their stay and travel for a short period after the program ends, and if so whether they would want to fly back from a different city) and be certain they understand any restrictions before purchasing tickets. Students should also be aware of airline restrictions in carry-on and checked luggage. When it comes to **packing**, the best advice is the hardest to follow: pack light! Encourage your student to think strategically—to pack clothes that they can layer as weather gets colder, that they can dress up or down as needed, and that they can hand wash and air dry.

We also encourage students to take clothes that can survive a lot of use and that they then might donate to a charity before they leave for home.

If your student plans to do some independent traveling on weekends or over program breaks, it's a good idea to have a smaller suitcase—perhaps a collapsible duffel—for use on those short trips.

No matter what your student packs, they should mark all luggage inside and out with their name and contact information. In addition, any prescription medications should be left in their original packaging and packed in carry-on luggage. Travel documents, including a passport photocopy and photocopies of any bank cards, should also be packed in carry-on luggage.

When your student arrives on site, someone from the program might be at the airport to greet them and transport them to program housing, or your student might have been given detailed instructions on how to reach housing on their own.

Registering with the US Embassy

Finally, before traveling internationally, your student should register their travel with the US State Department using its Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP, step.state.gov/step/).

This simple online process takes 10–15 minutes and ensures that the US Embassy in your student's host country is aware of their presence and can better assist in case of an emergency. As part of the process, your student can elect to have updates on their host country sent by email.

Please make sure that your student has completed the STEP enrollment for their study abroad program, and encourage your student to register any independent travel done on weekends or over breaks in the STEP system.

Data File

You can help your student by putting together a data file of documents for reference while they are abroad. Items to include are:

- A copy of the acceptance letter.
- A photocopy of the passport data page and entry visa, if applicable.
- Photocopies of bank cards and information on bank accounts.
- Photocopies of any prescriptions and contact information for your student's physician.
- A copy of your student's flight confirmation.
- IWU insurance information and information on the study abroad program insurance, if applicable.
- Emergency Contact information for IWU and the study abroad program.
- Contact information for the US Embassy or Consulate nearest your student.

MONEY MATTERS

Options for Accessing Funds Overseas

Cash: Students should avoid carrying large sums of cash (either in USD or the host country currency), but if they do want to convert funds, the best exchange rates are usually at banks and the worst at exchange booths in tourist areas.

Travelers Checks work much like cash, but can be replaced if lost or stolen. However, they are less common than they used to be and fewer merchants accept them.

Debit cards and ATMs are the most common and convenient way to access cash while abroad.

Students on year-long programs can look into opening a **local bank account**, but in many locations and for shorter programs, this may not be possible.

Credit cards are essential in case of emergencies and are very good for large purchases; however, taking a cash advance on a credit card often comes with a very high fee.

In emergencies, you can **wire funds** internationally using companies like Western Union or MoneyGram.

Budgeting

The International Office helps students put together projected budgets for their time abroad. Those budgets include required costs, such as tuition, housing, meals, and transportation, as well as an estimate of funds for personal expenses—buying toiletries, doing laundry, going out with friends, shopping for souvenirs, and some sightseeing. However, this projected budget is just a rough guideline, and students who don't pay close attention to their spending habits can easily overspend.

One of the best things you can do to help prepare your student for their time abroad is to sit down and help create a **personal budget**. Many

students are unaware of what their current expenses are here in the US, so a good place to start is setting up a system to help your student begin tracking expenses before they go abroad.

From there, you and your student can start to generate a budget for personal expenses: how much money to set aside for day-to-day expenses, how much for socializing, how much for occasional travel, and so forth.

Encourage your student to think about the places they want to visit and activities they want to do—and then to undertake some research. Travel guides, for example, list prices for tourist sights and museums and note when they are open for free. And by paying a small fee for an International Student ID Card (ISIC), your student can get discounted rates at participating restaurants, on travel, and on various other services.

Money and Banking

If your student does not already have one, they should obtain a debit card, as ATMs are the most common and convenient way to access cash overseas. In addition, your student should have a credit card (Visa and MasterCard are the two most widely accepted) for use in an emergency.

With the rise of online banking, it is now much easier for your student to keep track of funds. Make sure that they have set up an online account and that you have some way to easily deposit funds, if necessary.

Before your student departs, make sure that they call their bank and credit card companies to let them know the student will be using their card overseas. If the student does not, the bank might close access to the account to prevent fraud.

Your student should also check the rates they will be charged for using their debit or credit cards overseas. For ATM withdrawals, most banks charge both a service fee, connected with using another bank's machine, and an international transaction fee, which is usually a

percentage of the transaction. There are banks and credit card companies that do not charge the international transaction fee, but most do—and knowing what the rates are will help you and your student budget.

We recommend that students convert about \$100, either through their bank or at the airport before they depart, so that they have enough money to cover basic purchases in the first few days overseas. We **do not** recommend that students take significant sums of cash with them abroad.

Finally, you will want to ensure that your student has made arrangements for any ongoing bills to be paid while they are abroad.

EXPECTATIONS AND GOAL SETTING

In the rush to complete paperwork, arrange travel, and take care of money matters, students too often neglect the more reflective aspects of their pre-departure preparations—and so this is an excellent place for you to step in to guide your student and to share in the experience.

Managing Your Expectations

Your student will have good days and bad days while abroad—just as they do at home. But study abroad can make the good seem great and the bad seem awful.

Please remember that this is a normal part of study abroad and that students do work through it. You can help by listening and being supportive.

If and when your student is struggling with some aspect of life in this new culture, remember that on-site staff are there to help. They can explain cultural difference, help your student strategize on ways to resolve problems, and provide concrete actions your student can take.

And, when circumstances merit it, they will step in to resolve problems—but their first course of action will be to empower your student to find their own solution.

Your student will have researched their study abroad destination as part of the application process, but the research shouldn't end there. Together, you and your student might look over

guides and maps to get a sense of the geography or city layout; or you could find books or articles about the culture and history that you can read and discuss; or you can explore the cuisine by going to a local restaurant—or, better yet, download some recipes and try cooking them at home together, since this is both less expensive than eating out and good training for the time abroad.

While you and your student are learning about the culture, history, and geography of their destination, you can also help them to create realistic expectations of what study abroad will be like. It is easy, as your student's excitement grows, for them to romanticize what their daily life abroad will be like.

We tell students that if they want to feel at home, they should stay at home. Life in their host country should be different—and challenging. Living standards vary from country to country, so your student shouldn't expect their housing to be the same as

what they have at home or at IWU. Food is a reflection of geography, history, and culture, and so they shouldn't expect to eat the same as they do at home. And while technology is changing the ways in which we all live and interact, not all places are as technologically advanced or have the same infrastructure as we do in the US. Help your student not only be aware of these differences, but encourage them to embrace the differences.

What's Up with Culture?

An excellent tool to help students learn about culture and cultural differences is the University of the Pacific's "What's Up With Culture?", a set of self-guided online modules

(www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/).

We encourage students to explore the site, but it can be a wonderful resource for families, as well.

Finally, you can help your student maximize their study abroad experience by ensuring they articulate some goals—academic, personal, and perhaps professional. The more concrete the goals, the better, and setting goals that require your student to stretch is good. Then strategize with your student on how they might achieve these goals. For example, if your student is studying a language and their ultimate goal is to become fluent, then they could push themselves to take classes with native speakers at the local university and speak only the local language with their host family. But they might do even more by not speaking English with other study abroad students and by seeking out a volunteer opportunity where they can use their language and build their resume.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

HEALTH MATTERS

Before going abroad, your student should have routine physical and dental examinations. If your student is under any medical treatment, taking prescription medications, or seeing a counselor, make sure that they talk with their caregivers about going abroad. Please also encourage your student to complete all medical information forms as fully and honestly as possible so that, in an emergency, we and our partners can better assist them.

Prescriptions

Students taking prescription medications should work with their doctor and insurance company to secure enough medication for the length of the program. Medications should be left in their original packaging and then packed in your student's carry-on luggage.

If your student does need to get a prescription refilled while abroad, they will likely need to see a local doctor and get a new prescription. Knowing the chemical name, not just the manufacturer's name, for any drugs they are taking can make this process easier (for example, Advil and Motrin are manufacturers' names for the drug *ibuprofen*), as can having a letter from their physician that includes a description of the condition for which the medication is prescribed and the dosage. Most countries restrict shipments of medications from abroad, so it is not a good idea for you to mail medications to your student. Most likely, your package will be delayed in customs and your student may be charged an import fee; or worse, the package will be confiscated.

Students with glasses or contacts should carry a written copy of their lens prescription and, if possible, take an extra pair of glasses or lenses.

Vaccinations

Depending on where your student is planning to study, they may need to get special immunizations. The [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) website](#) has a country-by-country list of required and recommended vaccinations.

Mental Health

Study abroad can be both physically and emotionally taxing, and so maintaining a healthy body and mind is important for students. Sometimes, students who are experiencing emotional, personal, or mental health problems look at study abroad as a solution—or at least as an escape. But the challenges of adjusting to a new environment and a new culture generally exacerbate whatever problems the student has. If your student is experiencing any emotional or mental health challenges, please make sure they address them before departing for their program.

And encourage your student to take proper care of themselves while abroad. Eating well, exercising, and getting enough sleep can make a huge difference in your student's frame of mind and ability to cope with the challenges of study abroad.

INSURANCE

We know that health and safety are among the foremost concerns parents have when students study abroad—and they are of primary importance to us as well.

For this reason, IWU has an **International Travel** insurance policy that covers all IWU students when they study abroad on approved programs. The coverage is automatic and comes at no additional cost to the students.

IWU's International Travel coverage is organized by the Educational & Institutional Insurance Administrators (EIIA) with travel assistance services provided by Generali Global Assistance. Study abroad participants are provided with an EIIA card and are asked to carry it with them as they travel.

To access any of this coverage, it is essential that students contact Generali Global Assistance, which organizes services for the EIIA policy, as soon as possible.

When you call, please be ready to provide:

- Your name, location, age, gender, and home address
- Your policy information (you are a part of the EIIA program)
- The telephone number from which you are calling and/or a number where Generali Global can reach you

To access General Global assistance,

- call +1 240 330-1551 (collect from outside the US) or email ops@gga-usa.com.

Remember, **you are a part of the EIIA program.**

Students using this policy will need to cover their expenses upfront then apply for reimbursement from the insurer. It is therefore important that students secure receipts for any medical expenses incurred abroad.

Please note that, because your student will still be registered as a full-time student at IWU, they will be required to carry health insurance. The Student Health Plan, obtained

IWU International Travel Insurance

At the time of this writing, coverage includes the following:

- \$100,000 medical accident and sickness coverage with \$0 deductible
- \$25,000 coverage for pre-existing conditions
- \$200,000 accidental death and dismemberment
- \$1,000,000 emergency medical evacuation
- \$300/day in expenses for emergency family travel (limited to \$5,000/incident)
- \$1,000,000 repatriation of remains
- \$100,000 security evacuation coverage
- \$100,000 natural disaster evacuation coverage
- coverage for personal sojourn travel (for pre-/post-program travel)

through the University, covers students year-round and worldwide. If you normally purchase this insurance, you should continue to do so.

If your student is covered by your personal insurance, you will want to explore what coverage, if any, it offers while they are overseas.

Program Insurance

Many of the affiliated programs with which IWU works require students to purchase a specific insurance plan through them. Not only will such a policy provide additional coverage, but because it is organized through the study abroad program, the on-site staff will be much better able to help if and when your student needs to use it.

SAFETY ABROAD

IWU and the programs with which we work take student health and safety very seriously. While we cannot guarantee a risk-free environment when a student studies abroad (or when a student studies on campus), we take great care to ensure that students are not placed in dangerous or potentially dangerous situations, that students receive adequate pre-departure and on-site orientations to prepare them for life in their new home, and that support mechanisms are in place to help students in case there is an emergency.

However, it is each student's duty as a study abroad participant to take responsibility for their own health and safety. While we all have fears about violent crime, unforeseeable disasters, and acts of terrorism, the reality is that students' safety abroad depends most on their own actions and decisions—just as it does in the US.

As such, we encourage students to do the following:

Become familiar with the US State Department's website (www.travel.state.gov)

- Read the Consular Information Sheet for
- their host country
- Register with the appropriate US Embassy using the State Department's STEP (Smart Traveler Enrollment Program) program.
- Review State Department Travel Advisories concerning the countries or region to which they may want to travel.

Be Alert

- Be alert to their surroundings and the people with whom they have contact.
- Be wary of people who seem overly friendly or interested in them.
- Learn which areas of town they should avoid.
- Be prepared for an emergency — have phone numbers of program contacts handy at all times and memorize the country's 911 equivalent.
- Know how to reach the police in the country in which they are studying.
- Have sufficient funds or a credit card on hand for emergencies — especially for purchasing a train or airline ticket, or for medical care.

The "Real" Danger Abroad

The greatest danger to your student's health and safety while abroad is...your student and the decisions they make.

Excessive alcohol consumption, inattention to surroundings, participating in dangerous activities, or generally not employing common sense are far more likely to cause health or safety problems than any real or perceived risks abroad.

Blend In

- Keep a low profile and try not to be conspicuous by dress, speech, or behavior. Do not draw attention either through expensive dress, personal accessories (cameras, radios, sunglasses, etc.), or careless behavior.
- Integrate as fully as possible into the local community.

Stay Informed and in Touch

- Keep informed through radio, TV, newspapers, and the Internet.
- Make sure the resident director, host family, and/or foreign university officials know about travel plans and have contact information. Avoid Theft
- Keep valuable items in a safe place—lock up valuables in hostel/hotel safe when touring a city.
- Do not take nonessential items such as expensive jewelry abroad.
- Do not keep documents and money in one suitcase or location; make copies and leave one set at home.
- Do not flash large amounts of money: carry small bills or credit/debit cards whenever possible.
- Carry a purse or wallet so that it cannot be easily taken, especially in public transportation and other crowded public places.
- Avoid situations and locations popularly identified with tourists/Americans.
- Avoid traveling or going out alone.
- Do not leave bags unattended (even briefly!) in an airport, bus, or train station.

Be Smart

- Avoid crowds, protest rallies, or other potentially volatile situations.
- Consume alcohol in a responsible and culturally appropriate fashion.
- Do not use illegal drugs.

Travel Assistance

The International Travel policy also comes with Traveler's Assistance, which can help with lost document (e.g., passport, tickets, credit cards) replacement, emergency cash, translation services, and travel information. The International Travel insurance also provides trip cancellation/trip interruption coverage (\$2000) for medical reasons and coverage for lost/stolen checked luggage (\$500); however, it does not cover trip cancellation/interruption for non-medical reasons, nor does it provide coverage for personal property in general.

Students are encouraged to visit the Generali Global Assistance/GardaWorld website (www.garda.com) to:

- find reminders of the insurance coverage limits;
- access information on your study abroad destination and other travel locations;
- search for information on visa and immunization requirements;

- find a local medical provider, find overseas drug names for common prescriptions, and search a multi-lingual medical phrasebook database to help you describe symptoms in another language;
- and much more.

AlertTraveler

AlertTraveler is mobile app that allows you access to country and city information as you travel, offers safety and security alerts to let you know of any events that could potentially impact you while abroad, and provides an instant and easy way for you to check in with IWU if there is a major incident where you are. It also allows us to reach out to you when there is an emergency, both to check that you are okay and to see if we can offer assistance.

One month before the start of your study abroad program, an AlertTraveler panel will appear in your abroad.iwu.edu home page. When the panel appears, click “Generate” to create your password. Then you will use your email address and generated password, as shown on this panel, to log in to the AlertTraveler mobile app, which you can download for free on the App Store and Google Play Store.

There are some very short instructional videos in you abroad.iwu.edu account as well, in the Learning Content section

WHILE ABROAD

ARRIVAL

You have helped your student plan and prepare for study abroad, and now they are on their way. When they arrive, they may be met by staff from the program who will help transport them to their housing. Or, they may have been given detailed directions on how to get to the housing themselves. In either case, there will be local staff available to help there are questions or problems.

In the first several days after arrival, your student will be participating in an **on-site orientation**. During this period, they will be introduced to other participants and program staff; become familiar with where they are living and where their classes will be; receive detailed health and safety information; likely get a tour of their host city and participate in some cultural activities; and more. **Because your student will be caught up in a whirlwind of activities, you may very well not hear from them until several days after arrival.** With all of the mandatory orientation activities and the chaos of setting in to a new home, your student may not have ready access to a phone or computer. Please be patient—and rest assured that if there is a problem, you will be contacted quickly.

HOUSING

As with so much of study abroad, housing varies from program to program. Your student may be living with a host family, in a university residence hall, or in an apartment with other study abroad students. They may eat some or all of their meals with a host family, or they may be required to cook for themselves.

Given that standards of living vary from country to country—and even within a country—your student should expect some basic differences from what they are used to at home or at IWU. In large metropolitan locations, like London or Tokyo, space is limited, so rooms are generally smaller and storage space may be restricted. Electrical systems, heating/cooling systems, and even plumbing can be very different, with limits on usage. In many countries, few households have Internet access, and cellular networks are less reliable. Your student may need time to adjust to these differences and may at first complain to you about them. Listen to them, be supportive, and remind your student that they chose to study abroad because they wanted to experience something different and challenging. If there is a serious problem, encourage your student to bring the matter to the attention of on-site staff, who can help them resolve the problem.

CLASSES ABROAD

Educational systems and pedagogical techniques abroad differ, sometimes in very significant ways. But learning about and adapting to a new educational system is part of the challenge (and fun) of study abroad.

In center-based programs, where your student is in class with students from other US institutions, the teaching style may be fairly similar, with small class sizes and a lot of group discussion. And the professors in center-based programs, while they may also teach at a local university, have experience working with US students. Even so, your student may find that they have to take more responsibility for learning required material, may need to be more active in seeking additional help outside of the classroom, and may find that their grade rests on fewer assignments that carry more weight.

If your student is taking classes at a local university, they will have greater access to a wide range of classes, access to more specialized coursework in their discipline, and the opportunity to study with local students their age. However, they will also be fully immersed in another country's educational system. Classes may be significantly larger than even the largest lecture class at IWU; the professors may rely heavily or exclusively on lectures; and the final grade may rest not on a series of assignments completed over the course of the semester, but on one or two exams at the end of the term or year that are meant to test students' overall comprehension and retention of information.

As your student adjusts to this new learning environment, please remember that on-site staff are there to support them and that by adjusting to this new system, they will grow in confidence, become a more flexible and better able to adapt when they enter the work force.

COMMUNICATION

Modern methods of communication and social media now mean that staying in touch with your student is very easy. Still, don't expect to hear from your student as much while they are abroad as you do now. Time differences, intermittent Internet access, and busy

A Note on Grades

IWU transfers all grades from study abroad, and they are factored into each student's cumulative GPA.

However, because IWU students are high achievers, they often focus too much on their grades, worrying that one low mark on their transcript will ruin their future plans.

You can help us by reminding your student that what matters is what they learn—and that they will learn far more through study abroad than any one grade can reflect.

We don't want students to neglect their studies while abroad, but at the same time, students need to take some academic risks to reap the greatest educational benefits.

schedules of classwork and cultural exploration all mean that your student may not call or email as much as you might like. In the end, though, this is a good thing: too much contact with friends and family back home can rob your student of the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in their host community.

Cell Phones

Many of our affiliated programs require that students have a cell phone while abroad. Whether or not the program requires one (or supplies one, in the case of the IWU London and IWU Spain Programs), we strongly recommend that your student have one for use in an emergency.

A common and low-cost option is for students to purchase a **pay-as-you-go cell phone** upon arrival. These types of phones are generally inexpensive, provide your student with a local phone number, and offer good rates for local calls and texts. Because students have to top up their phones, they can never inadvertently run up a large bill and are better able to track their phone expenses. With this options, students will often bring their own smart phone from home, set the phone to airplane mode, and use it whenever Wi-Fi is available.

Alternatively, you and your student might look into **renting an international phone** before departure. Companies like PicCell and Cellhire can mail a phone to your home. These rental phones will have an overseas number and can provide fairly good calling and messaging rates; however, they work on monthly contracts, and an inattentive student can run up a very large phone bill without realizing it.

However, if your student prefers to **take a phone from home**, they will need to make sure that the phone will work in their host country. If the phone will work overseas, your student should keep in mind that all calls—both back home and to local numbers—will be treated as international roaming calls and charged at high rates. You and your student may want to switch to an international calling plan, which will generally give you reasonable rates calling overseas, but poor local calling rates calling.

Finally, if your student has a smart phone that can be unlocked, they might **purchase a local SIM card**, which will give provide a local phone number and reasonable pay-as-you-go rates for calls, texting, and data. This is a good option for a student who wants to continue to use a smart phone abroad.

Skype, FaceTime, and Messaging Apps

VoIP (voice over Internet protocol) services, such as Google Meets, Skype, and FaceTime, allow students to make calls using the Internet and are an increasingly popular way for students to stay in touch with family and friends back home. If your student plans to take their own computer and knows that they will have regular Internet service, this might be an option to explore. Other popular communication programs are Viber and WhatsApp, which allow for free messaging when students have a WiFi connection.

Mail

Don't underestimate the importance of good old-fashioned mail. Your student may call or Skype you regularly and send messages by email and text, but there is something very special about receiving a handwritten letter or card from home. Your cards and letters might take up to two weeks to arrive, but that doesn't diminish their emotional value.

You might also want to send a care package to your student abroad—and sometimes students request a favorite item from the US. These, too, can be a great way of supporting your student, but be aware that mailing large packages internationally can be very expensive, can take weeks to arrive, may be held up in customs, and, depending on what is in the package, may result in an import tax that your student will need to pay.

CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

Every student who studies abroad goes through a period of cultural adjustment. Some students react strongly to the psychological disorientation most people experience when living for an extended period of time in a different culture. This disorientation, commonly known as **culture shock**, is normal, and your student will move through it.

Whether your student has been abroad before or this is their first time outside the United States, they will at some point hit a challenging cultural barrier. For some, the bout with culture shock is brief and hardly noticeable. For others, culture shock is something they have to deal with over a longer period.

Symptoms of Culture Shock

- Persistent homesickness
- Psychosomatic illnesses
- Persistent boredom
- Unprovoked fits of weeping
- Withdrawal
- Loss of the ability to work effectively
- Need for excessive sleep
- Hostility towards host nationals
- Compulsive eating
- Stereotyping of host nationals
- Compulsive drinking
- Family tension and conflict
- Irritability

In the end, though, by meeting this challenge, your student will emerge with greater self-confidence, independence, and maturity.

Stages of Cultural Adjustment

Initial Euphoria. Many students begin their sojourn abroad with great expectations and a positive mindset. At this point, anything new is intriguing and exciting, and the similarities stand out most. Your student may be impressed with how people everywhere are really very much alike. This period of euphoria may last only a few days or a few weeks, but doesn't last for long.

Irritation and Hostility (a.k.a. culture shock). Gradually, your student's focus will turn from the similarities to the differences, which suddenly seem to be everywhere, are troubling. Culture shock happens when the differences are narrowed down to a few of the most troubling and are then blown out of proportion. (For Americans, standards of cleanliness, attitudes toward punctuality, and the value of human life tend to loom especially large.)

During this stage, your student may experience acute distress and blame the host culture for the natural difficulties inherent in any cross-cultural encounter.

Not everyone will experience a severe case of culture shock, nor will all the symptoms be observed. Many people ride through culture shock relatively easily, only now and again experiencing the more serious reactions. On the other hand, if your student never finds themselves feeling uncomfortable, they may be insulating themselves too much from their host culture.

Gradual Adjustment. This adjustment may unfold so gradually that, at first, your student is unaware it is happening. Once they begin to orient themselves and are able to interpret

some of the subtle cultural clues, the culture will seem more familiar. Your student will become more comfortable in it and feel less isolated from it.

Adaptation or Biculturalism. Cultural adaptation will result in an ability to function in two cultures with confidence. Indeed, when your student returns home, you will likely see many of the customs, ways of doing and saying things, and personal attitudes to which they adapted while abroad.

TIPS FOR HELPING YOUR STUDENT

Cultural adjustment is a process, and for students who struggle more, the danger is that they will quit their study abroad experience — either literally by coming home (which happens rarely) or figuratively by shutting down—without giving themselves the time to adapt. Professionals on site and at IWU work hard to prepare students for this process and to help them adapt, but you can also help your student work through the rough patches.

We mentioned earlier that shortly after arrival your student will be swept up in a host of orientation activities. In fact, programs consciously try to keep students occupied in these early days as a means of helping them through any initial homesickness. We also mentioned that it may be several days after arrival before your student has time to call or email at any length. This means that, if your student is hit hard and fast by culture shock, your first lengthy interaction may be filled with complaints and disappointment. (Moreover, students are more likely in general to call home during low periods than highs.) Listening sympathetically and allowing your student to vent is one of the most useful things you can do: sometimes, all they need is to hear a familiar voice and to process their feelings verbally with someone with whom they feel comfortable.

Be sympathetic and responsive as your student shares their problems, but try not to emphasize the difficulties by asking for too many details, jumping to negative conclusions, or assigning blame. Encourage your student to find the humor in situations, when possible, and to find solutions to their problems with the help of local staff.

You can also gently push your student to focus on their goals and on the positive experiences they are having. Encourage them to talk about the simple things, like the new foods they like and their walk to class. Ask them to send you photos of their room or their favorite places. Sometimes, the newness and differences can be hard to articulate, so you might suggest topics. For example, you might say that you went shopping and were wondering if grocery stores are the same; or that hearing the birds in the backyard made you wonder what sort of animals are common where they are.

Encourage your student to seek out good company. While the early stages of making friends can be challenging (just as it can be at home), joining student groups, volunteering, and generally keeping busy will help your student create a new support network abroad. Remind them to eat well, get enough sleep, move about—and to laugh.

If your student responds to the challenges of culture shock by withdrawing—by socializing only with Americans, by rejecting local food and customs, by retreating to their room and spending much of their time talking with friends and family back home—she will only draw out the painful process of adapting.

***** Remember*****

If you have any serious concerns about your student's mental health, please contact IWU or program staff.

FAMILY VISITS

If you are fortunate enough to visit your student while they are abroad, please keep the following items in mind.

Some parents ask about accompanying their students abroad. You might want to help your student settle in at the start of the program, but this really isn't possible. The early days of your student's program will be filled with activities that they cannot miss. The first weeks are also central to the friendships your student will forge for the semester and are a critical time in terms

of building your student's self-confidence: they need the space and freedom in which to explore their new home, and to do so on their own.

Remember, too, that your student is participating in an academic program, and as such is expected to attend class regularly. Indeed, some programs have very strict attendance policies because of host country government mandates. It is natural that your student will want to be with you while you visit, so to avoid conflicts with coursework, consider scheduling your visit over holidays, during program breaks, or after the program ends. Keep in mind, though, that the final weeks of the program can be very stressful and busy for your student, as they study for finals and prepare for the return home.

Finally, one of the great pleasures study abroad students derive when family and friends visit comes from being able to act as tour guide and cultural expert. Your student will be better able to do this once they have spent significant time in their host country. And seeing the confidence and maturity with which your student is able to navigate their new home is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourselves.

Family Emergencies

If there is an emergency at home and you are having difficulty reaching your student, you can contact IWU or the program provider directly, and we will help connect you with your student.

Since your student will be far away from home for an extended period of time, it might be wise as a family to discuss the circumstances under which your student might want to come home, whether temporarily or permanently. If a family member is very ill or grandparents are very aged, such a discussion can be important.

This can be a difficult conversation to have, but it is easier to consider the options before travel rather than in the stress of the moment.

EMERGENCIES

As part of both the pre-departure and on-site orientations, your student will be given instructions on what to do in an emergency. These instructions include contacting on-site staff as quickly as possible, as they are the best situated to help students, whether with small problems or large crises.

On-site staff are trained professionals with experience helping students during an emergency. They regularly monitor local conditions and issue warnings to students, as necessary, and they have connections within the community that can provide additional help for your student.

If your student experiences a medical emergency, on-site staff will help ensure that they receive treatment. In the case of serious medical problems, IWU insurance does provide for travel by a family member to be with the student while they undergo treatment. IWU insurance also covers the repatriation of your student if it is deemed medically advisable for them to return to the US. In these circumstances, please work with the IWU International Office, as the insurer must make the travel arrangements.

IWU insurance also has provisions for security evacuation, should the political situation dictate such a precaution, and for evacuation in the event of a natural disaster. In these events, IWU will work with the on-site staff, the US Embassy, and our insurers, and will keep you informed throughout the process.

If your student contacts you in an emergency, remain calm and gather as much information as you can—where they are, what the problem is, who else was involved, when it happened, whether they or anyone else is in imminent danger, whether they have contacted the program or anyone else for assistance, how they can be reached. Once IWU has that information, we will work with on-site staff and others, as necessary, to address the situation.

COMING HOME

Before you know it, your student will be returning to the United States. But the study abroad experience doesn't end when your student steps off the plane, and both you and your student need to prepare for their re-entry into life back home.

Re-Entry: What to Expect

Expect change. Even if the study abroad program was relatively short, your student will come back different—often with more energy and enthusiasm, and with a greater interest in going abroad again.

They'll also come back with more confidence, more independence, and more maturity.

Expect that readjustment will take time. The longer your student was abroad, the longer it may take them to adapt to life at home. They may be reluctant to let go of habits and ways of living that they experienced abroad.

Expect comparisons. Your student has dedicated significant time and energy into learning about, understanding, adapting to a new culture.

When they come home, they will look at the US with fresh eyes. They may be more critical or questioning of the world, but this is not a rejection: it's a way of reconciling the two worlds in which they can now live.

REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

Just as it will take time for your student to adjust to life overseas, it will take time for them to adjust to life back in the United States. In fact, students generally go through a second round of cultural adjustment, this time experiencing **reverse culture shock**.

The basic stages of reverse culture shock are similar to the stages of cultural adjustment described above: an initial euphoria at being home, seeing family and friends, indulging in favorite foods, and sharing news, followed by a period of "homesickness" for the host culture, and then confusion, irritability, and possibly depression. Your student will slowly work their way through this stage, but you can make the transition home easier. You'll need a lot of patience, though.

Some of the challenges students face when they return home include the pace of life in the US, American consumerism, the difficulty in expressing the depth of their experiences, and dealing with how others respond to the ways in which the students have changed.

Suggestions on how you can help your student include actively listening—asking questions, showing interest, and giving your student the time to tell their stories at their own pace. Remember, though, that your student will struggle to find ways to capture just how transformative the experience was and so may respond to your questions with short answers. Be patient, and find ways to help your student tell their stories. Perhaps, as you are preparing dinner, you can ask them to tell you about their favorite meal; or you can buy them the materials to make a scrapbook and then ask them to talk about items as they put it together.

As your student struggles to reconnect with friends and family, remind them that they too have grown and changed. That doesn't mean they have grown apart from those they knew, just that for a period they have travelled another road. And encourage your student to stay in touch with friends they made while abroad.

Some students respond to the difficulties of cultural readjustment by compartmentalizing their study abroad experience and trying to “get back to normal.” It can be easier for the student—and sometimes for the family—to do this, but it ultimately doesn't help the student. Encourage your student to find ways to build on their experiences. Encourage them to share their stories with others, maybe through an organization on campus or in your community.

Alternatively, some students respond to the difficulties of re-entry by focusing on “how to get back.” For families, this can be particularly disconcerting: your student has just come home from a long absence and all they seem to want to do is leave again. Know that this is not a rejection of you or of the US, but a reaction born of discomfort. Rather than nipping their plans in the bud, enjoy their enthusiasm and help them strategize for the future. Whether anything comes of their plans, you are allowing them to explore newly discovered options.

And finally, be patient. Bear with the phrases like, “It's hard to explain” and “When I was in [host country].” Don't bristle if your student is critical of American habits or values. And don't be surprised if your student wants more freedom. Remember that they have discovered a new cache of self-confidence and maturity, and may have had a great deal more independence while abroad.

Thank You!

Study abroad is one of the most transformative experiences your student will have at college—
and possible in their life.

You've played an essential role in making study abroad possible and helping your student to get the
most from the opportunity, and we hope that in the end, you too will have benefitted.

We want to thank you for letting us be a part of this important time in your student's life.
