

A Parent's Guide for Study Abroad

Congratulations! Your student has decided to study abroad. Study abroad is a wonderful experience that gives individuals a chance to learn about themselves and the world around them.

In the global context of the 21st century, students who include first-hand experience with diverse cultures are better prepared to succeed as leaders in their chosen profession.

-President Dorothy Leland, Georgia College & State University

We encourage you to talk to your student about the learning experience he/she is preparing for. Part of the full study abroad experience is learning how to be self-sufficient and independent. We encourage parents to let the student take the responsibility. Students who take responsibility in preparing to study abroad generally have a better experience than students who let someone else do the preparing.

After returning from my year abroad, I asked my dad how he felt about my study abroad experience. He said "I was proud that you did everything on your own. There was no point in holding your hand as you prepared to go, seeing how I wasn't going with you to hold your hand while you were there."

-Lisa Hicks, Le Havre, France 2007-2008 academic year

❖ **Health and Safety**

- Talk to your student about checking his/her medical records so that all vaccinations and shots are up to date. The CDC website has a country-by-country list of all required and recommended immunizations. www.cdc.gov/travel
- Check out the World Health organization for health news from the United Nations. <http://www.who.int/en/>
- Health Insurance
 - For students going to our partner universities or on one of the summer study abroad programs led by GCSU basic benefits include:
 - Deductible \$0
 - Basic Medical \$100,000 at 100%
 - Emergency medical Reunion \$2,000
 - Medical Evacuation/Repatriation/ Return of Mortal Remains Combined limit of \$50,000
 - Contact the Study Abroad office for more information
 - For students participating in ISEP here is the link for the health insurance benefits. http://isep.org/students/Placed/health_insurance4.asp
 - Some countries might require additional medical coverage for students studying on exchange. Your student should read the host country handbook (ISEP) or institutional handbook (GCSU Partners) and talk to a study abroad advisor to see if additional coverage is required.
- Prescriptions- Talk to you student about bringing enough of any prescription medications to last the duration of the stay. It is advised that students bring a copy of any prescriptions (including glasses or contact lenses), in case a refill is

needed or the original gets lost. Prescriptions should be packed in carry on luggage in their original containers.

- Over the counter medications- Since many over the counter medications are more expensive overseas and may not come in the same brands, it is advised that students bring over the counter pain relievers, sinus and cold medicines, and medicines for indigestion and leave the medication in its original container.
- Tips for staying safe abroad- Bad situations are usually caused by bad decisions. Talk to your student about making smart choices especially involving sex, drugs, or alcohol. Students should be aware of drug and alcohol laws in the host country. It is advised that students not rent cars or ride motor bikes in foreign countries, because driving laws are different.

❖ **Money and Finances**

- Accessing funds- Talk to your student about how he/she will access funds. Make sure that your student has contacted his/her bank and credit card company about travel plans. Make sure that you or someone the student trusts has the ability to handle his/her finances while he/she is abroad. Some students seek out a power of attorney for their parents. This is not required, but may be practical.
- Budgeting- Talk to your student about budgeting. If you will be helping your student financially, discuss a budget. If your student is going for a semester or year long program the first month is usually the most expensive, just like when your student moved to college.
- Financial Aid- Talk to your student about his/her financial aid. Ask if he/she has talked with the financial aid office about his/her study abroad trip, signed all appropriate forms, and filed all the appropriate paperwork. Ask your student if his/her FAFSA form is on file and his/her HOPE scholarship application is up to date. www.fafsa.ed.gov www.gacollege411.org
<http://www.gcsu.edu/financialaid/>

❖ **Paperwork**

- Talk to your student about getting paperwork completed and turned in on time. Ultimately it is your student's responsibility to get this done. The less parents do for the student the better. **This is good practice for their time abroad.**
- Passport/Visa- Ask if he/she has applied for a passport http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738_2.html or a visa <http://www.embassy.org/> (if needed).
- Tickets- If airline tickets are not provided by the program, ask if your student has made travel arrangements yet. <http://www.studentuniverse.com/> and <http://www.statravel.com/> are great websites for cheap tickets. Ask your student if he/she knows how to get to the final destination. If train/bus tickets are needed it is advised to buy them in advance, when possible.

❖ **Staying in Touch**

- Email- Email is a great free way to stay in touch with your student. If you don't already have an email account, ask your student to help you set one up. You can exchange messages and pictures instantaneously.
- Cell Phones- Chances are if your student has a cell phone at home, he/she will want one for his/her semester or year long exchange. Your cell phone provider might offer plans for service abroad, but those plans are often expensive, and not

ideal for contacting people in the host country. Many U.S. cell phones are not compatible with overseas providers. Talk to your student about getting a cell phone in the host country. Many places offer prepaid minutes or contracts.

- Online instant messengers- Skype is a great way to stay in touch. It is an online instant messenger that can also be used for video calls (using webcams and a microphone). When both parties are online the voice/video call is free, but Skype can also be used to make phone calls. Using Skype, it costs about \$0.03 to call landlines and cell phones in the U.S. from most places in Europe.

<http://www.skype.com/>

- Windows Live Messenger also offers free video calling and instant messenger services.

❖ **Culture Shock and Reverse Culture Shock**

- Culture Shock- This is the period of adjustment when your student goes abroad. It can be divided up into different stages, and like anything else might be different for each individual. Students who go on shorter summer trips may only experience the first two stages.

- The Stages:

- Euphoria or the “honeymoon” stage- When your student first arrives in a country everything will be new and exciting. This stage might last a week or two.
- The second stage usually begins when the student encounters some frustrations with the host country. There might be linguistic difficulties, feelings of alienation, frustrations with everyday life etc., which upset the student. He/she may start to see differences between the home and host country as negative things. The student might experience:
 - Depression
 - Changes in appetite
 - Anger
 - Sadness
 - Feelings of incompetence
 - Fatigue
 - Homesickness

During this time period the student may talk to you about his/her frustrations. Try to remember that this is normal. Remind your student that it’s normal to be frustrated, and it will pass. Don’t panic if your student seems upset and frustrated. You may only hear about the negative experiences; this doesn’t mean that there aren’t positive experiences happening during this stage. Try to remember that he/she probably experienced similar feeling when he/she moved to college. At this stage, encourage your student to stay active, eat well, and get adequate rest. Encourage your student to avoid good/bad comparisons and focus on the better aspects of the experience.

- The third stage is the adjustment period. The student will start to feel comfortable in the new environment. The student gets used to

the new routine and the differences between the home and host culture.

- The next stage is integration, and is often referred to as “going native.” The longer a student spends abroad the more likely this stage will occur. At this point the student has adapted to his/her host country. The student has a sense of belonging in the host country.
- Reverse Culture Shock:
 - This is the last stage of culture shock, and usually the most unexpected part of the experience. Most students expect to experience the first stages of culture shock in the new environment, but many students are not prepared to have the same feelings of frustration, depression, alienation, etc. upon returning home. Students who spend long periods abroad may have a difficult time readjusting to life in the States again. Parents should be prepared for this, and try to be understanding of students’ frustrations.
 - Why reverse culture shock is difficult:
 - Relationships with friends and family at home may have changed.
 - Your student just left all his/her friends that were made while abroad. When your student left for study abroad, he/she probably made plans to come home and see friends and family again, but keeping in touch and visiting friends made while abroad is a bit more difficult.
 - Students who study abroad for long periods grow, and experience many great life changing events; it may be difficult for people who have never studied abroad to understand the experiences your student had.
 - Life at home might seem boring after traveling and experiencing new things every day.
 - The study abroad office offers a re-entry orientation and encourages students to take advantage of the counseling services available on campus. (<http://www.gcsu.edu/international/studyabroad/handbook/culturestress.htm>.)

❖ **Academics**

- A typical non-American university student:
 - Starts college later than most Americans (age brings greater maturity and responsibility).
 - Resides in an apartment or lives close enough to the university to stay at home (most places do not have dorms or campus housing).
 - Has completed “core” classes in high school, and starts studying for his/her major upon entering the university.
 - Has experienced the freedoms that many college freshmen experience, before starting college.
- Differences-
 - If your student is doing a semester or year long program, it is important to remember that the academic environment will be different from that of GCSU. Often students will just have a final exam or a final and a

midterm. It is unlikely that your student will have any “busy work.” Although many institutions abroad do not have attendance policies, it is still very important to go to classes.

- Your student may find that the university system in the host country is less “hands-on” than the system here at GCSU. Student services are down-played tremendously.
- Summer programs are usually intense and more “hands-on learning” than a typical class at GCSU.
- Your student should work with his/her academic advisor and the study abroad office before and after he/she leaves to make sure that courses will count towards his/her major or minor. The student should make sure that he/she is still on track to graduate on time.

❖ **Packing**

- If you help your student pack here are some packing tips:
 - Remember less is better - airlines have weight restrictions, and traveling with heavy bags can be exhausting.
 - Pack weather appropriate clothing and shoes.
 - Female students should remember that many parts of the world dress more conservatively than in the States.
 - Pack enough prescription and over the counter medications to last the duration of the trip and keep them stored in the original container. The CDC has put together a list of things for travelers to remember to pack. <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/yellowBookCh2-HealthKit.aspx>
 - Bring copies of any prescriptions- including those for glasses or contact lenses.
 - Make copies of all important documents. Pack the copies in a separate bag from the original and leave a set of copies at home.

❖ **Arrival**

- Many students who do a semester or year exchange might have to stay in a hotel or hostel for the first few nights while lodging is acquired. Ask your student if he/she has a place to stay when he/she arrives. Don't panic if you don't hear from your student in the first couple of days. Remember: “No news is good news.” Your student may have every intention of phoning you immediately upon arrival, but may be so busy that s/he doesn't have time to call. Additionally, the student may not yet have figured out how to access a very different telephone system.

❖ **Visiting**

- If you plan on visiting your student while he/she is abroad, it is recommended that you plan any trips towards the end of his/her stay or after classes have finished. It is important for your student to get adjusted to his/her life abroad in the beginning. A visit towards the end of his/her stay means that your student will be the perfect free tour guide. He/she will have a chance to master the language, the public transportation system, etc. and he/she will be excited to show you around.