

Family Guide for Study Abroad



Office of Study Abroad and Outreach
Center for International Studies
Western Illinois University



Office of Study Abroad
& Outreach



WESTERN
ILLINOIS
UNIVERSITY

Office of Study Abroad

Kim McDaniel, Academic Adviser for Faculty-led Study Abroad Programs

KD-McDaniel@wiu.edu

Ehren Kuzekov, Academic Adviser for Individual Study Abroad Programs

EM-Kuzekov@wiu.edu

Dawn Gray, Office Support Specialist

studyabroad@wiu.edu

Katie Effertz, Graduate Assistant

K-Effertz@wiu.edu

Office of Study Abroad,, Center for International Studies
Western Illinois University
Horrabin Hall 08, 1 University Circle
Macomb, IL 61455-1390

Phone: (309) 298-2504

Fax: (309) 298-2405

E-mail: StudyAbroad@wiu.edu

Web: www.wiu.edu/studyabroad

Office Hours: Monday-Friday, 8 AM-4:30 PM

**In case of an emergency after office hours, contact the Office of Public Safety:
phone (309) 298 1949 or fax (309) 298 2884.**

Revised March 2015

The Family Guide for Study Abroad has been written to help you understand the process your student is going through to be prepared for his/her study abroad experience. It is our hope that this Guide will enable you to be an effective supporter of the student's study abroad experience. It can answer some of the questions that may arise during the time abroad.

Table of contents

Part 1 - The importance of study abroad ... Page 2

A sense of purpose • Cultural differences • Preparing for cultural differences • Culture shock • Coming home again

Part 2 - Preparing for departure Page 6

Checklist

Passport • Student visa • Make travel plans • Supply the Office of Study Abroad and Outreach with copies of passport, visa, and flight itinerary • Mandatory pre-departure meeting(s) • Items to take care of before leaving WIU • Make financial arrangements • Packing • Health insurance and health information • Familiarize yourself with the host country • Set up a communication plan

Part 3 - What to do while abroad..... Page 14

Checklist

Carry appropriate documents • Confirm safe arrival • Send class registration • Maintain academic records • Be aware of stress • Set high standards for personal behavior • Become a keen observer • Exercise appropriate caution

Part 4 - Returning home Page 17

Checklist

Have the transcript sent to the WIU Study Abroad Adviser • Pay all debts before departure • Retain class work • Evaluate the experience • Be aware of reverse culture shock • Share the international experience!

Part 5 - Miscellaneous information Page 19

Checklist

Important academic dates • The Office of Study Abroad and Outreach • Non-discrimination statement • Important addresses in the U.S. • Important addresses abroad

Part 1 - The importance of study abroad

In their report "Global Competence and National Needs" (November 2005) on the importance of study abroad, the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program notes the following:

"On the international stage, what nations don't know can hurt them. Whether the region is Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, or the Middle East, whether the issue involves diplomacy, foreign affairs, national security or commerce and finance - what nations do not know exacts a heavy toll. The stakes involved in study abroad are that simple, that straightforward, and that important. "

With regard to the educational value of study abroad, the Commission further states that: "Study abroad is a powerful educational tool. Research shows that students who study abroad still use a language other than English on a regular basis years after they return to the United States. Overwhelming numbers of graduates who have studied abroad agree that the experience enhanced their interest in academic work, helped them acquire important career 'skill sets', and continued for decades to influence their perspective on world events. "

An extended period abroad offers a great way to gain new experiences, experiences that are important for personal development as well as for one's professional future. By living abroad, your family member will learn to adapt to a new culture, and you will learn with him/her.

A sense of purpose

Before the student leaves, he/she should have worked out some things about his/her purpose for participating in study abroad. Going abroad is a great opportunity, but travel cannot -and should not- be the only reason. This trip is primarily a unique academic experience, which will be greatly enhanced by its international location. To help 'anchor' the purpose and value of this trip, ask your student some basic questions that will create greater self-awareness.

- Who are you? (What are your personal beliefs and attitudes at this point?)
- Where do you come from? (What do you believe as an American?)
- Where are you going? (What do you know about foreign customs, behaviors, and beliefs?)
- How flexible are you? (What beliefs are subject to revision or change? Which ones are not?)
- How valid are your reasons for going? (To internationalize your education? To learn a foreign language? To learn about a foreign culture? To sightsee? To 'escape' from something/someone in the United States?)

This list is by no means complete; you can discuss any question. The point is to take a moment to reflect on some important issues that will strengthen your student's self-awareness and better focus his/her sense of purpose.

Cultural differences

We are surrounded by elements in our own culture that influence who we are and how we deal with the world around us. Since we have grown up in our culture and its elements, we are at ease. Our perceptions have been shaped by the experiences we have had in our own culture. When we go to another country, other values are applied, and we lose our guiding principles for the little things in daily life. This may result in feeling insecure.

Every culture is different from the one we know at home in the United States, even if it is a western country. Sometimes adaptation to a western country is more difficult than learning the ways of a completely different culture because the differences are not that obvious. Take the simple gesture of greeting. In France, for example, men generally shake hands with other men but kiss the cheeks of women in greeting. Women, on the other hand, usually kiss the cheeks of both men and other women. French people use this greeting if they know each other well or if they are introducing a new person (your student) to their friends. In that case, he/she would respond in kind. Now, the question becomes, how often do they kiss? Generally it is twice, a kiss on each cheek, but this can vary from region to region. And sometimes, two men who are closely related or very good friends kiss each other in greeting. Think about the way you greet people in the United States. You shake hands, right? Well, even that gesture can differ greatly around the globe. Asian people tend not to squeeze your hand very hard, while the Dutch believe in a firm grip! Your student will experience a multitude of subtle cultural differences like these every day.

When your student encounters a different way of life in a new environment abroad, it can be a challenge for him/her to adapt to new social, economic, and educational systems as well as unfamiliar food, climate, and language. However, it will make him/her a more confident, empathetic person with a greater respect for different cultures, including our own. Cultural adjustment will enhance his/her problem-solving abilities by encouraging greater flexibility and initiative. These are important characteristics that your family member will incorporate; not only into daily life, but also into later professional life, and thus will make him/her a more highly competitive job candidate.

Preparing for cultural differences

Work at erasing stereotypes about the host country before your student departs. A good thing to do before departure is to read intensively, watch some documentaries, and face the prejudices your family may have concerning that country. If your family has a positive image of the chosen country, the separation from home and the arrival in the new environment will be easier for your student.

Give yourself and your student some perspective; make a list of some books that you think provide insight into the mind-frame of the people in the designated culture. Read guidebooks, newspapers (both international and from the specific country), magazines, novels, plays, and political analyses. Several of these can be found on-line.

As a practical tip, give the student something familiar to take along; something he/she cares about or is a reminder of home, which will make him/her feel more at ease from the very beginning. Examples could be photographs and/or calendars with birthdays noted.

Culture shock

Culture shock is a psychological, normal reaction to the differences we encounter in a foreign country. It is only one step in the adaptation process, but it is an important one. So that you understand better what your student is going through, we have listed some of the emotions study abroad students usually work through:

- being fascinated with the new impressions they are experiencing;
- feeling uneasy within the new culture and experiencing a feeling of not belonging to it;
- rejecting the foreign culture and its people;
- learning to decipher all the new behaviors and customs (and thus adapting to them);
- finally, accepting and -most importantly- enjoying the new culture.

You may receive a deluge of calls, letters, and e-mails from your student, especially during the holidays. This is normal, so don't be discouraged or even alarmed. He/she is simply overwhelmed with the new experiences and the foreign culture, and not everyone can react with ease. Be very patient, sympathetic, and supportive in helping him/her understand that these feelings of homesickness and irritation are normal and temporary. Help your student understand that this is something all travelers go through, and that it will ultimately make him/her a stronger person. Remind your student of his/her long-term goals and point out that he/she has already 'won' by the simple fact of having gone to a foreign country.

The personal reactions your student shows to these emotions will influence his/her way of approaching the people in the country. The better prepared he/she is when leaving home, the more positive the reaction will be.

Coming home again

You might think that coming home is the easiest part of this experience. However, it surprises students and parents alike to learn that the process of re-integration and readjustment to the United States, their families, and their friends is just as challenging as the initial process of integration in the foreign culture.

Often called 'reverse culture shock', the phenomenon occurs because your student will have changed in many ways; he/she will be more independent and have had experiences that people around him/her did not have. It can be very frustrating for your student to sense that he/she has changed and evolved, while the people around him/her have changed little or not at all. Everyone at home expects the student to be the same person he/she was before leaving, with the same interests, goals, and values. But the study abroad experience will have given him/her new opportunities to focus on goals, which may no longer be in line with the familiar surroundings.

In addition, your student may be anxious to see old friends. Be prepared if he/she cannot spare you as much time for this long-awaited reunion as you have anticipated. Be patient; this is only temporary. As the original culture shock passed with patience and support, this one will too. Be sympathetic and do expect it!



Part 2 - Preparing for departure

Checklist of required steps by your family member

- 1. Passport
- 2. Student visa (if applicable)
- 3. Travel plans
- 4. Copies of passport, visa and flight itinerary
- 5. Mandatory pre-departure meeting(s)
- 6. Items to take care of before leaving WIU
- 7. Financial arrangements
- 8. Packing
- 9. Health insurance and health information
- 10. Familiarizing yourself with host country
- 11. Set up a communication plan

1. Passport

If the student already has a passport, he/she needs to make sure it will still be valid: most foreign countries require passports to be valid for six months after the term abroad. If your student needs to apply for one, he/she should either go to the County Courthouse or to the Post Office. Your student can also have passport photos taken on campus in the Visual Production Center in Tillman Hall. Detailed information about the application process and requirements can be found in the student's acceptance packet, as well as on the U.S. State Department website: <http://travel.state.gov/passport>.

Passport processing time may take 6-8 weeks, so remind your student to not put it off. Keep in mind that if the program requires a student visa, he/she will need a passport for the visa application. Always check the U.S. State Department website for current waiting times. Expedited preparation is possible, but for an extra charge. We would also advise at least one parent/guardian to make sure they have an up to date passport in the event that a visit to the student's study abroad site is necessary.

2. Student visa

The student is responsible for finding out if a visa is needed. Make sure your student knows whether he/she must apply for the visa him/herself or whether the program provider will request it. Also, find out whether the visa needs to be obtained in the U.S., or whether it can be done after your student arrives in the host country. Questions about visas can be directed to the Study Abroad advisor and we will do our best to assist your student with the visa application process.

Visas are issued by the host country (Consulate or Embassy). Each country has different rules and fees. Most likely, a letter of acceptance from the foreign institution/program provider is needed. If required by the Consulate/Embassy, the WIU Office of Study Abroad and Outreach will also provide your student with a letter stating that the student is registered at WIU and will return here after their term abroad.

Some countries require a medical examination (some even require an AIDS test). Also, fees and processing times (from a week to three months) vary widely.

If your student is heading to a country that requires him/her to send the passport to their Consulate/Embassy in order to obtain the student visa, the process could easily take two or three weeks. Therefore, the passport must be ordered early enough so your family member can have everything in order before departure day. Contact the nearest consulate of the host country for precise information. To find the nearest embassy or consulate of the host country, visit www.embassyworld.org.

3. Travel plans

Before booking, your student must know exactly when the host institution/program provider wants him/her to arrive, and when he/she should leave after the study abroad term. Some program providers (like AIFS or ISA) give the option of having discounted (group) airfare as part of the program fee.

If the student has to arrange his/her own travel, it is worthwhile to do some research on the many travel websites. A short list of these can be found on page 13. Your student may also want to check the airlines' websites directly, or consult a local travel agent. Tickets should be purchased as early as possible because rates usually rise the closer one gets to the departure date. Also, your student should know whether he/she will be met at the airport, and/or any arrival instructions the host institution may have for him/her.

4. Copies of passport, visa and flight itinerary

The Study Abroad Adviser needs the following information to complete the student's file: (1) a copy of the passport; (2) a copy of the visa, if required; and (3) a copy of the student's travel itinerary including travel date, departure information, flight number(s), etc. We will keep this information on file.

5. Mandatory pre-departure meeting(s)

The Office of Study Abroad will announce one or more MANDATORY pre-departure meetings. It is very important for students to attend these meetings, so that they are well prepared for their study abroad experience. The Office of Study Abroad and Outreach staff is limited and cannot instruct each student individually.

Failure to attend the meeting(s) or make appropriate alternative arrangements will result in the postponement or possible cancellation of participation in the study abroad program.

The Office of Study Abroad and Outreach will also offer a pre-departure session for any interested parents/guardians. Student and parent/guardian pre-departure registration is on the same form, so you should coordinate with your student to register for the session.

6. Items to take care of before leaving WIU

Before your student leaves WIU for his/her study abroad experience, remind them to do the following:

- If he/she lives in a residence hall and is studying abroad during the second semester, go to University Housing and Dining (located in Seal Hall) and cancel the residence hall contract. Study abroad is an acceptable reason and will not incur a contract breakage penalty. At the same time, the student should find out what he/she needs to do to reserve space upon return.
- Clear all charges with Billing and Receivables. The Study Abroad Adviser cannot register the student or update his/her foreign registration if there is a hold or any other financial encumbrance on your student's account.
- The annual renewal for financial aid comes every year starting in January. If your student will be abroad in January and wants to renew, a visit to the Financial Aid Office prior to leaving campus is required. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for the following year will be available in December. If your student fails to pick up a copy, he/she can renew the FAFSA application via the WIU web site: www.fa.wiu.edu. If access to the web while abroad is impossible, he/she can send a request letter directly to Financial Aid, Western Illinois University, 1 University Circle, Macomb, Illinois 61455-1390 USA, and a FAFSA will be sent to him/her.
- Have your student take along a copy of his/her study abroad registration, to remember how he/she is registered at WIU. After completing registration abroad, he/she should compare it with the original registration at WIU. The Study Abroad Adviser needs to be informed of any registration changes.

It is important that you and your student communicate with WIU personnel regularly. This can correct issues before they become problems and ensure a successful study abroad experience.

7. Financial arrangements

If you are paying for your student's study abroad experience in any way, you and he/she may want to establish a budget clearly before departure. Determine what constitutes an emergency. How much traveling beyond the host city/country do you consider acceptable?

Moving money across international boundaries can be complex. Commonly used financial arrangements include:

Debit and credit cards

Electronic banking is becoming increasingly desirable and popular around the world. More and more students are going abroad with credit cards, debit cards, or a combination of both. The student will need a personal U.S. account to use a card to obtain cash from foreign ATMs. Your student must be the primary cardholder to use the ATM card abroad.

The student needs to check with his/her bank to see if a) he/she can use the debit card in a foreign ATM, and b) if their bank is willing to waive the fees for using an ATM other than their own. Be aware that

credit cards may not be as widely accepted in the host country as they are in the U.S., so your student may find him/herself using an ATM more often than here. Also, the credit card company may charge a conversion fee on international transactions. Researching different U.S. banks and credit card company policies can pay off.

Remind your student to let the bank and credit card company know when and where he/she will study abroad, in addition to any known outside travel plans. They will be less likely to block the card(s) for security reasons, if notified of any travel plans.

Cash

Your student may want to take a small amount of cash (in the foreign currency and some U.S. Dollars), just to get him/her through the first couple of days. This will give him/her time to locate any ATMs, and helps avoid problems such as banks being closed for a national holiday or the weekend.

Electronic transfer of funds

Your student should plan to open a temporary or student account in a host country bank, if he/she will study abroad for an entire academic year. This will allow for the electronic transfer of funds. In addition, having a local account will be more convenient; if your student is in remote areas, a local account may be accepted before a credit card, debit card, or traveler's checks. Make sure your student asks his/her U.S. bank about wire transfer policies and any possible fees.

Other financial arrangements include the following:

Joint checking account or power of attorney

If your student keeps a U.S. checking account, he/she needs someone (a parent or a trusted friend) to have power of attorney of this account, so as to make deposits or arrange fund transfer. Your student could also make you or a trusted friend or family member co-owner of his/her personal account while abroad.

Processing of financial aid

Your student should make detailed financial plans if expecting financial aid to help fund the study abroad experience. Financial aid is received at the beginning of WIU terms, and your student may already be abroad. The aid is deposited into the WIU student account. After appropriate WIU charges have been subtracted, the remainder will be directly deposited in the student's bank account. Make sure your student has set up Direct Deposit Authorization (DDA). For more information about financial aid, visit www.fa.wiu.edu.

8. Packing

Luggage

There are a variety of different luggage allowances on transatlantic flights. Amount and weight requirements vary by airline. Your student should contact the airline to confirm their luggage policies. The Travel & Safety Administration (TSA) has implemented a number of restrictions on items allowed through airport security. Visit their website (www.tsa.gov), to find the most current 'restricted and prohibited items' list.

Packing Tips

What goes into the student's suitcases is a personal decision. However, here are some tips and things you should check on as a parent. Make sure the following items are carried on the plane in either a **purse or carry-on luggage**:

- essential documents (passport, visa, etc.)
- cash, credit/debit card(s)
- ticket
- small toiletry items such as deodorant and toothpaste
- insurance cards
- medications in original containers

Make sure that your student leaves a copy of their passport, visa and plane ticket, as well as a list of debit/credit card numbers and traveler's checks' serial numbers with you for safekeeping.

9. Health insurance and health information

Health needs are often the biggest concern parents have when their student goes abroad. However, in most cases, there is no need for concern: in many countries, normal medical services are as good as (or better than) they are in the United States.

The Office of Study Abroad and Outreach requires that each student obtains either WIU Student Health Insurance or Patriot Medical Insurance through the International Medical Group (IMG) for the term he/she participates in a study abroad program. We recommend the student to sign up for the Patriot Medical Insurance if he/she normally waives out of WIU Student Health Insurance. These are the only two types of health insurance the Office of Study Abroad and Outreach accepts for our programs. Please also keep in mind that if your student is participating on an exchange or affiliate program, there may also be health insurance requirements through our study abroad partners.

It is important to address the following before your student leaves:

Identify health needs

Health needs must be shared with the Study Abroad Adviser when applying for a program. Any known allergies, disabilities, treatments, and medical needs must be mentioned, so that arrangements can be made. Resources and services vary widely by country and region; the Study Abroad Adviser can be of assistance in making reasonable arrangements.

Check health advisories

Your student should find out about immunization requirements and recommendations for the host country and check on any regional health or medical advisories. Ask questions such as:

- What illnesses are endemic to the region?
- What precautions are recommended to avoid sexually transmitted diseases?
- What are the customs, beliefs, and laws of the host country concerning sexual behavior and the use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs?
- How safe for consumption is the public water supply in the host country?
- What laws govern the import of medications and contraceptives?

Answers to many of these questions can be obtained from:

- Your student's personal health care provider
- Beu Health Center (phone 298-1888)
- McDonough County Health Department (phone 837-9951—call at least two weeks in advance)
- Center for Disease Control & Prevention (www.cdc.gov/travel)
- State Department Overseas Citizens Emergency Center (travel.state.gov)
- Mobility International for travelers with disabilities (www.miusa.org)

Assess emotional health and lifestyle at home

By going abroad, students will not leave any personal problems behind; they might even be worsened by being away from a familiar environment. Please make certain that your student assesses his/her own health and behavior patterns. If your student has certain fears or phobias, they should be confronted before he/she leaves home. However, other lifestyle tendencies may be less obvious. Travel may increase rather than reduce tendencies your student may have, and could lead to a crisis while away from home.

Pack a medical kit

Your student should travel with an emergency kit with items such as:

- band-aids
- sunscreen and sunburn ointment
- anti-diarrhea medication
- anti-bacterial ointment
- pain reliever
- any prescription medications

Prepare for airport and border security

While carrying prescription drugs, the student must be aware that customs officials are looking for illegal drugs. They should carry the prescription from their doctor and keep the medication in the original containers. Your student should be prepared for and be patient with airport security measures; the procedures are for his/her protection. For up-to-date security information, visit the Transportation Security Administration at www.tsa.gov.

10. Familiarize yourself with the host country

Travel publications

A good guidebook provides essential information about transportation, accommodation, cultural and historical background, sightseeing information, health and safety precautions, etc. You and your student can hold down unnecessary costs by purchasing tourism guides available at most bookstores. Several publications cater to students on limited budgets by featuring lists of inexpensive hotels and restaurants.

Legal matters

Laws differ from country to country, and your student should be aware of differences. Knowing the host country restrictions can help prevent problems. While abroad, your family member is still a WIU student and a representative of the university, and must adhere to the WIU Student Code of Conduct.

11. Set up a communication plan

Talk to your student to figure out a plan for communicating. He/she may be far away from home for an extended period of time, so it is important to discuss with them what to do in case of a family emergency. This should include what to do if a family member becomes ill or dies, or if your student is involved in an accident or gets severely ill.

Although you may want to set up a specific day/time to call, both parties should be aware that events may occur to make that phone call impossible (a train delay, unavailability of an international phone line, etc.). Often, e-mailing is cheaper and more convenient.

Useful Websites

U.S. Department of State <http://travel.state.gov>

Bureau of Consular Affairs • passport information • travel safety for students • services and information for American citizens abroad • how Consular officers can help in an emergency • important telephone numbers • links to U.S. Embassies and Consulates worldwide • American citizens services and crisis management

Airport information Airline phone number directory: www.travel-watch.com/airphones.htm
Airport locator: www.loglink.com/airports.asp

Currency converters Oanda: www.oanda.com/converter/classic
Xenon Labs: www.xe.com/ucc

Date, time, weather Date and time anywhere: www.timeanddate.com
Weather: www.weather.com - click on 'World'

Travel Governments of the world: www.gksoft.com/govt/en/world.html
Countries of the world: www.infoplease.com/countries.html
STA Travel: www.statravel.com
AESU: www.aesu.com
Thomas Cook: www.thomascook.com
Student Universe: www.studentuniverse.com
Sidestep: www.sidestep.com
Kayak: www.kayak.com
Ryan Air: www.ryanair.com
EasyJet: www.easyjet.com

Health Center for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/travel
World Health Organization: www.who.int/ith
IMG Patriot Health Insurance: <http://www.imglobal.com/en/img-insurance/travel-medical-insurance/patriot-travel-medical-insurance.aspx>

Part 3 - What to do while abroad

Checklist of required steps by your student

- 1. Carry appropriate documents
- 2. Confirm safe arrival within a week
- 3. Send actual class registration within 2-3 weeks
- 4. Maintain academic records
- 5. Be aware of stress
- 6. Set high standards for personal behavior
- 7. Become a keen observer
- 8. Exercise appropriate caution

1. Carry appropriate documents

When crossing international borders, travelers are required to produce their passports. In addition, some countries will require more information in order to allow entrance on a student visa. ***It is your student's responsibility to know which documents will be required when entering the foreign country.*** They may include:

- *Student visa* - most countries require a student visa before arrival.
- *Letter of admission* - some countries will issue a student visa at the border upon production of the official admission letter from the host institution.
- *Financial affidavit* - your student may be required to present a bank statement or notarized form showing that he/she has sufficient funds for the term abroad.

The WIU Office of Study Abroad and Outreach will also provide the student with a letter confirming their registration at WIU. Your student may have to produce this letter when entering the host country.

2. Confirm safe arrival

We ask our study abroad participants to let us know that they have arrived safely. Within a week of arrival or as soon as possible, your family member must send the foreign address and phone number to his/her Study Abroad Adviser.

3. Send actual class registration within 2-3 weeks

As soon as the student registers abroad, he/she has to confirm registration with his/her WIU Study Abroad Adviser. The direct credit system used for study abroad at WIU depends on parallel registrations at home and abroad. It is *your student's responsibility* to inform the Study Abroad Adviser of his/her registration as soon as possible!

4. Maintain academic records

Even though your student is directly registered for pre-approved study abroad classes, occasionally there are questions, or he/she may want to petition for special credit for a class upon return from abroad. Therefore, students should always keep all records from abroad: syllabi, reading lists, reports, papers, notes, journals, essays, etc.

Study abroad is an exciting adventure, but it is also an academic challenge that will be reflected in the student's WIU grades when the semester is completed. The foreign grades will count as WIU grades (after conversion), and will be calculated into the cumulative GPA.

5. Be aware of stress

Jet lag

Jet lag occurs when the time clock changes faster than the 'body' clock. It results in extreme tiredness and the overwhelming desire to fall asleep when you want to stay awake, and to remain alert when you want to sleep. The condition can persist for up to a week after arrival. Your student can help his/her body adjust during this period by eating nutritious food, drinking plenty of non-alcoholic fluids, trying to adapt to the local daily routine immediately, and getting plenty of rest.

Culture shock

As we have said before, culture shock is a condition that strikes almost everyone who leaves home for an extended time period, no matter how well prepared they are. Studies have revealed that there is a pattern to culture shock: it begins as initial exuberance, followed by depression and, eventually, equilibrium. It is during the depression period (this can be viewed as homesickness) that your student must be on guard and not react foolishly or improperly. Therefore, remind him/her that this is part of a natural pattern and that it will pass more quickly if he/she accepts the differences and overcomes the temptation to be critical and judgmental of the host culture.

6. Set high standards for personal behavior

Your student has unique status as a representative of WIU and the United States. While abroad, he/she is never completely anonymous, even though he/she does not know anyone. Like it or not, people label other people until they get to know them. Stereotyping is universal. This means that people are going to stereotype your student initially. Until they get to know him/her, he/she is *just* an 'American' in their mind. Unfortunately, Americans can be typecast because the Hollywood movie culture is so widespread.

Also, the average American tourist, which may be the only Americans that people in other countries have ever observed, may not be the best example of the typical American. Everything your student does will be compared with someone's stereotype, so remind your student to be a diplomat at all times. Now is the time to correct false stereotypes of Americans.

7. Become a keen observer

This is a great opportunity for your student to become an 'expert' on the host culture by immersing him/herself in the foreign culture and recording his/her thoughts. They will make friends with others if they make a conscious effort to become familiar with and learn about the host culture.

Educational travel should be part of your student's study abroad experience, and extensive cultural knowledge can become a great asset later. You are a resource that can help your student live that experience through conversations and by keeping letters and e-mails for a later recollection of their time abroad.

8. Exercise appropriate caution

For your student, keen observation is for his/her own protection. He/she should be careful at all times while abroad. Because his/her physical and emotional safety are involved, he/she should not take foolish risks.

It is important that your student always carry the address/phone number of the U.S. embassy and their foreign address. Remind them that they are experiencing the host country's culture, not taking American culture there. This means not wearing a lot of American defined clothing (e.g., American flag t-shirts).

Your student should be especially cautious about sexual behavior and practices. He/she should observe the host culture carefully, as sexual behavior varies widely from country to country. If they become intimate with someone, they should practice caution. Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) know no borders, and some, like AIDS and Human Papilloma Virus (Genital Warts), are life-threatening.



Part 4 - Returning home

Checklist of required steps by your family member

- 1. Have the transcript sent to the WIU Study Abroad Adviser
- 2. Pay all debts before departure
- 3. Retain class work
- 4. Evaluate the experience
- 5. Be aware of reverse culture shock
- 6. Share the international experience!

1. Have the transcript sent to the WIU Study Abroad Adviser

The official transcript/grade report should be sent to:

*Office of Study Abroad and Outreach
Center for International Studies
Western Illinois University
Horrabin Hall 08, 1 University Circle
Macomb, Illinois 61455-1390
USA*

Incompletes

Your student's grades will appear as 'I's (Incompletes) and an 'S' for OVST at zero credit until the host institution transcript has been received. This will be after the WIU semester ends. Therefore, do not be alarmed if your student receives a letter from Financial Aid and the Registrar's Office reporting incomplete grades. These will be cleared once the official foreign transcript has been received (this may take up to three months).

2. Pay all debts before departure

A few students have inadvertently left unpaid bills, such as library fines, etc., at their host institutions. As a result, their grade report was held until they sent a check back to the host institution to clear the foreign debt. **Students are responsible for all study abroad expenses.**

All institutions function the same way: unpaid bills mean no transcript, and no transcript means no WIU credit until the student pays any debt. In addition, WIU has the authority to delay further registration at WIU until these bills are paid. If Incompletes are not replaced with grades, they will eventually lapse to failing grades.

3. Retain class work

After your student finishes classes, he/she should take/send all important papers (syllabi, reading lists, papers, exams, etc.) home. These papers may turn out to be of immediate and/or future use. They may be important in order to get any kind of special credit, since Department Chairs may need to review the course material before making a decision.

4. Evaluate the experience

The Office of Study Abroad asks all returned study abroad students to fill out a study abroad evaluation. We depend on their input in order to better advise future study abroad students.

5. Be aware of reverse culture shock

Your student has been treated to a very unique and personal growth experience in which he/she has consciously and unconsciously compared the native culture with one or more foreign cultures. He/she has successfully lived in a foreign culture, absorbed their linguistic qualities, their unique architecture and cuisine, and their lifestyle. When your student comes home, there will be things that he/she will miss, and nobody else at home will appreciate that perspective. Be prepared for a minor -or major- jolt. Be understanding and sympathetic. We encourage you to help your student through this phase just as you helped him/her with the initial culture shock experience.

6. Share the international experience!

We love to hear your student's stories and look at his/her pictures! Also, he/she should plan to get involved after returning to WIU. This is the best way to make reverse culture shock less severe. There is a unique group of other U.S. and international WIU students who understand your student's perspective perfectly; they have sensed it too or have just arrived in the United States and are beginning to live through a study abroad experience. Your student has so much in common with them. Please encourage your son/daughter to sign up as a volunteer for International Student Orientation, to join Western's Ambassadors for Study Abroad (WASA) and help promote study abroad, or to become a Conversation Partner. In addition, we always need help with Study Abroad Fairs, the International Bazaar, classroom presentations and special events!

Part 5 - Miscellaneous information

- 1. Important academic dates
- 2. The Office of Study Abroad
- 3. Non-discrimination statement
- 4. Important addresses in the U.S.
- 5. Important addresses abroad

1. Important academic dates

March 1 or October 1

Deadline to apply for study abroad, meaning that all WIU and program application forms have to be in the Office of Study Abroad and Outreach by that date. Some programs may have earlier deadlines!

August, January, and June

Beginning dates of WIU Fall, Spring, and Summer terms. These dates can be important even if the starting date abroad is different. Students receive WIU bills and -if applicable- financial aid disbursements after the tenth day of classes at WIU.

November and April

Pre-registration periods. On-campus students will register for the next term at this time. If your student is concerned about pre-registration, he/she should contact the Academic Adviser via e-mail; he/she can then pre-register your student in absentia. The Study Abroad Adviser cannot register your student.

November, April, and July

Freezing of files. If your student changed classes abroad without contacting his/her Study Abroad Adviser, changes can no longer be made after the university files are 'frozen' for that particular term. This happens in approximately mid-November, mid-April, and mid-July.

December, May, and July

Ending dates for WIU Fall, Spring, and Summer terms. At the end of each term, grades for on-campus courses are submitted. Your student is also registered at WIU even though he/she is abroad. He/she will receive an 'I' (Incomplete) until grades are received from abroad. In spite of form letters, you should not worry - Incompletes will be removed once transcripts have been received from abroad.

2. The Office of Study Abroad and Outreach

The Study Abroad Adviser is your student’s primary contact with Western Illinois University while abroad. We are here to help your student and you. If there are any questions about courses, financial aid, registration, billing, or any other problem, the student should call his/her Study Abroad Adviser **first** at (309) 298-2504.

However, there are a few things that the Office of Study Abroad and Outreach cannot do. For example, we cannot give your student’s address or other information to any unauthorized person. We cannot pay bills, arrange housing upon return, or register your family member for the next term. By supplying you with this Guide, we hope to assist in making the study abroad experience positive and productive for you and your student.

3. Non-discrimination statement

Western Illinois University is an equal opportunity educational institution and does not discriminate in any aspect of its educational programs or activities on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, disability, or status as a disabled veteran.

4. Important addresses in the U.S.

Office of Study Abroad, Center for International Studies
Western Illinois University
Horrabin Hall 08, 1 University Circle
Macomb, IL 61455
Phone: (309) 298 2504
Fax: (309) 298 2405
Web: www.wiu.edu/international

Your student’s Study Abroad Adviser: _____
E-mail: _____
Phone: _____

Your student’s Academic Adviser: _____
E-mail: _____
Phone: _____

Your student’s Financial Aid Adviser: _____
E-mail: _____
Phone: _____

5. Important addresses abroad

International Office(r) in host country:

Contact person _____
Address _____
E-mail _____
Phone _____

Nearest U.S. Embassy/Consulate:

Contact person _____
Address _____
E-mail _____
Phone _____

Your student's place of residence abroad:

Contact person _____
Address _____
E-mail _____
Phone _____

Other:

Contact person _____
Address _____
E-mail _____
Phone _____

Other:

Contact person _____
Address _____
E-mail _____
Phone _____

Other:

Contact person _____
Address _____
E-mail _____
Phone _____