
Student Handbook for Studying Abroad



International Programs & Exchanges Western Washington University

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Dear Student:

This orientation handbook is one reference tool to assist you in preparing for your study abroad experience. Used in conjunction with orientation meetings or the pre-departure orientation class, this handbook should help you explore basic issues like homestays, money management, and culture shock. However, you should anticipate doing your own exploration into the many related areas. This holds true for country-specific information, as this handbook in no way substitutes for your own research about your host country.

There are so many ideas on how to ensure a good experience abroad. Even though it is not possible to guarantee anything, you can plan to make the most of your adventure and have a positive experience. Characteristics that play vital roles are patience, flexibility, adaptability, sense of responsibility, and perhaps most important, a sense of humor. Avoid rigid ideas of “right” and “wrong” ways to do things. You may find a new way to view yourself and the world. Take a look at what one former international exchange participant wrote:

I would like to share with you a few reflections about what I think should be given a stronger emphasis in your orientation...that is, students' self-preparation and taking responsibility. These qualities are often understated because of the widespread idea that it is up to the exchange program to provide for students' every need and to anticipate their expectations.

This is not only impossible; it is undesirable, because, beyond the planned goal of studying abroad, there is the life experience of being a minority in a new environment. Being a minority: fear of being neglected, fear of being rejected. Each time we are in contact with someone or something that challenges our way of thinking, it is an opportunity for us to put our beliefs to the test and maybe to even discard these opinions that are not truly ours, but the product of our education.

Each time one of our expectations is thwarted, there is a possibility to go beyond it and to discover what our frustrated expectations or our missed goals prevented us from seeing. Such an experience may bring us to a constructive reassessment of our priorities...

Each time we do not receive the comfort, the attention, or the respect we are used to, there is an opportunity to extend our flexibility, to explore unknown regions of ourselves and of human relations...

We, students of the Western world, have the natural tendency to take our beliefs and our way of life for granted. The experience of being a minority forces us to put them in perspective; it leads us to embrace other points of view, it stretches our minds, and not only at an academic level; and this is an invaluable exercise, particularly for those who are likely to be decision-makers for tomorrow.

Here are some recommendations I would make to international exchange prospectors:

- *The success of your experience depends more upon your attitude than any other external factor. This is what exchange students should be convinced of when they land in their new country of adoption.*
- *Accept changes, don't try systematically to find in your new life what you have left in your country; and be aware of comparisons between “home” and your present environment; doing so, you focus on the past and close the doors of the future.*
- *Expose yourself; consider your exchange studies as a unique field of experiments where you can discover numerous fresh perspectives on life.*

This is why I believe exchange students must deepen their sense of responsibility when they undertake their exchange journey towards self, other, and life awareness.

A Renewed Perspective on International Student Orientation, presented at an International Student Exchange Program (ISEP) Conference by François de Vargas, past ISEP participant.

As you read the rest of this handbook, keep in mind that it will not tell you everything you will need to know. Sometimes a little ignorance is a good thing. Part of an overseas experience is facing challenges, dealing with ambiguities and learning about who you are through small mistakes. There is no doubt that this experience will help you grow.

Good luck with your coming adventure!



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Chapter 1

PREPARATIONS FOR DEPARTURE

Congratulations on your admission to a study abroad or exchange program! There are still many things to do before you leave home, and first weeks or months in your host country will be much more satisfying if you plan ahead. This chapter will give you an idea about what kinds of pre-departure preparations you should be making.



Passports



U. S. citizens need a passport to travel outside the United States. You should apply as soon as possible to avoid the tourist rush or a government shutdown.

Passport applications can be picked up at your local county clerk's office, or you can go to any major passport office located in the capital city of your state. You should return the application, along with valid proof of citizenship (e.g., a certified copy of your birth certificate or an expired passport), proof of identity (e.g., valid driver's license) and two (2) passport ready (2 x 2 inches) photos taken within six months of submitting your application. The application gives specifications for the photographs, but almost any camera store takes official passport-size photos.

For Washington State residents, if you have waited until the last minute, you can go to the Passport Office in Seattle (Federal Building 992, 915 2nd Ave.), with your plane tickets in hand and get one-day service. This delay will cause you great problems if you need to obtain a student visa.

The Department of State has a comprehensive homepage that provides a

variety of information about passports. The address is http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html.

Visas

You will need a student visa to enter almost any country. Each country will have its own regulations, so if your program sponsor does not send you information on how to obtain a visa, check with them and/or the closest consulate regarding specific visa requirements. There is almost always a fee attached to the visa application, and the process can take several weeks. Please do not wait until the last minute to obtain a visa. Delays can cause you to miss your plane. Standard items usually required in the application are a visa application form, a current and valid passport, one or more passport-type photographs, a visa application fee, and a letter of acceptance from your host institution.

Sometimes you may also be required to provide evidence of financial support during the period of time you will be studying abroad, a negative HIV test, or proof of medical insurance. You can learn about embassies in Washington, D.C. by searching the Electronic Embassy homepage at <http://www.embassy.org>.



International Student Identity Card



The International Student Identity Card (ISIC) is available through Student Travel (STA). Although it is quite Euro-centric, this card is a bargain. ISIC will entitle you to some insurance coverage while traveling, reduced fares and entrance tickets to cultural events and visits, and other travel benefits. The ISIC card is also useful as a piece of identification. Remember, your driver's license won't mean anything to officials overseas! Applications can be obtained online: <http://www.myisic.com/MyISIC/>.

The ISIC card is good for one academic year, meaning that if you apply in September, your card will only be valid until December of the following year. (See section on Healthcare Issues Abroad for details on ISIC insurance coverage.)

Another travel resource that may be useful to you is a Hostelling International membership, also provided by the STA. This membership entitles you to a variety of budget accommodations around the world. Check out the homepage for more information about youth hostels and other traveling tips.

International Calling Cards

Making a simple telephone call home from a foreign country can sometimes be a frustrating process. We have found that purchasing an international calling card in your host country is probably the most simple and cost-effective way to call home. One way to find out about the best deals on calling cards in your host country is to talk to other students who have been on a study abroad there, or to talk to your program director once you arrive. You should try a few different calling cards to find the best minute rate.

Also, in case you don't already have a universal e-mail account, you will probably want to get one before you leave. E-mail is a good way of keeping in touch with people back home, especially if you have access to a computer while you are abroad. Sites like hotmail.com, yahoo.com, and junos.com offer free e-mail accounts that can be accessed from anywhere in the world. Your Western email account will also work overseas.

Rail Passes



Travel will probably be on your agenda at some point during your stay abroad. Flying to other destinations is an option, but might be expensive. An economical solution to traveling is to do it by train or bus. It is sometimes necessary to purchase rail passes ahead of time if you are traveling long distances, so you might want to check into it before you leave.

Eurail Passes are the most common railroad passes in Europe. A variety of rail passes are available enabling you to travel to as many European countries as you like.

Other countries, such as Japan and the United Kingdom, also have discounted railroad passes for students.

You should consult a travel guide for your country of destination to see if you will need to purchase the pass in the United States. Eurail Passes can be purchased at most travel agencies, as well as through STA (www.sta.com). You will need to show proof that you are a student in order to buy a Eurail Pass



from STA and other student travel agencies.

Travel Arrangements



You should arrange your flight as soon as you know when you are supposed to arrive in your host country. The best deals are found when you gather the information on your own and set the arrangements. In addition to contacting a local travel agent you should always compare prices with student travel agencies. Whether or not you go through a travel agency or through a student travel organization you should always ask for student fares.

STA Travel offers low student fares for travel, as do a number of other agencies. These agencies tend to be busy so be sure that the agent gets your basic information into the system so you don't have to start over if you call again. They will want to know specific information on dates, arrival destination, etc. If you don't know what airport you should fly into, just tell the travel agent where you want to go. You may buy a round-trip (return) ticket or two one-way (single) tickets. If you plan to travel after you finish your program, you may want to look into buying an open-ended return ticket, which usually has a one-year limit. Another good source for student fares is *Transitions Abroad* magazine, which often has advertisements for overseas flights.

A travel partner might make the transition into another country easier. If you can contact other students going on the same program, traveling together is a good option. However, we do not suggest making travel plans with other students by getting joint tickets for cheaper rates. Doing this can commit you into a travel plan that you may want to change later after you meet other students from your program.

Packing

It is nearly impossible to pack everything you want. The trick is to pack what you need, and more importantly, what you can carry! Remember that everything you take must also return, unless you are willing to sacrifice it.

Here are a few tips that may come in handy while you are deciding what you should bring with you overseas. The most important thing to remember is that you will only be gone for one to twelve months and you will buy things while you are away.

Suitcases

It is much easier to have two smaller bags than one large suitcase, and backpacks are easier to carry and they leave your hands free. Suitcases with wheels are helpful but not necessary. A large traveling backpack is very useful because you can fit many items into it. You will also be able to use it for trips out of the city you will be staying in. Pack what you think is necessary to take, and then carry your baggage around the block and up and down some stairs. If you have a difficult time carrying your baggage around the block, think about how difficult it will be to lift these items on and off of trains or any other means of transportation you will be using. You can make your decision from there.



Put your address on a luggage tag and inside your suitcase also, in case the suitcase breaks or is lost during your travels. You may want to invest in a cheap plastic or leather luggage tag since the paper airline tags fall off easily when



luggage is being loaded and unloaded. Also, never leave your bags unattended, especially if they contain valuables inside. The easiest target for thieves is an unwatched bag.



If you will be abroad for more than one season, plan ahead and take clothes for changing weather. Distribute the weight evenly: breakables and light-to-medium-weight clothing in the hard-sided suitcase(s), heavy sweaters, shoes, etc., in the packs or duffels. A helpful trick is to roll clothes tightly to get the air out. Another helpful trick is to pack a large lightweight bag that is small and flat when folded, because you will probably need an extra bag for your return home.

Pack anything that is spillable, such as shampoo, toothpaste, etc., in sealed plastic bags. Be wary of 'liquid' carry on regulations, for more information visit <http://www.tsa.gov/311/index.shtm>. Airplane pressure can open bottles and products will end up all over your clothes. Aerosol cans should be carried on board. They can explode if checked in a decompressed luggage compartment.

What to Take

(Remember: All countries have different fashion trends, people in most other countries dress up more than most Americans, even to go shopping, so take something nice)

Shirts: Bring up to five short-sleeves or long sleeved shirts in a cotton/polyester blend. Arrange mix according to season.

Sweaters: Warm and dark is best for layering and dressing up. It never looks wrinkled and is always dark, no matter how dirty it is.

Pants: Bring two pairs: one lightweight cotton and another super-lightweight for hot and muggy big cities, and churches with modest dress codes. Jeans can be too hot for summer travel; however a sturdy pair of jeans could come in handy. Linen is great.

Shorts: Take a pair with plenty of pockets. This can double as a swimsuit for men.

Swimsuit: Especially for women.

Underwear and Socks: Bring five to seven sets (lightweight dries quicker).

Shoes: Take a well-used, light, and cool pair, with Vibram-type soles and good traction. Open-toed shoes are nice for warmer weather, but comfort is very important so make sure they're broken in.

Jacket: Bring a light and water-resistant windbreaker with a hood. Gore-Tex is good if you expect rain.

Accessories: For instant respectability, bring anything lightweight that can break the monotony and dress up an outfit.

Money Belt: It's essential for the peace of mind it brings. You could lose everything except your money belt and the trip could still go on. Lightweight and low-profile beige is best. In small towns, depending on the region, this might not be necessary—but in larger cities you will want to hide your important items.

Documents and Photocopies: Bring your passport, airline ticket, railpass or car rental voucher, driver's license, student I.D., hostel card, and so on. Photocopies can help you get replacements if the originals are lost or stolen. Carry photocopies separately in your luggage and keep the originals in your money belt.

Small Daypack: A small nylon daypack is great for carrying your sweater, camera, literature, and picnic goodies.



Camera: Charge or put a new battery in your camera before you go. Consider bringing high capacity memory cards or uploading digital photos online for safekeeping. If your digital camera has a rechargeable battery you may need a plug adapter to charge it throughout the trip.

Zip-lock Baggies: Get a variety of sizes for 1,001 uses. They're great for packing out a little lunch from the breakfast buffet, leftover picnic food, containing wetness, and bagging potential leaks before they happen. The 2-gallon jumbo size is handy for packing clothing.

Wristwatch: A built-in alarm is handy. Otherwise pack a small travel alarm clock, too.

Earplugs: If night noises bother you, you'll love a good set of plugs such as Sleep-well.



Toiletries Kit: Put all squeeze bottles in zip-lock baggies, since pressure changes in flight cause even good bottles to leak. If you plan to carry on your bag, all liquids, gels, and aerosols must be in three-ounce or smaller containers, and all of these items must fit within a single, quart-size sealable plastic baggie. Bring a little toilet paper or tissue packets.

Towel: You may not find towels available for you when you reach your country and settle in. You could either buy one abroad or take one with you.

Sewing Kit: Clothes age rapidly while traveling. Your flight attendant may have a freebie for you. Add a few safety pins.

Travel Information (minimal): Rip out appropriate chapters from guidebooks, staple them together, and store in a zip-lock baggie. When you're done, give them away.

Map: Get a map best suited to your trip's overall needs, and pick up maps for specific local areas as you go.

Address List: Use it to send postcards home and collect new addresses. Taking a whole address book is not packing light. Consider typing your mail list onto a sheet of gummed address labels before you leave. You'll know exactly who you've written to, and the labels will be perfectly legible. Many travelers prefer to keep in touch by writing blogs or mass emails.

Postcards or small picture book from your hometown, pictures of family and friends: A zip-lock baggie of show-and-tell things is always a great conversation piece with people you meet.

Journal: An empty book filled with the experiences of your trip will be your most treasured souvenir. Use a hardbound type designed to last a lifetime, rather than a spiral notebook. Attach a photocopied calendar page to visualize your itinerary and jot down reminders. Keep a traveler's check and expenses log in the appendix.

Small notepad and pen: A tiny notepad in your back pocket is a great organizer, reminder, and communication aid.

Optional Bring-Alongs

Skirt and Sandals: Especially for women.



Sunglasses and Sunscreen

Pillowcase: It's cleaner and possibly more comfortable to stuff your own.

Hairdryer or Curling Iron: If you feel that you need these items overseas, look for a small,

lightweight model with a built-in voltage converter. You'll also need a plug adapter for the country you'll be living in. It may be cheaper to purchase these items when you arrive in the host country.

Small Flashlight: Handy for reading under the sheets or night trips to the bathroom. This item is more useful than you would think!

iPod, MP3 or CD Player:

Partners can bring a Y-jack for two sets of earphones. Some travelers use digital recorders to record pipe organs, tours, or journal entries.

Collapsible Umbrella

Tiny Lock: Use it to lock your backpack zippers shut.

Combination Lock: Many hostels provide lockers for keeping valuables, but may not offer locks.

Spot Remover: Bring stain-removing wipes or a dab of Goop in a film canister.

Gifts: Local kids love T-shirts and baseball cards, local hosts appreciate small souvenirs from your home town.

Bed Sheet: If you're doing any extra traveling, this item can come in extremely useful when you are faced with circumstances you may not have expected. It doubles as a beach or picnic blanket, comes in handy on overnight train rides, shields you from dirty blankets in mountain huts, and will save you money in other dorm-type accommodations, which often charge extra for linen or don't provide it at all.

Plug Adapters and Voltage Convertors: If you intend to use electronic devices abroad you may need a plug adapter or voltage convertor to make sure they work properly. For more information: <http://countrycode.org/>

This list was adapted from Rick Steves' website. Go to www.ricksteves.com for other helpful travel tips.

- Band-Aids
- Sunburn ointment
- Anti-diarrhea medication
- Antibacterial ointment
- Pain relievers
- Allergy medications
- Find out if you would need water purification tablets, salt tablets, skin moisturizers, or insect repellent in the region you're going to.



Also be sure to pack regular medications, contraceptives if you may need them, feminine hygiene products if you are traveling where they are not available, and any other routine health and medical products you think you may need or brands that you like. Check the expiration dates of all medications before you leave. Pack prescription medicine in its original container.

Contact Lenses/Glasses

If you wear contact lenses, bring an extra set of contacts, cleaning solutions and extra glasses. Cleaning solutions and replacing lenses can get very expensive abroad. (See section on Healthcare Issues Abroad.)

Film



Airport X-ray machines do not generally harm film. The general rule of thumb is: ASA400 or lower (200, 100, etc.) is okay through X-rays; anything higher (e.g., 1000) should be hand-checked by airport officials.

Important Documents

Passports and other documents should be carried with you, secure yet readily accessible at immigration. You might want to make a few copies of your passport and hide them in different places in case your original gets stolen. The same goes for money, credit cards and traveler's checks. NEVER pack these documents in your check-through baggage.

Weapon-Like Objects

Sharp objects such as knives, scissors or letter openers may not be carried on board in hand luggage, but must be checked through.

Baggage Allowances

Each airline has its own requirements. Generally, two pieces of luggage may be

checked, with one shoulder bag allowed on the flight. If you travel from one country to another, there is usually a one-bag limit, and they will charge you for extra pieces. The dimensions of bags (total 106") seems to be less important than the poundage these days; seventy pounds is average. Your travel agent should be able to help you.

Financial Responsibilities

You will be responsible for paying a non-refundable application fee to apply to International Programs and Exchanges. For each quarter that you are gone, you will pay a concurrent enrollment fee. Both of these fees will go to IPE, and additional fees may be charged by your program. Tuition, housing, food, transportation, and other program costs should be worked out with your program.

If you are going through a co-sponsorship program or through an institution besides WWU, you will deal directly with that program regarding any other costs, and you are responsible for adhering to its payment schedule. Most agencies require a significant deposit before your departure. You may be able to make arrangements with the sponsoring institution to pay your fees in installments. Check with your organization for this information.

If you cancel or withdraw late from a program you will most likely be responsible for partial payment or be assessed a cancellation fee. Keep copies of all documents pertaining to your financial obligations in case there is any question about what you are required to pay. Also, save copies of forms you sign, such as contracts and statements of financial responsibilities.



Power of Attorney

It is highly advisable to designate an individual, usually a parent, to take care of legal or financial matters on your behalf while you are abroad. You may designate someone as “power of attorney” by completing the Power of Attorney form. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 is a federal law which provides that the institution will maintain the confidentiality of student education records. If you wish your parents or any other individual to receive financial information about your student account, you must complete and return the Student Privacy Act form to the Student Accounts Office in Old Main 360.

Taxes

You may need to arrange to have tax forms sent to you or have taxes paid for you while you are out of the country. It is possible to ask for an extension. Be sure to know what your tax responsibilities are and how to comply while you are away.

Financial Aid

Most forms of student financial aid are applicable to study abroad and exchange programs at Western Washington University because of the Higher Education Act of 1965. As amended in 1980, the act says that, “for a student enrolled in an academic program that normally includes a formal program of study abroad, reasonable costs associated with such study” may be considered when determining eligibility for federal aid. Some of these forms of aid include Direct Loans (subsidized, unsubsidized, and PLUS), Perkins Loans, Pell Grants, Washington State Need Grants, and some scholarships. You may use your financial aid towards the program fee charged to your account by the International Programs and Exchanges office, or you may use your financial aid

disbursement to pay an outside organization or university.

Your financial aid budget for the quarters that you are studying abroad will be determined based on reasonable costs for your program including round-trip transportation, tuition and fees for the program, living costs, passport and visa fees, and health insurance. Your estimated program cost will be determined jointly with an IPE advisor, and this information will be given to the Financial Aid Office to adjust your financial aid based on your overall costs. Students who wish to receive summer financial aid while studying abroad must meet all of the standard summer eligibility requirements.

Many programs start before your fall quarter disbursement is made, and federal law prohibits aid from being released earlier. For programs charged to your account at WWU that is no problem since you are billed at the beginning of each quarter. However, for other programs you are responsible for making any and all payments to the program sponsor before your financial aid is disbursed. Fortunately, most schools and organizations will allow you a grace period, and may possibly require a letter from the Financial Aid Office. You should check with your sponsor for additional information.

It is ultimately your responsibility to make sure all correct forms are filled out and returned to the corresponding departments on time. It is also your responsibility to check with each department to see that all paperwork is being processed correctly before you depart on your program. You cannot assume that everything will be done automatically.



Financial aid for the following year can be arranged from the host country. Normally you will receive a revised FAFSA form at your permanent U.S. address. You should make arrangements for it to be forwarded to you overseas or leave a Power of Attorney form with a responsible person so that s/he can fill it out on your behalf. If you have internet access, you may apply for financial aid electronically. Visit the Financial Aid Office web page at www.finaid.wvu.edu for the link. Otherwise, any specific financial aid questions while on exchange should be directed to the Financial Aid Office. You can contact Fidele Dent at 650-3470 or e-mail sfr@cc.wvu.edu.

Students who participate in study abroad or exchange programs are still expected to meet satisfactory academic progress requirements (a copy of the policy is available in Old Main 265 or on the Financial Aid Office website). However, students who are enrolled in study abroad or exchange courses are given an extension to allow extra time for grades to be submitted to WWU. If you receive a letter concerning your satisfactory academic progress status, please contact your IPE Advisor or the Financial Aid Office for additional information.

Finally, please remember that you cannot use a future disbursement of financial aid to pay for the program fee balance of a current quarter. For example, if your program fee for Fall Quarter is \$3,000.00 and your financial aid for Fall Quarter is only \$2,500.00 you cannot wait until Winter Quarter's disbursement to make up the \$500.00 difference. You are responsible for paying the difference during Fall Quarter. If you do not pay your leftover amount, there will be a hold on your student account and you will not be able to register for Winter Quarter, which would lead to no Winter Quarter financial aid.

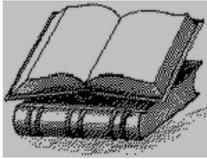
Student Status

It is necessary for you to be a full-time student while on financial aid. "Full-time" means taking a minimum of 12 quarter credits on a quarter program or 12-15 semester credits on a semester program. If you are on financial aid and fail to maintain full-time status you may be required to pay back part of your disbursement upon your return.



Chapter 2

IMPORTANT ACADEMIC ISSUES



There are a number of important academic matters that must be taken care of before you leave on exchange, as well as when you return. The best way to proceed is by carefully following the suggestions and procedures in this section of the manual and by consulting a Credit Evaluator in the Registrar's office in Old Main 230.

Registration

You will be concurrently enrolled and registered in a full course of study (at least 12 credits per quarter) for each quarter that you are studying abroad. Students on exchange or on a co-sponsorship program will be registered in a block of Study Abroad credits. Students who are in Faculty Led Programs may be registered in individual courses that you have selected. If you are in these programs, you must adhere to out add/drop deadlines and inform us as soon as possible on any changes to your course schedule by e-mail or fax.

There are a couple things you must make sure to do before you leave Western so that you can be registered for a study abroad or exchange program correctly and on time:

1. Check with Student Financial Resources or the Cashier's Office to make sure your student account has a zero balance. Even a small library fine or a parking ticket can prevent your registration.
2. Make sure to talk to your advisor in your major or minor department to

make sure your credits will transfer toward your major or minor.

Pre-Registration

You may view the online timetable of classes at www.wwu.edu. Be sure to go to the Registrar and/or Student Accounts and notify them that you will be gone and have any mail forwarded to your permanent address. You should register for WWU classes for the quarter you are returning while you are overseas or have someone do it for you. You are responsible to register yourself for your next quarter at Western before you return from your study abroad. View the online timetable and be familiar with registration dates. If you have access to a computer at your time of registration, you can register online.

Academic Advising

It is your responsibility to check with your academic advisor or the department advisor to see if courses taken at the host school or institution will apply to your major, minor, or general elective courses.



Transferring Credits



This is perhaps the most important academic concern you should have as an exchange or study abroad participant. Please pay close attention to the following issues:

Who is Responsible for Credit Transfer?

YOU are ultimately responsible for the courses you take, providing the proper transcripts to Western for evaluation, and for any other documentation needed for the proper transfer and placement of credits taken abroad. All courses taken at the host institution for academic credit can be transferred into your degree at WWU; how it transfers is up to you and the departmental advisors in your major/minor or the department chair. The host coordinators cannot help you with this! They are totally unfamiliar with your degree needs.

Credit Transferability

Only those courses that you have passed according to the host institutions grading policy will be considered for resident credit on your WWU transcript. Semester credits count as 1.5 quarter credits. For courses taken through sponsored programs with individual approved courses, the letter grades will be figured into your cumulative grade point average at WWU. Courses may or may not be applied to you major or minor based on credits equivalencies. This is determined by your academic advisor or the departmental advisor.

Obtaining a Transcript

Before you leave your host institution, make sure that you make arrangements for an official copy of your transcript to be sent to International Programs and Exchanges.

It is your host school's responsibility to send transcripts to the IPE office. If you studied

a foreign language while abroad, IPE will send a copy of your transcript to the professor who is your advisor in the language department for evaluation for the number of credits successfully completed. They will then send the transcript to the credit evaluator, who



posts your study abroad transcript onto your final Western transcript for your quarter(s) abroad. If you did not study a foreign language, your transcript will be sent directly to a credit evaluator. Some universities and programs take a long time (possibly 1-3 months) to send transcripts to our office. It is your responsibility to contact the host school to have your transcript sent to the IPE office as soon as possible. Be patient! As soon as we receive your transcript, we will send it to the credit evaluator or language professor.

Before you leave your host campus, you may want to arrange for two or more official copies of your host school's transcript to be sent to you in case you need it to transfer to another school or for graduate work.

Applying for Graduation

You may study abroad for your last quarter at WWU. However, graduation plans must be made at the Registrar's office prior to leaving on your study abroad program. You might arrive home in time to walk in the ceremony—but if your transcript has not been received by WWU, then you have not officially graduated.



Chapter 3

MONEY MATTERS



Managing your finances is one of the most important and challenging aspects of a successful and enjoyable academic experience abroad.

Dealing with a new currency and cost of living are the beginning of the challenge. Before you leave your home country, pay attention to the exchange rate between the U.S. dollar and your host country's currency. Learn to think in that currency, and don't forget a good pocket calculator.

Money Amounts

How much money do you need for your time abroad? Your program fee might include your tuition, housing, books, some transportation, and possibly food. However, you will need to bring funds to cover all other expenses. The amount you will need for incidental expenses will depend on your lifestyle as well as local costs. Take a close look at your expenses and prepare a budget for yourself based on the estimated expenses on the form.

One way for you to estimate how much you will spend is to make an effort to contact students who have traveled or studied abroad in your country before. Ask them how much they spent and what they spent their money on. The list below gives you some ideas about your possible expenses before and during your study abroad.

- Tuition
- Clothes
- Rent
- Taxes
- Family expenses
- Recreation
- Gifts
- Fees
- Passport and Visa
- Meals
- Insurance
- Transportation
- Books
- Travel

Money Options

It is really helpful to bring about \$50 in foreign currency with you from home. You never know what expenses you might have right away, and it's better to be safe and have that currency on hand than to be stranded with only debit cards or traveler's checks. You might want to contact your host institution's coordinator and ask what they think is a reasonable amount. Remember the packing advice—carry your money, cards, passport, and traveler's checks under your clothing in either a money belt or a thin purse. The last thing you want when you first arrive is to lose these items.

Debit Cards

A debit card is excellent for international travel because it allows you to withdraw money from your bank account in the United States in the currency of the host country. We strongly suggest that you use a debit card as your main way to get cash. If you decide to use a debit card overseas, be sure to ask your bank for a card that has Visa or MasterCard on it. You can use it in any cash machine abroad that has a Visa or MasterCard symbol on it, and it will not be like cash advancing.



When you use a debit card, it will give you a menu choice of different languages and will ask you how much money you want in the currency of the country you are in. The transaction will debit the money from your checking account in the United States at that day's exchange rate, and no commission will be charged in most cases. Check with your bank for transaction fees. Most debit cards can also be used to make purchases abroad like a credit card.

Credit Cards



Credit cards are valuable for big purchases, emergencies and also cash advances, although there are usually higher interest charges for cash advances. Most major credit cards are honored abroad (e.g., American Express, MasterCard or Visa), but there are exceptions. Credit cards are particularly useful for hotels, restaurants, shops, airline tickets and car rental agencies.

When you use a credit card, the company makes the exchange rate purchase for you, reflecting the exchange rate on the day your credit card transaction is processed. This amount may be more or less than what you thought you were paying at the time of your purchase. You will be billed in dollars on your statement, and sometimes you will see the foreign exchange conversion listed as well. You need to leave someone you trust in charge of paying your monthly credit card bill since most credit card companies will not send bills to non-U.S. addresses.

Though credit cards are handy, we suggest leaving them at home. It is easier than you think to spend extra money on your credit card while abroad.

Traveler's Checks

Traveler's checks are a convenient and safe way to carry money. However, they do have a higher exchange rate than debit or credit

cards. To cash them, you must go into banks and sometimes talk to confused tellers, although larger cities with tourists deal with them more regularly than small towns. If the checks are lost or stolen, the company that issued them will replace their full value, as long as you have a record of the serial numbers. Keep the receipt of the check numbers separate from your checks. Traveler's checks can be purchased at almost any bank in the United States, usually at the rate of one percent over the value of the checks you are buying.

Wire Transfers and Bank Drafts

If you think you might need to use bank transfers or have your initial funds sent to you in the form of a bank draft, visit your bank before you leave and ask them for a list of the correspondent banks in your host city. Let them know who is authorized to initiate cable transfers for you. Once abroad, you can contact your home bank by telegram or phone and receive the money, usually within 48 hours. Be advised that you will probably have to pay the cabling charges both ways, in addition to a commission charged by the host bank. Money can also be cabled from home through American Express or Western Union; this type of transfer will take two to five days and the charge varies according to how much money is sent. Alternatively, you can notify your home bank and request that a bank draft in your name is mailed to you.



Chapter 4

JUGGLING HEALTHCARE ISSUES



Adjusting to life in a new country means excitement, challenge, and the unexpected. No amount of preparation can guarantee a trouble-free transition. There is one area, however, in which you do not want to face the unexpected: medical care for yourself. You are not a citizen of the host country; therefore, you are not usually given the same medical care benefits as its citizens. Arranging and paying for medical care is your responsibility, and you should pay careful attention to the international coverage.

Before You Leave

Before you travel abroad, it is worthwhile to take a close look at the many factors that contribute to your physical and emotional well being. Many factors of your daily health have to do with lifestyle and environment. The state of your health will have a significant impact on the success and enjoyment of your trip. With proper planning, travel can be a happy and health-promoting experience.



Assess your Health and your Health-Related Practices

Going abroad is not a magic “geographic cure” for concerns and problems at home. Both physical and emotional health issues will follow you wherever you go. In particular, if you are concerned about your use of alcohol and other controlled drugs or if you have an emotional health concern, you should address it honestly before making plans to travel. Contrary to many people’s expectations, travel does not minimize these problems, — in fact, it often exacerbates them to a crisis stage while you are away from home.

Identify your Health Needs

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

Check Health Advisories

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

Some questions to think about:

- What illnesses, if any, are specific or endemic to the region?
- What medications should I take to prevent these illnesses?



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- What precautions are recommended for sexual or health practices?
 - What kind of insurance do I need, and how much coverage?
 - What are the customs, beliefs, and laws in my host country concerning sexual behavior and the use of alcohol and drugs?
 - What is the quality of water in my host country?
 - What are the laws governing the import of medications, medical supplies, and contraceptives?

This information can be found in several places, including:

- Family Physician or WWU Travel Nurse
- Student Health Center
- local Public Health Department
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention or
<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/travel.html>
- State Department Overseas Citizens Emergency Center
- Travelers with disabilities can get more information from Mobility International
- Lonely Planet Guides for information on international health issues and predeparture planning:
<http://www.lonelyplanet.com>
- World Health Organization:
<http://www.who.int/en/>

The International Student Identity Card (ISIC), available from STA Travel, provides card holders with a toll-free help line staffed by multilingual representatives who are prepared to advise travelers on required immunizations for travel abroad, as well as help travelers in case of medical,

financial, or legal emergencies abroad. (See chapter on Pre-Departure Preparation for more details about the International Student Identity Card).

See your Health Practitioners

A visit to your family physician, gynecologist and dentist will help ensure that you are in good health before you leave and might prevent emergencies abroad. Get needed immunizations and hepatitis protection, if appropriate (see below). Update your health records, including eyeglass prescriptions and regular medications.

If you are on prescription medication, carry a supply with you. If you self-inject prescribed medication, you may need to carry needles and syringes with you. You'll need a physician's prescription for medication and medical supplies to pass through foreign customs.

Take copies of all medical records, prescriptions in generic form, and other pertinent information. Carry these with you in a safe place. If you expect to need regular medical care abroad, take a letter of introduction from your physician at home, providing details of your medical conditions, care, and specific needs.

Immunizations/Travel Clinic

If you are concerned about possible health problems, you can visit the Travel Clinic in Western's Student Health Center. You could also call the Center for Disease Control (CDC). They have an International Traveler's Hotline (404) 332-4559 where, by punching in the country code of your host country, you can get recorded information on vaccinations, food and water and current health problems. Their web address is



<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/travel.html>. Make sure your tetanus shot is current, and you should consider a vaccination for Hepatitis A, which can be caused by contamination of food or water by sewage. Infected food handlers can also cause the virus. A normal immunoglobulin is usually administered to prevent Hepatitis A. If you are planning on traveling to South America, Africa, Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, Russia or remote areas of your host country, PLEASE consult the CDC's Traveler's Hotline or the Student Health Center before you depart. They may suggest vaccinations as much as six months in advance.

Health Insurance Coverage

Western Washington University requires that students and faculty engaged in international educational activities purchase and maintain an adequate health insurance plan while studying or traveling abroad. Minimum coverage under the plan should include:

- * Basic medical expense coverage up to \$100,000 per injury or sickness.
- * Accidental death & dismemberment indemnity in the amount of \$10,000.
- * Repatriation expense benefits of \$15,000.
- * Medical evacuation benefits of \$50,000.
- * Family air fare expense of \$1,500.
- * Overseas travel and assistance services.

Recommended Insurance Plans

Wells Fargo 1-800-853-5899
<https://wfs.wellsfargo.com/ProductServices/A+to+Z/StudentInsurance/> Click on "Study outside the U.S." and follow directions to "Washington Study Abroad – Outbound." You can enroll online.

HTH Worldwide 1-888-243-2358

www.hthtravelinsurance.com/
Click on "Global Student" and follow directions to "U.S. Students Abroad." You can enroll online.

CISI 1-800-303-8120

www.culturalinsurance.com/index.asp
Click on "Study Abroad" and then "Study Abroad Individuals." The plan that meets our University recommendations is the "upgrade plan." The "basic" does not. You can enroll online.

Can my medical insurance provide coverage abroad?

Most medical insurance plans provide insufficient coverage while abroad, and do not provide medical evacuation benefits, repatriation expense benefits and other important travel services. However, if basic medical coverage is provided by your existing plan, coverage may be enhanced to meet the University's requirements with the following travel assistance programs:

- MEDEX 1-800-732-5308 or <http://www.medexassist.com/Default.aspx> Click on "Individual" and then "Select Your Plan." The plans are listed under "Evacuation Coverage."
- Int'l SOS 1-800-767-1403 or <http://www.internationalsos.com/enroll>

If you have any questions, please contact IPE at 360-650-3298 or WWU's Risk Manager at 360-650-3065.



Give Yourself Some Time to Adjust

The emotional effects of being far away from home and in a country that you are not familiar with could lead to something called culture shock (this will be discussed in more detail in the cultural adjustment section). You may experience confusing emotional highs and lows for a short time. Remind yourself that this will soon pass once you are well rested and eating normally. Time is the best cure. It won't take long for you to make friends and become familiar with your surroundings. If symptoms persist, however, consider it a possible medical problem and seek assistance from a counselor or physician.



Stress

A moderate amount of anxiety and stress is a natural part of everyday life, and is usually an indication that your body is responding to the problems it must overcome. Jet lag, a new language, exotic foods, registration, beginning classes, and even changes in the weather can take their toll. Recognize that if you are tense, slow down and try to relax. Use the same stress-relief techniques you use at home — exercise, meditation, reading, etc.

Find out about Resources

Learn how to get medical help, whether routine or emergency before the needs arise. Is there an equivalent to a 911 emergency number and, if so, what services does it access? Who will provide routine medical care, and how can you reach that provider? If you need any special resources, find out how to get them. These could include services for those with disabilities, self-help groups (such as Alcoholics Anonymous), or other health-related needs.

Don't be Afraid to Ask Questions



Lifestyles may be very different from home. This is true even in cultures that seem relatively similar to the United States. Ask about safety issues such as local transportation, traffic patterns, swimming practices at regional beaches, and use of electrical appliances. Ask about security issues such as neighborhood or building security, personal security during evening or other outings, and culture-specific behavior or security concerns related to gender.

You cannot assume that the experiences and practices you took for granted at home will be accepted in your host country. If you are not sure about something, whether it is a simple question about where a service can be found, or a more complex matter, such as expectations about friendship and dating, ask someone you trust.

AIDS and other STD's

You are undoubtedly aware of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) and other sexually transmitted diseases (STD's). You may wonder whether you are more at risk for developing AIDS overseas. The answer is simple: you are no more at risk overseas than you would be at home; your risk of infection depends almost entirely on your own behavior. The only exception is if you have a medical emergency and require a blood transfusion. Developing countries have less stringent controls over blood collection and storage than the United States and often have a more contaminated blood supply than other countries.



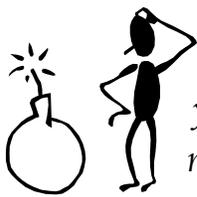
As you probably know, you do not get AIDS and other STD's in the same way you get a cold, influenza, or other contagious illnesses. You can become infected with the virus only if it gets into your blood through contact with the blood, semen, or vaginal secretions of an infected person. This can happen only if you engage in sexual activities involving the exchange of body fluids, or if you share needles (for example, for injecting drugs, acupuncture, tattooing, or ear piercing) with someone who is infected. Always use a condom if you have sex. If you plan to have sex while you are abroad, take condoms with you. In any activity involving needles, make certain the needles are sterilized.

Remember that diseases that you consider long gone may still be making the rounds in other countries. Do not take unnecessary risks. Be the responsible partner if the situation requires you to do so.



Chapter 5

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND LEGAL ISSUES ABROAD



“Better safe than sorry,” goes the American saying. No matter how safe your campus and community appears to be, you should acquaint yourself with your new environment by reading all safety and orientation information you receive when you arrive on-site. You should also acquaint yourself with the common laws of your host country. Much of this information is common sense, but you should pay close attention and ask questions you may have.

Begin by Orientating Yourself

- Familiarize yourself with your neighborhood and campus by walking around in the daylight.
- Ask fellow students or staff members about areas you should avoid at night.
- Do not walk alone at night.
- Note the address and telephone number of the closest consulate or embassy.
- Locate the police station that serves your neighborhood.
- Locate the nearest fire-alarm box and learn how to report a fire.
- Identify the hospital emergency room nearest to your home and know what to do in case of an accident.
- Keep emergency numbers near your phone at home. Find out the equivalent 911 emergency number in your host country.

Passport

Carry with you—separate from your passport—two extra passport pictures, passport number, date and place issued, and a certified-not photocopied-copy (not the original) of your birth

certificate or an expired passport. If your passport is lost or stolen, report this to the local police; get written confirmation of the police report and, take the above documents to the nearest United States Consulate and apply for a new passport.

The bottom line is to be cautious — not fearful. MOST INCIDENTS HAPPEN WHEN YOU GET CARELESS.

Exercise the same precautions you would in any U.S. city. In unfamiliar surroundings you may not know the real concerns. Use common sense. Never carry large amounts of cash! Use money belts or a concealed purse for your passport, visa, money, credit cards and other important documents. Don't leave your luggage alone. If you want to explore a city, leave your belongings in the “checked luggage” area, which will probably only be a couple of dollars in local currency. You will look like a tourist (at least for awhile). People may “target” you for cons, so be aware. And hitchhiking is not recommended!

Within the last few years there have been some serious security issues for study abroad participants. It is



important for you to be familiar with the security precautions that would be used in case of any international or local “situations.” The following ideas are for emergency and non-emergency situations, and are based on common sense.

Register with Consulate & Department of State

It would be wise to register with the nearest U.S. consulate office in your host country. This will make them aware of your presence in the vicinity, and they can also advise you with local information updates.

If you travel to countries beyond your program site and expect to be there for more than a week, register upon arrival at the U.S. consulate or embassy having jurisdiction over the location.

Some countries require students to “register” with the local police department. Your host coordinator should advise you if you need to do this.

Make sure the resident director, host family, or foreign university official who is assigned the responsibility for your welfare always knows where and how to contact you in an emergency and your schedule and itinerary of where you are traveling, even if only overnight.

Develop with your family a plan for regular telephone or e-mail contact, so that in times of heightened political tension, you will be able to communicate with your parents directly about your safety and well-being.

The US government monitors the political conditions in every country around the world. For current information, advisories, or warnings

contact the State Department in Washington D.C. (202-647-4000) or the local US embassy or consulate where you are (see the section on US embassies or consulates abroad in this handbook). You should also check the State Department website at <http://travel.state.gov> periodically for Travel Warnings.

We encourage all students to register with the State Department Travel Registry. Travel registration is a free service provided by the U.S. Government to U.S. citizens who are traveling to, or living in, a foreign country. Registration allows you to record information about your upcoming trip abroad that the Department of State can use to assist you in case of an emergency. To register, visit <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/>.

Keep in Contact with Home

Your parents and friends will have concerns while you are away. Please keep in contact with them on a regular basis and let them know how you are. If you make plans to call at a certain time, make every attempt to call at that time. Otherwise, people may worry unnecessarily. If you plan to travel, leave your itinerary with your host coordinator and with your family.



Stay Informed

Stay well informed about local and regional news and conditions. Read newspapers with good international coverage and analysis of local problems and issues. You may want to research local and national laws and practices before you depart. Good sources of



information are the internet, The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times.

Don't Allow Yourself to be Vulnerable

Do not frequent places that may make you vulnerable by association. Some restaurants or clubs have reputations for being American “hang-outs,” such as McDonalds and Burger King, avoid them if possible.

Keep a Low Profile

Walk away from trouble and take a passive approach to any potentially volatile situations. Do not give information about your school, the students or professors. Do not act like an “ugly American.” Americans are known throughout the world as loud and obnoxious. If you decide to follow this role, both you and your country look bad and the stereotype is confirmed to the people surrounding you. Being drunk for some people leads to obnoxiousness, so if you are one of these individuals, try to restrain from drinking too much. You represent the United States and Western Washington University when you are overseas.

Stay Alert

Be aware of your surroundings, including unknown individuals “hanging out” in your building or any strange activity nearby. Be suspicious of unexpected packages, letters with no return addresses and/or excessive postage, and especially letters that appear to contain more than just paper. Be careful of who has access to your room or apartment. Visitors should be screened; delivery persons should be asked for identification and should not be left unsupervised.

Female travelers are sometimes more likely to encounter harassment, but

uncomfortable situations can usually be avoided by taking the following precautions: Dress conservatively. While short skirts and tank tops may be comfortable, they may also encourage unwanted attention. Avoid walking alone late at night or in questionable neighborhoods. Do not agree to meet a person whom you don't know in a non-public place. Be aware that some men from other countries tend to mistake the friendliness of American women for romantic interest.

Traveling Safely



You will probably be doing a lot more traveling than you would normally do at home. This means that you will be using buses, trains, metros, taxis, planes and maybe even animal transportation. Many means of transport can be convenient and inexpensive for you as a student. However, there are a number of safety issues you should keep in mind, especially in urban settings:

- Do not display money, jewelry, or other valuable items.
- Choose a car or compartment in a train or metro in which others are riding.
- Note the location of emergency equipment.
- Do not fall asleep on short rides: you could end up far from home.
- Do not stand on the edge of a train or metro platform.
- Keep important items on your body, and keep your pack closed.
- Never leave any luggage or bags unattended.
- Avoid unwanted attention and confrontations.
- Beware of pickpockets and shady characters.



Legal Matters

There are a number of common legal matters you should be aware of, regardless of your host country. Some of them are much more serious than others, so please read each carefully so that you are aware of the liability involved.

While you are abroad, Western Washington University cannot assume ANY responsibility for your actions.

Working Abroad and Work Permits

Since you will be participating in an academic program, you should take full advantage of your opportunity to study and travel. Therefore, it is recommended that you don't work. Most host countries will not allow you to work legally and work permits are next to impossible to attain. However, if you would like to stay and work during the summer, consider the Work Abroad program sponsored by STA Travel. They can arrange your paperwork so that you can work legally. Information about their work abroad program can be found online:

http://www.statravel.com/cps/rde/xchg/us_division_web_live/hs.xsl/work-abroad.htm.

Illegal Drugs

NEVER travel with marijuana or any other drugs. It is Western's and International Program and Exchanges' policy that student use of drugs on an overseas program cannot be tolerated. Use of drugs is cause for immediate dismissal of the student involved.

If approached by someone selling drugs, walk away. Do not even talk to that person, because a conversation with a suspected narcotics pusher is seen as an

act of "intent to purchase" by some countries.

Laws concerning drugs are much more stringent and penalties are more severe in Latin America, Asia and Europe than in the United States. Conditions of imprisonment in a foreign jail are not something you want to check out. Remember that being a citizen of the United States does not matter. You are subject to the laws of your host country, so the U.S. Consulate cannot help you get released if you are arrested. They can only help notify family and arrange for legal representation.

U.S. Customs

Upon returning home, you will go through U.S. Customs. Duty ranging from 5% to 50% or more will be charged on anything over the amount that is allowed duty free. Certain items will not be charged duty depending upon the country of purchase and type of item. Make sure to keep all receipts for purchases you mail home or bring with you, as you might need them when you go through customs upon your return. In some countries, especially those belonging to the EEC, you may get the taxes back on certain purchases. Under no circumstances will you be allowed to bring back fresh fruits and vegetables of any type.



Chapter 6

CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

When you first walk off the plane, your first thought might be to turn around and hop back on the 20,000 ton mechanical bird that has just brought you to this strange land. Some of you may feel a sense of excitement, of eagerness to “begin,” whatever that might mean to you. And for a handful of you returning to a place where you’ve been before, stepping off the plane might bring a sense of homecoming. As time goes by and you settle into your routine, register for classes, begin the process of making friends and explore the area you now call home, you will be going through many emotional, psychological, and possibly, physical changes. This is what is known as “cultural adjustment” or “cultural adaptation.” You cannot avoid these changes, but as long as you recognize them when they occur, you will be better prepared to deal with their consequences.



The Importance of Defining "Culture"



It is difficult to begin a discussion on cultural adjustment without first defining the word "culture" and what makes culture. According to American Heritage Dictionary, culture is defined as "the arts, beliefs, customs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought created by a people or group at a particular time." If you were to ask several different people what they thought culture meant, they might come up with things such as:

- manners and customs
- beliefs and ideas
- ceremonies and rituals
- laws (written & unwritten)
- ideas and thought patterns
- language
- arts and artifacts
- social institutions

- religious beliefs
- myths & legends
- knowledge
- values and morals
- concept of self
- accepted ways of behaving

Everyone has their own personal culture. Yours may be your preference for cowboy boots over sneakers, or rap music over classical. In short, there is no one correct list of components of culture, but at least you can get a sense of what makes up culture.

The Implications of Cultural Adjustment

As described in the beginning, cultural adjustment is a continuous, on-going process. It never stops, and it varies from one individual to another and from one culture to another. The end process nearly always results in both a changes in the individual and the setting. Your own personal adjustment process may



require you to confront not only differences in your new culture but it may also force you to take a good look at your own cultural values and practices.

The concept of adjustment implies change. In your case, you will be moving from your "American" culture to one overseas. The nature of your adjustment required depend on the nature of the differences between your original culture and the new one and on the objectives you seek to complete in the new culture. In developing new patterns of coping with your new environment, you may experience varying degrees of disorientation and discomfort. This is called "culture shock."

Culture Shock

Culture shock is not quite as shocking or as sudden as most people expect. It is part of the process of learning a new culture that, as you have learned already, is called "cultural adaptation." A definition of culture shock is:

The feeling of frustration and anxiety which arises when familiar cultural cues are suddenly removed and replaced by new and seemingly bizarre behavior.

— Lewis and Jugman, *On Being Foreign*

You may experience some discomfort before you are able to function well in new setting. This discomfort is the culture shock stage of the adaptation process. The main thing to remember is that this is a very normal process that nearly everyone goes through. The common symptoms of culture shock are:

- Extreme homesickness
- Desire to avoid social settings which seem threatening or unpleasant

- Physical complaints and sleep disturbances
- Depression and feelings of helplessness
- Difficulty with coursework and concentration
- Loss of your sense of humor
- Boredom or fatigue
- Hostility towards the host culture

Students are sometimes unaware of the fact that they are experiencing culture shock when these symptoms occur. There are ways to deal with this period of culture shock, so it helps to recognize that culture shock may lie behind physical symptoms and irritability.

Coping With Culture Shock

The most effective way to combat culture shock is to step back from a given event that has bothered you, assess it, and search for an appropriate explanation and response. Try the following:



- Observe how others are acting in the same situation.
- Think about the situation, what it means to you, and your response to it.
- Ask a local resident or someone with extensive experience how they would have handled the situation and what it means in the host culture.
- Decide how you can apply what you have learned the next time you find yourself in a similar situation.
- Be open-minded and flexible.



Throughout the period of cultural adaptation, take good care of yourself. Read a book or rent a video in your native language, take a short trip if possible, exercise and get plenty of rest, write a letter or telephone home, eat good food, and do things you enjoy with friends. Take special notice of things you enjoy about living in the host culture.

Although it can be disconcerting and a little scary, the “shock” gradually eases as you begin to understand and adapt to your new surroundings. It is useful to realize that often the reactions and perceptions of others toward you — and you toward them — are not personal evaluations but are based on a clash of cultural values.

The more you know about your personal values and how they are derived from your culture, the better prepared you will be to see and understand the cultural differences you will encounter abroad.

Know What to Expect

Anticipating future events and possibilities makes it easier to deal with them when they happen. For example, it helps to anticipate your initial departure and plan ways to maintain relationships with people at home while you are away. Be sure to allow ample time to say goodbye to all the people who are important to you, and plan ways to keep in touch.

Generations of students have found that they go through a predictable series of stages as they adjust to living abroad. At first, although the new situation is a bit confusing, most students also find it to be exhilarating, a time of new experiences, sights, sounds and

activities. With so much to learn and absorb in the new culture, the initial period of settling in often seems like an adventure. During this time, you will tend to look for and identify similarities between your home culture and your host culture. You will find that people really are friendly and helpful. There will be many opportunities to meet people in your community, and you should take advantage of these opportunities.

Intercultural Communication

One of the major contributors to unease in a new situation is communication. You will bring your own communication habits, both verbal and non-verbal, that sometimes do not transcend cultural limits. Studies of intercultural communication have shown that the amount of time and energy needed for simple communication increases as cultural differences increase.

You should try and recognize that other cultures may use different verbal and non-verbal communication methods. Body language, the use of “personal space” when talking and other non-verbal communication can be very different than what you are used to in the United States. Likewise, some cultures are not nearly as frank, sarcastic or confrontational when discussing certain topics. Sometimes things are implied in conversation but not voiced. It is important to remember that there are differences in communication styles.

Imposition of Personal Values

Our tendency to impose our own values and assumptions onto people in other cultures can inhibit cross-cultural understanding. While you are abroad you should avoid making definitive,



prejudicial judgments that may result from your own cultural responses. Be open-minded and receptive to different ideas, concepts and behaviors. A certain amount of “cultural self-analysis” might reveal some things about your own motivations and value system. Such knowledge can contribute to increased communication skills, increased acceptance and understanding of others, and more productive interaction.



Chapter 7

RETURNING HOME



You may have just arrived overseas, but it is not too early to begin thinking about the day you return home. Reflecting on questions such as “Why did I choose an overseas program?” and “What do I want to accomplish during my time here?” can help you clarify how you are going to integrate your overseas experience into your academic, professional and personal goals for the future. Preparing for the surprises that often greet travelers after an extended period abroad will enable you to turn what is sometimes an awkward time into a productive one.

Making Travel Arrangements

If you already have a return plane ticket you should contact the airline and reconfirm your seat at least 72 hours in advance. Airlines notoriously overbook flights back to the United States. You may decide to travel before leaving the country, or have your family or friends join you. Depending upon your ticket restrictions this may be possible for a small fee. If you want to change your return date, contact the airline directly or visit a travel agency. They can tell you what, if any, restrictions there are. If you do not have a return ticket you should book a flight at least 60 days in advance, especially if you are returning in the summer when it is high travel season in the United States.

Departing Checklist

There are a number of very important things you must do before you leave your host country. Do not leave everything for the last minute, or you may find yourself with too little time to do what needs to be done.

Transcripts

Make sure you check with the International Office at your host school about how and when you will be getting your transcript sent back to the United States. You must have an official transcript sent to the International Programs & Exchanges office at WWU for processing. You may want to obtain additional copies of your transcript or any other relevant documents, especially if you plan on applying to graduate school in the future. You will need to produce official copies of transcripts for admission to most graduate schools, and it could be difficult to obtain them after you have departed. (See section on Academic Issues.)

Forwarding Address

Leave your forwarding address with your host coordinator, even though it is probably the same address as the one on your student application.



Outstanding Bills

Pay all outstanding bills, including housing, library fines, and any other college or university obligations. Your transcript may not be released until you do so.

Some of the material for the following sections was taken from *The Art of Coming Home*, by Craig Sorti.

Preparing for Reverse Culture Shock

You may think that adjustment ends when you have successfully assimilated into the life of your host country, but in fact the cycle of cultural adjustment continues through your return to the United States. Reverse culture shock is not an isolated event, but rather part of the total adjustment process that stretches from pre-departure to reintegration at home. The rest of this chapter is meant for you as you prepare to leave your host country. It is important to read this section now, as well as when you are about to return home.

Change and Adaptation

You have just had the opportunity to live, study and travel overseas. During your stay you have probably assimilated some of the host country's culture, you have learned new ways of doing things, and gained some new views and opinions about certain topics. In short, you have changed. As one returnee explains, "Living abroad has a deep, broadening effect on a person — an effect that I didn't realize until my return." For some people living overseas and having those changes occur outside of the United States can magnify those experiences, thus causing the return home to be a bit unsettling.

While overseas you probably experienced a greater amount of independence, both academically and personally. This independence can help make you more confident in your abilities to achieve your goals. You may have become increasingly surer of yourself and possibly have gained a more mature or focused attitude about your future.

New Skills

Along with the new ideas, views and attitudes that you have developed, you have probably acquired some new skills. These may include discovering a new way to do an old task, a different perspective on your field of study, or increasing your foreign language skills. And, for those of you studying in an English-speaking country, the English language will acquire a new meaning through idioms, lingo, and phrases that are specific to the host country.

These new skills will now become a part of your daily life. Increasing facility with your foreign language will probably have one of the greatest impacts. If you have learned to become dependant on these skills to communicate from day to day, then it may feel strange for you to revert back to your native language. The degree of "strangeness" is directly connected to the amount of culture from the host country that you have assimilated and will definitely influence your re-adjustment. You may feel frustrated and depressed if you cannot communicate your new ideas, skills or opinions. Patience, flexibility, and time are the things you will need to readjust.

Loss of Status

One returnee described their loss of status when they said, "being in a



foreign country as a foreign visitor you are to a certain extent a ‘special person’; your views, accent, lifestyle are all interesting to your hosts. As such, you will receive a lot of attention, make friends and, generally, be popular. However, when returning home, you become again a ‘normal person.’ I found it very difficult to make that transition.”

Friendships

Now that you have studied abroad, you obviously have a new circle of friends. You most likely saw some or all of these people on a daily basis and they probably became an important part of your life. Leaving your new friends can be, for many, the most difficult part of re-entry. Having to abandon close friendships, or girl/boyfriends, and cultural supports frequently brings feelings characteristic of those associated in a grieving process. Though you may seem to adjust once home, that adjustment may cover over many contained feelings of uncertainty, alienation, anger and disappointment.

At first, friends back home will ask about your experiences and appear to be interested. They will often show a slight fascination for your adventures, but this may quickly fade. They will whip through pictures and stories once, but since they have not shared the experience, you should be prepared for possible disinterest. You may find that your friends are more eager to talk about what has gone on in their lives as opposed to hearing about your life overseas.

If your friends have never lived abroad you may also have to deal with feelings of envy or jealousy. New and unusual points of view often threaten people if they, themselves, have not had a similar

experience. As much as you need to talk about your recent time away from home, try to be sensitive to the attitudes and feelings of others. (Refer to the section on coping strategies, which discusses other options for support).

Your relationships with your friends can alter because of the changes that have occurred in your life and theirs. Friends may even have found new friendships and have priorities that are now different from yours. Be patient. If the friendship is worth maintaining, adjustment can and will be made.

Family Relationships

These changes — your new independence, new views, attitudes, acquired skills, and your new friends — all have contributed to making you who you are now. The “changed you” will have to re-adjust to life in the United States, and, for some, this can be difficult. Initially, you may even have to live at home. It can be a surprise to learn that you are not the only one affected by re-entry.

You are the one who has been away and had so many new experiences. Everyone and everything at home probably stayed fairly stable. However, the home that you remember is not always going to be exactly the same as it was when you left. This feeling of dislocation occurs for two reasons. First, because you are now looking at what was once familiar through a new set of perceptions, you will see everything a bit differently. The new experiences and perspectives gained abroad may mean that home is never the same again.

Secondly, like it or not, life at home did carry on while you were away. Things have happened to your family and



friends and events have occurred in their lives. These events may have caused changes in their feelings, perceptions, opinions, and attitudes just as your experiences have changed you.

It is normal for you to desire to hold onto the person who you have become. Your overseas experience and life will now be a part of you and reflect who you are right now. The “new” you cannot be discarded or forgotten for the “old” you.

University/College Life

For those of you who return to a university setting, you may feel that you have re-adjusted during the few months at home. However, if you come directly back to school without or with limited time at home, you may face a new set of re-adjustment issues upon return to academic life. If you have become very accustomed to a different type of academic system while overseas, you will have to deal with re-adjusting to the academic system at Western. For example, some students, while overseas, experience a greater amount of academic independence than they had previously experienced. If you have found that academic freedom is particularly gratifying and challenging then the re-adjustment to a system that is a bit more structured can be difficult. Returning to university life you may also feel a bit removed from Western and your department.

Levels of Readjustment

As stated earlier, no experience is the same for everyone. You will go through re-entry much differently than someone else. Research on readjustment to life in the United States after a prolonged stay abroad suggests that there are several variables that may affect the degree of

difficulty faced by individuals during re-entry. Some of these variables include:

Age and Academic Level

Older students or professionals who were well established in their field before their studies abroad sometimes experience a less troubled re-entry than younger students do. Those who left home as teenagers, ready to discover new attitudes and explore new ways of living, may likely adopt the host culture rather than selectively integrating it with their own cultural or personal beliefs. Once home they may constantly compare home country traditions and practices unfavorably with their host country experience, increasing their feelings of alienation.

Previous Cross-Cultural Experiences

Students who have previously been away from the United States have less trouble adjusting. A student who expects to experience some difficulties on return is better able to manage re-acculturation problems.

Length of Stay and Degree of Interaction with the Host Culture

The longer a student stays in the host country and the greater the degree of interaction and empathy with the host culture he or she experiences, the more difficult re-entry to the home culture environment may be. Some observers have noted that students who are able to afford vacation visits home during their study abroad seem to experience fewer problems upon returning home for good.

Readiness to Return Home

It has been found that students who strongly desire to return home at the end of their study abroad are most likely to return home with a high motivation to re-socialize, while those who strongly



desire to stay in their host country will seem alienated upon re-entry. Those who are moderately looking forward to returning home are expected to have the healthiest re-entry.

Degree of Similarity between the Home and Host Culture

The greater the differences between the host culture and the home culture, the greater the re-acclimation difficulty for the student. An Australian or British student returning home from the United States might expect an easier transition than a student returning from Thailand or Saudi Arabia.

Job Opportunities upon Return

Students who have difficulty finding a job upon their return can be expected to experience a more stressful re-entry than those who return to a past position. Sometimes, those returning to previously held positions feel they have outgrown them or that superiors and colleagues do not appreciate their contributions.

Individual Awareness

Even the most aware individual is not immune from reverse culture shock or re-acclimation bumps. But you should be able to understand what is happening and why. Ideally, you will be calm and capable of focusing on what you can do to ease the transition process, will look for ways to use the best of your experience, and will translate it so that family and colleagues can understand and share the benefits.

Availability (or Lack) of a Support Group

Being able to share concerns and coping strategies with other recent or more established returnees could help reduce the panic, depression, frustration, and

sense of helplessness that can accompany re-entry. Students who return to places where few people have studied abroad may feel alone since there is no one with whom they can discuss their concerns. It helps to locate another person who has shared this experience and to see that you can successfully overcome reverse culture shock.

Length of the Readjustment Period

The length of time that the re-adjustment phase lasts will vary from person to person, but it will also depend on the level of intensity you experience. If you experience a very high level of intensity, your adjustment will most likely take longer than if you experience a very low level of intensity. One returning student said, "I have been back four months and I still find it very hard to communicate about my experiences and often I feel I must hide many of the new attitudes or knowledge I may have gained that seems at odds with my old life." In addition, the length of time the re-adjustment lasts depends on you and how you cope with the situations that occur.

Coping Strategies

The good news is this phase of readjustment to life in the United States does not last forever! Here are some suggestions of ways to make this phase a bit easier on you and your family and friends.

Acknowledge your Adjustment

First, and foremost, acknowledge the re-entry phase as part of the overseas experience. Just as you had to give yourself time while going through the culture shock phase (if you did experience culture shock), you must



give yourself time to go through the re-entry phase. Acknowledging that reverse cultural adjustment is real will help you avoid feelings of guilt that might occur if you are feeling depressed or unhappy about being home. One student's advice was, "Don't blame yourself. Give yourself time... I'd have felt less guilty and peculiar if I'd realized it was a common phenomenon."

Share your Adjustment

Educate your family and friends about this phase of adjustment. Many people have never heard of reverse cultural adjustment and are not aware of its existence. If the people around you know a little about what you are experiencing, then, hopefully, they will be a bit more patient and understanding towards you and help you to re-adjust.

Stay in Contact with your Host Culture

Keep in contact through letters, telephone calls, and e-mail with the friends you made in your host country. It will help you feel that what you experienced was real and not a dream. When they come back, some students feel like they never even studied abroad. Also, if some of your friends are returning to the United States they will possibly be experiencing similar adjustment problems. You are an obvious support system for each other.

Seek out Others and Get Involved

If you are returning to Western, offer your services to the International Programs and Exchanges office. You are the perfect person to be an advocate for the programs in the office, and it can offer you an outlet to share your experiences.

Set Goals for your Future

Now is the time for you to look towards your future. You have finished one phase of your life and are ready to move ahead. Think about your next challenge or goal. Begin to make plans for that goal and put those plans into action. If you are returning Western to finish a year or two of a degree, you can develop goals for that period of time so that you will feel you are moving ahead rather than regressing. It is up to you to get the most out of that time by giving yourself new goals and challenges. Take the influence of your overseas experience and use it positively to help plan this next phase of your life.

Here is some advice from other returnees:

"I think one of the best steps to take is to give yourself and your friends and family time. It was good to visit with people and catch up on their news and listen to them. Listening is important."

"Try and reflect on the positive aspects of your stay away and the positive aspects of your here and now and how they compare and contrast."

"Don't be surprised — it will take time to re-adjust, but you'll feel 'at home' again in time. Don't expect to view/see people or things as you did when you left. Try to look for the positive things in returning home, not the negative."

"First of all, realize it is very natural to experience such. Secondly, try not to take yourself too seriously (if possible)... Keep up your ties with your friends in the 'foreign' country by letters and phone calls."

"Be patient with yourself and your mood swings. Keep in touch with friends you've met, but don't forget to build new bridges at home."



FINANCIAL AID RESOURCES

BOOKS AND MANUALS

- Chronicle Student Aid Book, Chronicle Guidance Publications
- Directory of Financial Aid for American Undergraduates Interested in Overseas Study and Travel, Joseph Lurie, Adelphi University Press
- Directory of Financial Aids for International Programs and International Activities, University of Minnesota Press
- Directory of Financial Aids for Minorities, ABC-Clio Information Services
- Directory of Financial Aids for Women, Sandra Goldstein and Gail Schlachter
- Fellowships, Scholarships, and Related Opportunities in International Education, The University of Tennessee Press
- Financial Resources for International Education, The Institute of International Study
- Financial Resources for International Study: A Definitive Guide to Organizations Offering Awards for Overseas Study, Peterson's Guide
- Grants for Graduate Students, Peterson's Guide
- How to Find Out About Financial Aid, Gail Schlachter
- Financial Aid for Study and Training Abroad, Gail Schlachter
- Scholarships, Fellowships and Loans, Feingold
- The International Scholarship Book, Daniel J. Cassidy
- National Scholarship, Daniel J. Cassidy, Research Service
- The Scholarship Book, Daniel J. Cassidy, Research Service
- The Student Guide: Grants, Loans, and Work-Study, U.S. Department of Education



INTERNET RESOURCES

HEALTH

- <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/travel.htm> (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention)
- <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/health/health.htm> (Lonely Planet Guide to health and diseases)
- <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/health/predep.htm> (Lonely Planet Guide to pre-departure health information)
- <http://www.who.ch> (World Health Organization)

TRAVEL INFORMATION

- <http://travel.state.gov/> (U.S. State Department)
- <http://www.statravel.com/>
- <http://www.transabroad.com/> (Transitions Abroad Magazine)
- <http://www.studenttraveler.com/> (Student Traveler)
- <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/> (Lonely Planet Guides)
- <http://www.iie.org> (Institute for International Education)
- <http://www.nafsa.org> (NAFSA: Association of International Educators)
- <http://www.istc.umn.edu/> (University of Minnesota, International Study and Travel Center)
- <http://www.globaled.us/> (Center for Global Education)

WORK ABROAD

- <http://www.overseasjobs.com/> (Overseas jobs)
- <http://www.worldteach.org/> (World Teach)
- <http://www.peacecorps.gov/> (The Peace Corps)

MISCELLANEOUS

- <http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/> (time zone search)
- <http://cnn.com/WORLD/> (CNN world news)
- <http://www.countrycallingcodes.com/> (international phone area codes)
- <http://wings.buffalo.edu/world> (virtual tourist)
- <http://www.xe.net/currency/> (currency conversion)
- <http://www.ups.com/using/services/intl/intl-guide.html> (UPS international shipping information)

