

Student Study Abroad Handbook



ENOCH LEHUNG/CITY OF JOBURG. A Johannesburg, South Africa neighborhood fitted with solar-powered geysers.



Study Abroad Participant Handbook

Congratulations on your acceptance to the Lane Community College (LCC) study abroad program! The information provided below gives general requirements and advice on how to have a successful experience abroad. Some of the information will be discussed at your orientation session, but it is your responsibility to read through the entire handbook. You should take this handbook with you to your program location, as well as refer to it when you return to the U.S.

I. Pre-Departure Logistics

PASSPORT

All U.S. citizens are required to obtain a passport before participating in international travel. If you do not have a passport, apply immediately, as processing at peak times can take more than six weeks. First time applicants are required to apply in person. For more information and application forms, visit travel.state.gov/passport.

If you already have a passport, it must be valid at least six months beyond the end of your program. If it will expire before that date, you should apply immediately for a renewal passport.

Participants must submit to the LCC program faculty, a clear and legible photocopy of their passport photo page prior to their departure.

VISA

A visa is an official document issued by a foreign country that gives formal permission to enter that country. A visa is usually a stamp or a sticker placed in your passport; therefore, you must possess a passport before applying for a visa.

Not all countries require U.S. citizens to have a visa; LCC's International Education office will inform you if you need one. The visa process can be time-consuming, so it is advised to begin the process upon acceptance to a study abroad program. If you plan to visit other countries during your study abroad program, determine the entry requirements for those countries in advance.

Important note to non-U.S. citizens: If you will be traveling using a passport from another country, it is important to research visa and travel restrictions and requirements. Many countries have very different visa rules depending on one's citizenship and passport type.

EMBASSY REGISTRATION

All participants should register their overseas travel with the Department of State. Though this registration is voluntary, it can help to better assist Americans abroad during an emergency, who are victims of crime, accident or illness, or whose family and friends need to contact them in case of an emergency at home. Registration is free and can be completed online at travelregistration.state.gov.

PACKING

Remember that you alone are responsible for carrying your luggage while abroad. How much do you think you could comfortably carry one mile? Inexperienced travelers tend to pack too much and are then frustrated by their heavy luggage while abroad. Below are some suggestions on what to bring and how to pack.

- International luggage allowance can vary by airline. Check with your airline carrier for weight and size restrictions and fees for excess baggage.
- In your carry-on, you should include one change of clothes (in case your luggage is lost), all of your important documents, all prescription medications, and an extra pair of eye glasses or contacts (if necessary).
- Before packing your entire wardrobe, think about what clothing is absolutely necessary. What is the climate of your host country? What type of clothing is acceptable? How often do you need to dress professionally? Try to pack clothing that can mix and match well and be layered. Also, dark clothing can hide dirt better than lighter clothing.
- Pack comfortable walking shoes. You may also want flip flops to wear in the shower.
- Depending on where you are going and how long you are staying, it may be easier to buy toiletries in your host country. If you do decide to pack toiletries, place them in a ziploc bag in your checked luggage. If you plan to put toiletries (recommend tooth brush and tooth paste) in your carry-on, know that there are very tight regulations on liquids; visit www.tsa.gov for specific information.
- American appliances require a plug adapter and in many cases a voltage converter when used abroad. These can be purchased at many electronics stores in the U.S. If you will be in the host country for an extended period of time, it may be easier to buy your desired appliances (such as a hair dryer or electric razor) upon arrival.
- Do not bring any valuable items that are irreplaceable. If you plan to take a laptop, get it insured in case of damage or theft.
- Leave enough room in your luggage or bring an extra bag for souvenirs and other items you may purchase in your host country. Check the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol website (www.cbp.gov) for information on what can be brought back into the U.S.

FINANCES ABROAD

How much money you need and the best way to use money abroad will depend on the length and location of your program, as well as your own personal spending preferences. Before leaving the U.S., research your host country: How much do meals cost in restaurants? How much does local transportation cost? What about entertainment? Finding answers to these questions can help you better determine a budget before you leave.

To help with your budgeting, remember that eating in restaurants or buying drinks can quickly deplete your funds. You can save a lot of money by getting most of your food at grocery stores and carefully budgeting how much you spend on food and drinks. It is also important to pace your shopping. Many people rush to buy souvenirs and gifts during

their first days abroad, only to find the same gifts at a lower price elsewhere. Shop around first to find the best deals.

Remember to take into account the American dollar's value in foreign currency. A good website to consult for up-to-date exchange rates is www.xe.com.

Cash

It is highly recommended to have about \$100 worth of the local currency before you even arrive in your host country. This will be useful for buying food and drink or paying for transportation upon arrival, if necessary. Before leaving the U.S., ask at your local bank if you can get currency for your host country. If you cannot easily get currency before leaving, plan to exchange or withdraw money at the airport or port of entry.

On a day-to-day basis, you should keep as little cash on your person as possible. If you must carry a large amount of cash, you may want to purchase a money belt or a small pouch that can be worn underneath your clothing to avoid theft.

Exchanging Money

You can exchange money at banks and bureaux de change either in the U.S. or abroad. These institutions generally charge a commission fee and the exchange rate will not be as favorable as if you withdrew money from an ATM. If possible, avoid exchanging money at airports, where exchange rates may be higher.

ATM / Debit Cards

Travelers often find that the easiest way to access money abroad is through ATM and debit cards. Before leaving the U.S., talk with your financial institution to determine if you have an internationally accepted ATM/debit card and PIN, to get a list of ATM locations in your host country, and to learn how much money you will be able to withdraw at once and in one day. ATMs usually offer a reasonable exchange rate, however your home financial institution may charge a service fee for an international withdrawal.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are another easy way to use money abroad. Visa and MasterCard are the most widely accepted cards worldwide. Before leaving the U.S., contact your credit card company to alert them of your international travel; otherwise, the company may suspect that your card has been stolen and prevent further use. You should also determine if your company charges a service fee for international transactions. Remember to write down your credit card number and the company's international phone number in case of loss or theft.

A useful feature of credit cards is the ability to use them for a cash advance at many banks and ATMs. Ask your credit card company for your international PIN and for the limit that you are allowed to withdraw.

Traveler's Checks

Traveler's checks, which can be cashed for local currency in foreign countries, can be purchased at any bank, AAA travel office, or American Express office in the U.S. The benefit of traveler's checks is that they can be replaced if lost or stolen; be sure to write down the numbers of your checks and keep that information separate from the checks themselves. However, many people now find that traveler's checks are inconvenient to cash and prefer to rely on ATMs. Despite this, you may still decide that it is beneficial to have traveler's checks on hand in case of an emergency.

Emergency Funds

If you find that you do not have enough money, or if you are unable to withdraw money from an ATM, there are a few different options available:

- Western Union can quickly transfer money almost anywhere worldwide and charges a service fee based on the amount sent. For more information, visit www.westernunion.com.
- MoneyGram International is a company similar to Western Union. For more information, visit www.moneygram.com.

COMMUNICATION

There are many different ways to communicate home while you are abroad. Below are some suggestions that may be helpful during your program.

Telephone

Basics: Almost all of LCC's study abroad programs are in a time zone other than Pacific Standard Time. When calling home, keep in mind the time difference to avoid calling at inappropriate times. When dialing an international number, it is necessary to include the access code and the country code before the phone number. To call someone in the U.S. from another country, you would need to dial 00 + 1 + area code + phone number. For people in the U.S. to call you, they will need to use a different set of codes (011 + country code + local number). Note that international numbers often have a different number of digits, and the first digit may be dropped when dialed from overseas. A helpful website for the current times worldwide and international dialing codes is www.timeanddate.com.

Cell phones: Most American cell phones will not work overseas. Even if your phone is capable of receiving service abroad, this can be an expensive option. Some participants choose to buy a "pay as you go" phone upon arrival in the host country. While this can be useful and inexpensive for calls made within your host country, it can still be a costly option for calling home. Some rental phones allow free incoming calls; however, the person calling you would still be charged. Before purchasing a phone overseas, research the costs in order to find the most affordable option.

Landlines: If you are staying with a host family, do not assume that you are free to use their phone. It is often more expensive to use a landline overseas than it is in the U.S., even when using a calling card. Talk with your host family about appropriate phone use.

Pay phones and calling cards: Pay phones overseas may be coin-operated, but more often they require a calling card. Calling card rates vary, so research your options to find one that is reasonable. They can be purchased in the United States or in the host country, in airports, train stations, post offices, convenience stores, etc. Even though calling from a pay phone offers less privacy, it is generally the most affordable option.

Voice Over IP: If you have internet access overseas, you may be able to use software that allows you to make free or inexpensive calls over the internet to other computers and even to landlines and cell phones. These services require a microphone, and voice quality may not be as good as a traditional phone. Video chat is also possible and requires a webcam. Some of the programs to offer this service include Skype, Google Talk, AOL Instant Messenger, FaceTime, Windows Live Messenger, and Yahoo! Messenger.

Internet

Computer access: Not every country is as technologically advanced as the U.S. Personal internet access may be more difficult to find, and school computer labs may be smaller and only open during specific hours. In many countries, internet cafes offer hourly rates for internet use and are convenient for checking email, making travel arrangements, uploading photos, etc.

Blog/Online Journal: An easy way to share your daily life abroad and travel adventures with friends and family at home is through an online journal, also called a blog. The advantage of blogging over email is that you do not have to send large, lengthy emails that may clog inboxes. Blogs can also be therapeutic during times of homesickness. Some sites that offer free blogging are LiveJournal, Blogger, and Wordpress.

Mail

It is often very easy to send mail internationally, though delivery times will take longer than within the U.S. For important and/or time-sensitive materials, you can rely on worldwide companies such as FedEx, UPS, or DHL. Remember to send home a postcard, too!

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT IDENTITY CARD (ISIC)

ISIC is an internationally accepted student ID card that is available to full-time students. It offers advantages such as:

- Proof of student status;
- Discounts on flights, buses, trains, and ferries;
- Discounts on entertainment, attractions, and entrance fees to museums and cultural sites;
- Discounts on hostels, hotels, restaurants, and shopping; and
- Access to free 24-hour, multilingual ISIC Emergency Help Line.

Cards can be purchased at several Eugene-area travel agencies. For more information, visit www.isic.org.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Travel insurance is designed to pay for unexpected costs incurred while traveling, such as those related to trip cancellation and lost baggage. Travel insurance is not a substitute for health insurance coverage abroad and is completely optional. For participants who are interested in purchasing travel insurance, more information can be found at www.travelguard.com.

II. Health and Safety

MEDICAL AND DENTAL CHECK-UPS

LCC strongly recommends that all participants visit a physician and receive a dental check-up prior to departure. Let your doctor know to where you are considering traveling and the nature of the program abroad. Ask your doctor if they have any concerns about your health; even minor health issues can become more serious through the stresses of adjusting to a new culture. If you regularly take medications, discuss plans for advance prescriptions and/or reactions to watch for (e.g., some medications make people vulnerable to sunburn, etc). See “Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drugs” below for more information.

Certain countries may require a physical examination before a visa can be issued. Your program coordinator will provide more information.

IMMUNIZATIONS

Some study abroad locations require participants to have specific immunizations. Talk with your program coordinator to learn what immunizations are required or even recommended for your program. Keep in mind that some immunizations require multiple booster doses and must be started weeks before departure. All study abroad participants should be up-to-date on their routine immunizations.

HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE

All study abroad participants are required to have health insurance that covers medical illness and emergency treatment abroad, as well as evacuation and repatriation of remains in the event of serious injury or death. Many individuals assume that their health insurance policies will cover them for medical illness or hospitalization, but find that their policies have significant limitations on coverage outside the U.S.

Several study abroad programs already include reasonably priced and comprehensive health insurance coverage that is suited to the program length and location. If individual participants are not required to purchase a standardized health insurance package, each individual must provide documentation of their coverage, including policy number and statement of coverage. If your health insurance does not cover medical illness and emergency treatment abroad and evacuation and repatriation of remains, you will have to purchase supplemental insurance; talk with the International Education Coordinator for advice. Participants who wish to arrive early to the program site or extend their stay after

the program are responsible for arranging their own health insurance coverage during this time.

All participants should maintain their domestic health insurance policy. This is especially true for those who have a pre-existing condition, which may not be covered by overseas coverage.

PRESCRIPTION AND OVER-THE-COUNTER DRUGS

If you are taking a prescription medication, you should bring an adequate supply for the duration of the program. Do not assume that medications that are easily available in the U.S. will be so readily available in your host country. If your insurance company requires written confirmation that you will be studying abroad, please contact the International Education Coordinator. You should pack all prescription medication in your carry-on in the event your checked luggage is lost, and all medication should be kept in the original prescription containers in order to facilitate clearance through customs.

It is important to note that some countries have restrictions on certain drugs or require a written note from your physician stating your diagnosis and why the medication is needed. Please talk with a physician or the International Education Coordinator to discuss any concerns you have about your prescription medication.

EMERGENCY INFORMATION AND HEALTH FORM

After being accepted to a program and prior to departure from the U.S., all study abroad participants are required to fill out an Emergency Information and Health Form. This form is confidential and only information related to the health and well-being of a participant is shared with the necessary overseas contact. While providing information is voluntary, participants are encouraged to be as detailed as possible. The more information provided regarding a participant's physical and mental health, the easier it will be for the International Education Office and program coordinator to respond appropriately and coordinate resources in the event of an emergency.

HIV/AIDS AND STDs

The threat of HIV/AIDS is more serious in some countries than in others; however, regardless of the study abroad location, participants should always take the necessary precautions to keep themselves healthy. Listed below is advice on how to avoid the risk of contracting HIV or a sexually transmitted disease.

- Abstain from sexual activity. If you do decide to be sexually active, always use a latex condom and spermicide during vaginal, oral, and anal sex. You should purchase condoms in the U.S. before departure, especially if you are traveling to a developing country.
- Do not use intravenous drugs or share needs. Avoid body piercings, tattoos, acupuncture treatments, and medical or dental procedures that require needles.
- If possible, delay blood transfusions until you have returned to the U.S., as not all countries screen blood for HIV. If you must have a blood transfusion, contact the closest American Embassy or Consulate for a recommended facility, and receive blood from a friend or classmate who has tested negative for HIV.

If you are HIV-positive, you need to know that some countries require HIV screening tests and even restrict individuals with HIV from entering the country. The country's Embassy can provide more information. Also, be aware that not all medications are available worldwide; talk with your physician regarding this matter. If you have any questions or concerns, contact the International Education Coordinator.

JET LAG AND POST-ARRIVAL SICKNESS

Jet lag is the disruption of one's circadian rhythm caused by crossing several time zones during a flight. Jet lag affects people differently; symptoms may include loss of appetite, headache, fatigue, insomnia, irritability, and even mild depression. It is believed that eastward-bound flights are more disruptive than ones going westward. Below are some tips for how to cope with jet lag:

- Drink plenty of water and avoid alcohol during the flight to stay well hydrated.
- Exercise in your seat and move around the flight cabin as much as possible.
- If you reach your destination in the morning, stay awake until the appropriate local time to go to sleep.

COUNTRY SPECIFIC RISKS

It is important to research any possible health issues in your host country prior to departure. For example, if you are traveling to the tropics, the risks of suffering from traveler's diarrhea and contracting malaria are higher than they would be in colder regions. Learn how to protect yourself and what you need to do should you become ill.

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Participants with a history of mental health issues (including, but not limited to, depression, anxiety, stress management, and addiction) are encouraged to disclose this information on the Emergency Information and Health Form. While study abroad is an exciting experience, it can also be stressful. The added stress of adapting to a new culture while being far from your support network can magnify existing health issues. Talk with your physician, a close friend or family member, the International Education Coordinator, or your program coordinator about your concerns and to develop positive coping strategies while abroad.

If you are taking medications to manage your mental health, it is important that you continue to do so and make plans to bring a sufficient supply. Interruption or change in type or dosage of such medications combined with travel stress can often trigger serious problems.

ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE

The most common source of problems relating to code of conduct and safety problems during college-led international travel programs stem from alcohol and/or drug abuse problems. For students under age 21, travel abroad may afford their first opportunity to legally purchase and consume alcohol. For others, travel abroad may reduce their normal inhibitions and lead to more reckless drinking or drug consumption. Some students may have pre-existing drug abuse or alcoholism problems that they bring with them abroad.

In almost all cases, alcohol or drug use will lead to impaired judgments that can place students at greater risk or lead them to make poor decisions.

LCC has developed a specific statement regarding alcohol use related to school related events. For the purposes of an international travel program, all participants are required to comply with the following statement:

Alcohol Use by Students at Off Campus Functions

While attending college funded functions and activities including study abroad and trips off campus, students are responsible to refrain from the unauthorized or illegal use, possession, or distribution of illegal drugs and/or alcohol. These functions include lodging and travel to and from events and anytime one is representing LCC. Any student, regardless of age that is found to be distributing illegal drugs and/or alcohol is subject to college disciplinary procedures as well as prosecution by local authorities. Alcoholic beverage consumption by those of legal drinking age shall not interfere with any scheduled program, nor shall it negatively impact other delegates.

Students have a right to a smoke-free, drug-free, and alcohol-free learning environment. Students are responsible to interact in ways which will not interfere with the educational process and/or any LCC sponsored activity.

For students with pre-existing alcohol or drug abuse problems, you may wish to identify Alcoholics Anonymous chapters in the local region of travel or define other plans prior to departure to responsibly manage addictions.

While drugs may seem more readily available abroad, many countries have strict penalties regarding drug use and possession. Individuals caught with even a small amount of an illegal substance may face heavy fines, arrest, or incarceration; as guests in the host country, study abroad participants are subject to the local laws and punishments. Should an American be imprisoned overseas, the U.S. government cannot secure that person's release or provide legal support. Likewise, LCC is not responsible for legal counsel for a study abroad participant accused of a crime. Any participants caught with illegal substances will be subject to program dismissal.

FOOD-RELATED ISSUES

Safety

Food is an important aspect of every culture, and what is described as "good food" is defined differently by different cultures. You may find that a typical meal is small by American standards or uses ingredients that you have never eaten. In many countries, food and drink are safe to consume, but in other countries you need to use caution. When you arrive in your host country, talk with your program coordinator, your host family, or local students about food quality and what precautions, if any, need to be taken. The following tips will help you stay healthy when eating or drinking abroad:

- Avoid uncooked food, especially from street vendors.
- When buying fruit, select those that have a thick peel.

- Only drink water that you know is safe for drinking. If you are unsure, drink bottled water and avoid ice cubes and drinks made with blended ice.
- Never leave drinks unattended.
- Avoid products made from unpasteurized milk.
- In general, “Peel it, boil it, cook it, or forget it.”

Special Dietary Needs

Participants who are vegetarian or who have special dietary needs should know that not all locations overseas can accommodate their needs. If you have any dietary concerns, talk with the International Education Coordinator or with a physician. If your study abroad program involves a home-stay, provide as much information as possible on your housing form to ensure a good match with a host family. Please note that your host family is not required to make special meals tailored to your needs.

Eating Disorders

All cultures view food and standards of beauty differently. In some cultures, telling someone that he or she has gained weight is considered a compliment. Participants who currently have or who have had an eating disorder may find this aspect of study abroad particularly challenging. Before departure, it is important to not only talk with your physician, but also with the International Education Coordinator, who can help you find support networks in the host country. If your study abroad program includes a home-stay, be as open and honest as possible on your housing form to help prevent difficult home-stay situations.

ROAD SAFETY

Driving accidents are one of the leading causes of death of travelers. Because road conditions and driving laws vary by country, study abroad participants are discouraged from renting a car. Likewise, riding or traveling with others who are not familiar with local road conditions or rules is equally discouraged. Most countries have a well-developed public transportation system that facilitates travel both within a city and between cities. For more information, visit the Association for Safe International Road Travel website (www.asirt.org) or the U.S. Department of State’s website on international road safety (travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety_1179.html).

Basic road safety tips include:

- Know your route, destination, and current state of repair.
- Avoid traveling at night.
- Do not hitch rides or travel with strangers.

GENERAL SAFETY TIPS

Regardless of where you are in the world, you should always exercise safety precautions to protect yourself from theft, harassment, and assault. You will undoubtedly stand out as a foreigner, which can make you more vulnerable, but you can be proactive to ensure your own safety. The following tips can help you to stay safe overseas:

- Learn about your host country and city before leaving the U.S. and talk with your host family and/or program coordinator upon arrival. What safety concerns are specific to this location?
- Avoid traveling alone, especially at night and in unfamiliar locations, but also avoid drawing attention to yourself when traveling with a large group of Americans or other foreigners.
- Do not flaunt your money, camera, cell phone, etc. Use a money belt to keep your money and passport hidden under your clothing. You may wish to keep a “decoy” wallet or purse with a small amount of cash that can appease a would-be robber demanding your money. Keep valuables locked up when you are not using them.
- Remember that even a small amount of alcohol can impair your judgment and make you more vulnerable.
- Use common sense, be aware of your surroundings, and avoid confrontations. Avoid areas that appear to be unsafe.
- Observe the local culture. Learn how to blend in with others from your new city.
- **Most importantly**, do not get too comfortable in your new setting. Do not assume that once you know your way around, you will be completely safe.

CULTURAL PROBLEMS

Some problems arise due to cultural misunderstandings. Before leaving the U.S., read and study as much about the local culture and customs as possible. (The next section of this handbook provides more information related to culture.) Listed below are things to avoid while abroad:

- Avoid discussions of politics, religion, etc., with people you do not know well.
- Avoid arguments or discussions of controversial subjects with individuals who have been drinking.
- Avoid wearing clothing and accessories with American flags, logos, etc.

EMERGENCIES ABROAD

All of LCC’s study abroad programs have been selected with participants’ safety in mind. However, there are many events that cannot be prevented, such as accidents or illness, political unrest, and natural disasters. All LCC faculty and staff who lead a study abroad program are required to attend an education abroad training workshop to ensure that they are prepared in the event of an emergency.

Emergency Protocol

Carry emergency contacts (cell phones and college contacts) with you at all times in case an emergency develops when away from the group. Should an emergency arise, contact your trip lead or designated staff at the partner college immediately. Establish a designated meeting place with trip leads in the case of phone disruption. Your first responsibility is to remove yourself and others from harms way and then establish contact with college staff. In the event of natural disasters or other catastrophic emergency, be aware of closest locations of US Consulates, Red Cross, or local police, hospital, and related emergency facilities. Phone home to let family and friends know you are OK, but avoid talking to the media or spreading rumors if you do not have all of the information.

Instead let college staff manage media and college communications and worry about keeping yourself and those around you safe and calm.

Political or Social Unrest

It is possible that political or social conflicts may arise that result in demonstrations against the actions of either the local government or another country. Should there be any political or social unrest, it is advised to take the following precautions:

- Stay informed on local events by reading the newspaper, watching the news, and talking with your host family and/or program coordinator.
- Avoid public demonstrations and protests, where violent outbreaks are possible.
- Blend in as much as possible. Avoid wearing apparel with American logos and stay away from places frequented by Americans.
- Communicate home to let family and friends know that you are okay. Images portrayed online or on tv can make the situation appear more threatening than it is, causing your family and friends to worry.

III. Culture

CULTURE: WHAT IS IT?

Culture is an abstract concept that cannot be fully explained in one sentence. Some people make a distinction between “culture” and “Culture.” The first, little c culture, encompasses the beliefs, behaviors, and values that influence a particular group of people and are passed from generation to generation. This includes daily habits and routines, such as how people greet each other, what one eats, what one wears, etc. The second, big C culture, is the refinement of those daily habits and routines. French crêpes, the Great Wall of China, Shakespeare, Bob Dylan, and *día de los muertos* are all examples of big C culture.

Before going abroad, read about the culture of your host country. Remember to pay attention to little c culture as well as big C culture. The more you know, the less likely it will be that you commit a cultural mistake. Some cultural aspects that you might want to research include:

- How do people greet each other?
- What time are meals eaten? What is the biggest meal of the day?
- What is proper etiquette when eating with a group of people?
- What subjects are considered taboo to talk about?
- How should you dress?
- How are gender roles different from in the U.S.?

THE “UGLY AMERICAN”

Unfortunately, Americans have earned a bad reputation in many parts of the world. The “Ugly American” is a stereotype that refers to someone who is loud, ill-mannered, and uninterested in local culture, and who considers American culture the standard to which all other cultures should be compared. There are many ways for you to avoid falling into this stereotype:

- Learn about your host culture before going abroad.
- Keep an open mind and be curious.
- Observe the locals and behave as they behave. For example, if they speak quietly on public transportation, then your loud conversation will only draw negative attention. Likewise, it may be insulting if you refuse to use chopsticks in Asian countries.
- Remember that there is no one correct culture. American culture is not better than any other culture; it is just different from other cultures.

FITTING IN

Acceptable social behavior will vary from country to country, but there are some ideas that are universal. Below are a few things to keep in mind that will help you fit into the local culture. In any case, you should always be polite, respectful, and friendly.

- Humor is expressed very differently around the world. Americans tend to use a lot of sarcasm and slapstick humor, which may not translate well into another culture. People may be offended by comments that you consider humorous.
- Observe how closely people stand and sit next to each other and the amount of physical contact they use. Americans tend to prefer a lot of personal space, but in other cultures, two people conversing stand only inches apart. Likewise, some cultures find it odd that Americans hug each other, while Americans think it is awkward to kiss friends on the cheek.
- Some cultures may consider personal questions to be rude. Follow your hosts' lead to know which questions are polite. It may also be rude in some cultures to talk too much about yourself.
- Certain subjects, such as religion and politics, are considered taboo in many cultures. Conversations around these subjects may lead to heated debate and tense situations, so use caution if your hosts try to engage you in debate.

STAGES OF CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

You will probably be excited about everything when you first arrive in your host country. However, that excitement may wane after a few days or weeks. When people immerse themselves in a new culture, they generally experience different stages of cultural adjustment. Listed below are the different stages with a description of each one. Not everyone experiences every stage of adjustment, and for some people certain stages may be repeated.

- ***Honeymoon***: Almost everyone experiences this stage when they study abroad. Immediately upon arrival, you are curious and enthusiastic about everything in the new culture: the food, the buildings, the language, the way people dress, etc. You are settling into your new living arrangements, getting to know new people, and exploring your new city.
- ***Engaging Culture***: As you become more involved in the host culture, you start to notice the differences between this culture and American culture. You may find yourself missing the conveniences of home and wondering, "Why do they do things this way?" You may also feel more tired and have frequent headaches during this stage.

- ***Culture Shock***: Many people, though not all, experience culture shock while abroad. This is the lowest point of cultural adjustment, during which you may feel that you hate being in the host country and want to return home. Culture shock can manifest itself in a number of ways, including: sadness, homesickness, loneliness, sleeping too much or too little, anger, irritability, resentment, withdrawal or a sense of helplessness. See “Coping Strategies” below for suggestions on how to deal with culture shock.
- ***Adjustment – Crisis – Frustration – Adjustment (cyclical)***: While adjusting to the new culture, a crisis may occur that causes you to revert back to feelings of frustration with the new culture. In this stage, a crisis can be something as minor as not understanding your host mother when she asks you a question. Though you probably will not reach the same low as you did while experiencing culture shock, this stage may occur more than once.
- ***Integration***: In this stage, you become more and more integrated into the host culture. You feel more comfortable and at ease in your new surroundings, and begin to view the host culture through the eyes of the locals. You are even able to laugh at yourself when you make a mistake. As your time winds down in the host country, you realize how much you will miss when you return home.
- ***Re-entry and Reverse Culture Shock***: For some people, reverse culture shock is the most difficult part of study abroad. While you are excited to be with your family and friends, you may be frustrated that no one is interested in hearing your stories or seeing your photos. You might miss the routine that you developed abroad and your notion of “home” may have changed. The next section of this handbook gives advice on how to deal with reverse culture shock.

COPING STRATEGIES

Being far from home and immersed in a new culture can be stressful, even for people who have experience traveling abroad. When a participant is in a low mood, it may be more tempting to make poor decisions in an effort to feel better. Listed below are examples of poor coping strategies, as well as strategies that are more positive. Participants are encouraged to write their own list of coping strategies that have worked for them during periods of transition and stress and to have it on hand in case it is needed while abroad.

Poor Coping Strategies

- Avoiding others
- Staying in your room or apartment all day
- Eating excessively or skipping meals
- Turning to alcohol or drugs
- Escaping into sexual relationships

Better Coping Strategies

- Visit fellow students
- Find a local person with whom you can talk
- Practice your faith through prayer, meditation, reading, etc.
- Write letters or emails to family and friends

- Take a walk or otherwise spend time outside
- Meet with the program coordinator to talk about stress

CULTURE AND GENDER

The way that men and women are expected to act, how they talk to members of the same and opposite sex, and the perceptions of masculinity and femininity are all defined by the culture in which one lives. Many cultures view gender roles differently than we do in the U.S. Before going abroad, learn about your host country's cultural views to know what may be expected of you.

Women in particular may notice a marked difference in how they are treated abroad. In some countries, it is common for men to openly express their interest by honking, whistling, or yelling. American women may receive even more attention because of the negative stereotypes that are portrayed by American tv shows and movies. Even being friendly or making eye contact, which is common in the U.S., can draw unwanted attention. While women from these countries have learned to deal with these actions, American women may get annoyed or feel harassed. Below are some precautions that women should take while abroad:

- Dress conservatively. Skirts that are too short or tops that are too low can give the impression that a woman is "loose" or "easy."
- Pay attention to the dress and behavior of the local women and model yourself after them.
- When going out, use the buddy system.
- Remember that alcohol will impair your judgment and make you more vulnerable.

MULTICULTURAL STUDENTS

Multicultural students may face some unique challenges when studying abroad. Some may study in a country where, for the first time in their lives, they are considered a member of the majority. Because these students look like the citizens of the host country, they are initially held to the same cultural expectations and their most distinguishing feature is no longer their physical appearance but their American citizenship.

Other students may choose to visit a country where their ethnicity or heritage is even more pronounced when compared to the locals, such as an African-American student who studies in Japan. In situations such as this, students may be seen as a curiosity and draw stares and attention from the local citizens. Some students have also reported that people have asked to touch their hair because it is so different.

Before studying abroad, multicultural students should research the country that they will visit in order to understand the cultural views of race and ethnicity. Students should also consider the impact of being far from their support network of family and friends. If you have any questions about what to expect in the host country, talk with the International Education Coordinator.

Some websites that may be useful for multicultural students include:

- All Abroad: www.allabroad.us

- Project for Learning Abroad, Training, and Outreach: www.globaled.us/plato/resources.html
- Diversity Abroad: www.diversityabroad.com

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

All students who meet the eligibility requirements are able to study abroad through the International Education office. Although LCC provides reasonable accommodations to assist persons with disabilities, bear in mind that American laws governing accessibility do not apply overseas. Persons who wish to request reasonable accommodations for an education abroad activity should contact Disability Resource Services at least 12 weeks in advance of international travel.

Students should know that disabilities are culturally defined. Some cultures do not recognize certain disabilities, while in other cultures persons with disabilities are not necessarily treated with respect and dignity. However, many individuals with disabilities who have traveled abroad have found some cultures to be more tolerant and accepting than here in the U.S. Others have discovered that the way of life in certain countries helps alleviate symptoms associated the disability. Study abroad is a challenge regardless of where a student goes, but through the experience participants learn more about themselves and their abilities.

Two websites that students may find helpful are:

- Mobility International USA: www.miusa.org
- University of Minnesota's Access Abroad: www.umabroad.umn.edu/access

LGBTQQ STUDENTS

Sexual identity is culturally defined, and the degree to which non-heterosexuality is accepted and tolerated varies by country. As Americans, students may feel entitled to certain basic human rights; however, LGBTQQ students may need to reconcile those rights with the cultural values of the host country. Before studying abroad, there are many things to consider:

- How does the host culture view non-heterosexuality? How do citizens of the host country treat those who are openly gay?
- Are there any laws governing homosexuality? Bear in mind that it is illegal in many countries, and punishment varies from fines to jail time to the death penalty.
- What is considered an acceptable display of affection between two people of the same sex? It is important to know that in some cultures, two men may hold hands or kiss each other on the cheek as a sign of respect and women may hold hands as a sign of close friendship.
- If you are currently open about your sexuality, will you need to hide it while abroad? If so, how will you handle suppressing part of your identity?
- What support networks, if any, exist in the host country?
- If you choose to come out while abroad, how will that affect your relationships with family and friends once you return? Will they still be supportive of you? How will you respond if they dismiss your sexuality as a temporary result of your study abroad experience?

If your study abroad program includes a home-stay, it may be wise to indicate your sexual orientation on your housing information form. This will help ensure that you live with a family who is accepting of your sexuality. Contact the International Education Coordinator if you have any questions.

LGBTQQ students may find the following websites helpful:

- NAFSA: International Educators Association's Rainbow Special Interest Group: www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/index.html
- Amnesty International: www.ai-lgbt.org or www.aiusa.org/outfront

IV. Re-Entry

PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

At the end of the program, all study abroad participants are asked to complete an exit survey. This survey helps the International Education Office build upon the strengths of the program, as well as make any necessary improvements. Please note that if you have specific concerns about your study abroad program, you should contact the International Education Coordinator.

CUSTOMS

Upon your return to the U.S., you will be required to pass through U.S. Customs and declare all items that were purchased or given to you while abroad. To facilitate this process, keep your receipts together in your carry-on luggage. Some items, such as fruits and vegetables, are not allowed into the U.S. Failure to declare items or significantly understate an item's value can result in a penalty. For more information, visit the U.S. Customs and Border Protection website (www.cbp.gov).

HEALTH ISSUES

Should you become ill after your program, make an appointment with a doctor and tell her or him what countries you visited while abroad. If you were on a program that provided health insurance, remember that this coverage ends at the completion of the program. For this reason you should maintain your domestic health insurance while abroad or schedule to resume your domestic health insurance on the date you return to the U.S.

RE-ADJUSTMENT AND REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

While some study abroad participants are able to seamlessly reintegrate into American culture, others find it especially challenging. You may feel initially feel thrilled to be home with family and friends, but that excitement can give way to feelings of disappointment and frustration when they lose interest in hearing every story that goes along with the hundreds of photos that you took. You may also miss various things from your life abroad, like certain foods, tv shows, people, or stores.

Another problem is that students often return home with the expectation that nothing has changed while they were gone. However, regardless of how long a student is in another country, it is inevitable that he or she will miss out on certain events, like weddings, birthdays, blockbuster movies, or big news stories.

For many students who experience reverse culture shock, it generally does not last as long as the initial culture shock you felt abroad. The following suggestions will help you to cope with your reverse culture shock, as well as continue your international experience.

- Maintain contact with the friends that you made abroad.
- Hang out with other study abroad alumni.
- Share your experience with students who are about to study abroad.
- Meet with an international student at LCC.
- Submit a story about your experience to a local newspaper.
- Design a poster that the International Education Office can use to promote study abroad.
- Give a presentation at a local elementary school about your host culture.
- Teach English abroad once you have finished school.
- If your study abroad program focused on language-learning, you can:
 - Check out books and magazines in that language from the library.
 - Watch videos, stream news shows online, and listen to music in that language.
 - Join a local conversation table.

V. Contact Us

If at any time you have any questions regarding your study abroad experience, please feel free to contact us.

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