Study Abroad Handbook

Office of International Programs
Dear International Study Participant,

Congratulations on your study abroad plans for the upcoming semester or academic year. I hope that your international experience will contribute profoundly to your development as a person, a scholar, and a global citizen. Boston College hopes for no less.

We have compiled this handbook to provide you with information that you will need to prepare for your experience abroad. While you will also receive information directly from your host institution or organization, please review this handbook now and share the information with your parents. We have drawn upon years of experience to provide, in very short compass, information on everything from visas and health to packing and cultural preparation.

While increasing numbers of Boston College students have already had significant international travel experience, relatively few have had a sustained experience of living, working or studying abroad. This poses great and exciting challenges and promises to pull you far beyond your normal comfort zone. Please welcome that challenge. Resist the temptation, so ready at hand, to retreat into the electronic cocoon afforded by current technology.

How might you make the most of your study abroad experience? Work to integrate into your host environment. Keep in mind that the transition into your new setting will not be seamless, and you may not have the same services that are available at Boston College. Take advantage of the strengths of the host university and community and try to live as the local students live. Join student organizations, do volunteer work in the local community, set up informational interviews with local companies...do whatever it takes to meet local students and residents. Try, as best you can, to live in and with the community which will be your home for the term or year. Don’t settle for being a remote bystander.

And if you face difficulty or experience confusion, let us know. Our office, and Boston College at large, is always ready to help.

With best wishes,

Nick Gozik, PhD
Director, Office of International Programs
Director, McGillycuddy-Logue Center for Undergraduate Global Studies

www.bc.edu/international
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PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

TRAVEL PREPARATIONS

☐ Conduct pre-departure research
☐ Apply for a passport and visa if needed
☐ Make travel arrangements
☐ Plan your finances
☐ Arrange medical and dental check-ups
☐ Obtain necessary vaccinations and prescriptions
☐ Register online for HTH medical insurance
☐ Make a packing list

AT BOSTON COLLEGE

☐ Complete a Final Confirmation and Clearance Form for Study Abroad
☐ Pay all BC and external provider bills
☐ Complete a Consortium Agreement (only for financial aid recipients attending an external program)
☐ Obtain BC course approval for major, minor, and core requirements
☐ Complete a housing “Leave of Absence Form,” or contact Residential Life to sublet your apartment
☐ Submit a mail forwarding address to the McElroy post office

ON-SITE SAFETY PLANNING

☐ Read health, safety, and travel recommendations for your destination
☐ Make copies of all important documents
☐ Purchase a money belt or neck pouch
☐ Give a relative your travel itinerary and contact information

CONTACT THE OIP WITH QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK
TRAVEL PREPAREATIONS

Travel Documents
• You are responsible for being in full compliance with immigration regulations. Your passport must be valid for at least six months after your US return date. Visit www.travel.state.gov for passport information and the country’s consulate page for visa information. Non-US citizens should check with the appropriate consulates about visas and passport renewal procedures.
• If you attend a BC program and your host country requires a visa, your OIP program manager will provide you with further details on the visa application process. In most cases, students are responsible for obtaining their own visas. You are also encouraged to contact the consulate directly. The OIP provides visa assistance for some external programs. External program students should also check with their program provider.
• Keep copies of all passport and visa application documents you submit.
• If you travel through other countries en route to your final destination, even if you just switch planes, you may need a transit visa. Check on this before departure.
• Bring copies of your passport/visa, in a separate place from the originals, when you travel.

Travel Arrangements
• You are responsible for your own travel arrangements.
• If you arrive before the start of your program, book accommodations for that time. Youth hostels may be a less expensive alternative to hotels. However, hostels may not have lockers available so have an alternative way to secure/lock your own belongings.
• Keep in mind that most rail and airline passes must be purchased in the US before departure.
• Read all guidelines and restrictions before purchasing airline tickets and passes. Remember that most airlines charge fees if you change your travel dates after purchase.

Some websites that students have used in the past include:
www.statravel.com    www.raileurope.com
www.kayak.com        www.hiusa.org
www.hostels.com
Finances

- In most countries you can use credit, ATM, and debit cards. Your ATM card must have access to international networks (e.g., Cirrus, Plus). If you have a PIN with letters, know the corresponding numbers. Some vendors and ATMs may require a special ‘chip’ card for transactions, making it impossible to use your card in certain situations. Keep backup currency on hand. Know your credit card PIN. Check your bank’s overseas fees before departure.
- Many US banks have international partners that do not charge ATM fees or charge reduced fees. Ask your bank about their international partners.
- Take another ATM or credit card as a back-up. Bring some US currency, which can be exchanged in an emergency. Leave copies of all bank cards in the US. Take your bank international customer service numbers abroad.
- Notify your ATM, credit, and debit card banks before departure. Otherwise, they may think your cards were stolen once you use them abroad.
- Research what is needed to open an overseas bank account. It may not be possible to open an account everywhere, and other places may require it. It may take up to two weeks to activate a new account.
- Evaluate your program’s cost (see the Finances section of the OIP website for BC program estimates). Prepare a budget. Take local currency with you for your arrival. You may have difficulties withdrawing or exchanging money at the airport and will want to make sure that you have enough for the first day. The amount needed varies by location.

Medical Insurance

- You will need to have several types of coverage, including your domestic insurance plan, HTH coverage, and sometimes in-country insurance. All serve different purposes.
- For domestic coverage, you can utilize BC’s insurance plan or arrange coverage through another carrier. BC program participants who do not use the BC plan must waive the insurance through Agora. External program students who choose the BC carrier’s plan must obtain the “Student Health Insurance Plan Enrollment Form for JYA Students” from Student Services and submit it to the provider.
- All BC students will also be enrolled in the HTH Worldwide Insurance plan for the duration of their program. External program students with comparable coverage may be eligible for an HTH waiver. Visit the OIP website for a list of eligible programs.
- Students enrolled in HTH are required to register online for HTH insurance (www.hthstudents.com) after receiving the insurance certificate number.
- An HTH fee is placed on your BC bill each semester you are abroad.
Medical Insurance (Continued)
- HTH insurance coverage dates are listed by program on the OIP website. If you plan to be abroad before or after your particular program’s coverage dates, it is recommended that you extend your coverage for an additional fee. Visit www.hthstudents.com/ge.cfm?ac=EVH-8208 for further details.
- Keep in mind that HTH does not cover you within the US.
- Download your HTH membership card from their website. Carry this card at all times. You will need the card if you seek medical treatment abroad.

Health Preparations
Students with Chronic Illness
- If you have a physical or psychological condition that requires ongoing treatment, you must notify the OIP so that necessary assistance can be arranged. You must also consult your physician or counselor about your plan to go abroad. Seek their advice about your options and discuss your overseas medical care.
- Consider possible consequences of stress from cultural adjustment and reliance on different medical practices.
- You are strongly encouraged to inform on-site staff about any medical condition for which you may need special assistance. Do this prior to arrival.

Check-Ups and Vaccinations
- Have medical and dental exams before departure.
- Check that all of your vaccinations are current. Certain countries may also require or recommend vaccinations against specific diseases before departure. Visit the following websites for details:
  - www.state.gov (US Department of State)
  - www.cdc.gov (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
  - www.hthworldwide.com (HTH insurance)

Prescriptions
- Bring medications in their original labeled bottles. Take copies of all written prescriptions with generic names.
- When feasible, bring medication that lasts for your entire stay abroad. It is not always possible to obtain some medications abroad.
- Do not ship medication overseas— it may be retained at customs.
- Visit the HTH website (www.hthworldwide.com) for information on HTH’s prescription benefit.
- Pack medication in your carry-on bag, not your checked luggage.
Health Preparations (Continued)

Other Precautions

• If you have a serious health condition or allergy, plan to wear a Medic Alert bracelet. It is strongly recommended that you let on-site staff and travel companions know of your condition in case you have a medical emergency. Bring translations for your condition or allergy in the local language(s) where you will be traveling, so that you can explain in the event of an emergency.

Packing

• The government, airports, and airlines enforce strict regulations on the content and weight of baggage. Consult airline websites for details.
• Use sturdy luggage and pack lightly. Be sure you can lift your own luggage.
• Secure a luggage tag on each bag. Place your overseas and US contact information inside each suitcase.
• Take a small carry-on bag packed with essentials—e.g., toiletries, change of clothes, medication in original containers— in case your luggage is lost. Read federal guidelines (www.faa.gov) before packing liquids, gels, and aerosols.
• Keep your passport, money, and acceptance letters separate from your checked baggage. You will need them upon arrival at the airport.

Don’t Forget:

• Copies of your passport, visa, medical prescriptions, and all bank cards (front and back sides) in case of loss. Leave copies with a parent or guardian.
• Your host institution’s acceptance letter
• Contact information for overseas staff and the OIP
• HTH insurance card
• Appropriate clothing for your host country’s culture and climate
• Prescriptions in their original containers
• Extra eyeglasses, sunglasses, and your prescription
• Contact lenses and solution
• Money belt or neck wallet
• Cell phone (if it will work abroad)
• Adapters and voltage converter if bringing electronics
• Laptop computer (consider insuring it against theft)
• Battery-operated alarm clock (if your cell phone does not have an alarm)
• Lightweight backpack for traveling
• Sturdy walking shoes or waterproof hiking boots
• Camera and journal to document your experience
Pre-Departure Research

Recommendations for Everyone
- Research your host country using the internet, travel books, newspapers, magazines, and international news programs.
- Talk with study abroad returnees, OIP staff, BC faculty, and international or exchange students who have studied or lived abroad, and especially those familiar with your host country.
- Be informed and capable of discussing US history and current events while abroad. You may be surprised by how much people in other countries know about these topics.

Health/Safety
- www.bc.edu/international (OIP website - see “Wellness Abroad” link)
- www.state.gov (US Department of State)
- http://studentsabroad.state.gov (US Department of State)
- www.hthworldwide.com (HTH insurance)
- www.cdc.gov (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Countries/Cultures
- www.onlinenewspapers.com (international newspapers)
- www.countrywatch.com
- www.worldatlas.com
- www.culturecrossing.net

Recommended Guides
- Rough Guides series (www.roughguides.com)
- Let’s Go series (www.letsgo.com)
- Lonely Planet series (www.lonelyplanet.com)
- Frommer’s series (www.frommers.com)
- Culture Shock series
- Eyewitness Travel guides
- Maximizing Study Abroad: A Student’s Guide to Strategies for Language and Culture Learning and Use (R. Michael Paige et al., 2002)
- www.cafeabroad.com

The OIP Resource Room has host university materials, student evaluations, and books.

Women/LGBT/Disabled/AHANA Students
Attitudes toward women, the LGBT population, disabled people, and AHANA students vary worldwide. Customs, beliefs, laws, facilities, and social practices relating to these populations may be different than in the US.
Women/LGBT/Disabled/AHANA Students (Continued)

To prepare for the cultural differences you may encounter, it is recommended that you:
• Speak with people who have traveled or lived in your host country.
• Research your host country. Many student travel guides have sections pertaining to special interest groups.
• Be sensitive to cultural differences. Remember that you will be subject to your host country’s laws, even if you feel they are discriminatory.
• Meet with your OIP advisor if you have any concerns. All matters will be kept confidential.
• Visit the OIP website and the Office of the Dean of Students website (www.bc.edu/content/bc/offices/dos/GLBTQ.html) for further information.

Phones Abroad

Ask study abroad alumni or locals for advice about making calls abroad. Some methods work better than others. Options that may work include:
• Your US cell phone can work abroad if it is a world/tri-band phone. Keep in mind that making international calls from your US cell phone can be prohibitively expensive. Contact your provider for rates.
• You may be able to unlock your phone and use a local SIM card, allowing you to pay local rates. Contact your provider to see what might be possible.
• If it is not feasible or too expensive to use your US phone abroad, consider purchasing an inexpensive cell phone and plan in your host country.
• Consider using Skype (www.skype.com) for international calls. You can pay for a subscription or deposit a certain amount on your account.
• You can bring a US phone card or use local calling cards. Check with the provider about rates and how to make calls.

BC Communication and Technology

• It is very important that you send your international contact details to the OIP (via the OIP website) soon after arrival abroad.
• Boston College will communicate with you via your BC email account. Be sure to check it while abroad. Also utilize Agora while overseas.
• You may need to set up a Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection while abroad, particularly in areas that restrict internet access. When using your computer in public places (cafe, hotel, etc.), connect to VPN before accessing sites that require any personal information. Visit EagleVPN and www.bc.edu/vpn for details.
• Stay connected with the OIP via Facebook (www.facebook.com/bcstudyabroad), Twitter (twitter.com/@BCStudyAbroad1), and Instagram (Instagram.com/bostoncollegestudyabroad).
OIP Final Confirmation

- External program participants must notify the OIP when accepted to their program. Provide the OIP with a copy of your acceptance letter. The OIP cannot process your final paperwork until you let us know your acceptance status.
- All students (accepted students, those not yet accepted, and academically “conditional” students) must complete the Final Confirmation and Clearance Form for Study Abroad by its due date.
- If you submit the Final Confirmation and Clearance Form for Study Abroad after the due date, you risk losing your study abroad placement. The form is on the OIP website and needs to be returned to the OIP.
- Once we receive your Final Confirmation and Clearance Form for Study Abroad, the OIP will register and bill you for study abroad. Any BC courses for which you had registered will be dropped. If you are not accepted yet or are a ‘conditional’ student, the OIP will wait until you are cleared to go abroad.
- You should continue to meet BC’s academic, disciplinary, and financial requirements until departure or risk losing final clearance to go abroad. You are responsible for all financial losses if you are not cleared to go abroad.

Study Abroad Withdrawal Policy

- In the event that you must withdraw from your program, contact the OIP immediately. External program students should also contact the external program provider. Students (except CSON) who return to BC within the first two weeks of the BC semester may re-enroll at BC.
- If you withdraw from a BC or external program after June 4, 2015 (fall/year programs) or November 4, 2015 (spring programs) you will be charged a $500 withdrawal fee ($1,000 if your program already began) AND other program expenses incurred. These withdrawal fees will be applied to your BC student account and will not be covered by financial aid. Students who received OIP scholarship money will also need to return those funds upon withdrawal. External program students may incur additional charges from their provider and should contact them about fees.
Finances
• BC program participants are billed BC tuition and can be considered for BC, federal, and state financial aid. For some programs, housing costs are included on the BC bill. Participants are responsible for handling all other expenses. Visit the Finances section of the OIP website for estimated program costs.
• External program participants pay tuition and fees directly to the external provider. Consult the program for costs. You remain eligible for federal and state financial aid only. An ‘External Program Fee’ is placed on your BC bill to cover all BC services provided. If you receive financial aid, complete a “Consortium Agreement” (available at Student Services) and submit it to the financial aid office of your external program, who should send it back to the address listed on the agreement.
• If you expect a refund from a financial aid package, submit a Refund Request through Agora. BC will not automatically forward aid funds to external programs. Refunds cannot be requested before the regular BC semester begins in Chestnut Hill, even if your program abroad starts beforehand.
• All students are charged an HTH insurance fee for each semester abroad.
• Fall and full-year students receive a fall credit on their BC bill for the BC Activities Fee and Health Services Fee after it is confirmed that they are studying abroad. Student Services processes these refunds.
• Visit the OIP website for details on study abroad scholarships.

Course Approval
• You must obtain course approval from the appropriate BC department for major, minor, and core requirements that are not pre-approved. Complete this process before leaving campus. Visit the OIP website for a list of pre-approved courses.
• Complete a "Course Substitution Form for Study Abroad" for each course requirement, and obtain the appropriate BC department signature. Forms are available at the OIP in Hovey House or at Student Services in Lyons Hall. You are encouraged to obtain approval for at least two courses per requirement.
• Return completed forms to Student Services and keep a copy for your own record.

BC Housing
• Students with four years of BC housing should complete a “Leave of Absence Form” for their time abroad, which can be completed on Agora (see "My Res-Life Forms").
• If you need to sublet your off-campus apartment or room, contact the BC Off-Campus Housing office (www.bc.edu/offcampus) to post a vacancy.
• Housing questions should be directed to the BC Office of Residential Life (www.bc.edu/housing).
Cultural Adjustment

Once abroad, you may face an adjustment period referred to as "culture shock." The degree of shock depends on factors such as length of study abroad, your flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, degree of difference between your home and host culture, prior experience abroad, and your expectations. Culture shock is a normal part of study abroad. It shows that you are experiencing the differences between your culture and that of the host country. Symptoms of culture shock can include homesickness, depression, feeling lost and out of place, frustration, irritability, and fatigue. If you experience culture shock, remember that you are not alone. Some suggestions for dealing with culture shock include:

- Embrace your host culture and wrestle with the differences.
- Keep an open mind. We all have preconceived ideas and beliefs that come into question while abroad.
- Get to know others at your host school; do not isolate yourself.
- Find a "cultural informant," such as a local person with whom you can discuss your frustrations and encounters with difference.
- Learn as much as you can about your host culture.
- Maintain a support structure with others, particularly those going through the same experience. However, do not retreat into an American "clique" to avoid the discomfort of culture shock.
- Keep a journal. Record your impressions of new experiences and the transformations that are occurring within you.

Remember that insight results from sustained and direct contact with your host culture, not from observation at a safe distance. As you overcome culture shock, you will be able to approach life in your host country with understanding and enthusiasm. For some students adjustment is not so easy to overcome—contact your program’s staff or BC if you need further assistance.

For some students, culture shock becomes more serious. If you are concerned by your mental and/or physical status, do not hesitate to seek help. Onsite staff can assist in helping you find medical treatment.
Computing Support
• For technology information specific to study abroad, including how to get your laptop repaired, visit www.bc.edu/techabroad.
• For software and other technology questions, you can also contact the BC Help Center at help.center@bc.edu or +1.617.552.4357.

Academics
Course Selection
• Take a full course load at your host institution. BC program requirements are on the OIP website. External program students should take the equivalent of 15-16 US credits per semester. If you wish to overload on courses abroad (i.e., 18 BC credits), contact the OIP before finalizing your course registration.
• Non-academic/audited courses do not earn credit or appear on BC records.
• Save all coursework and syllabi as supporting documentation of your work.

Course Approval
• Contact the BC department if you did not already get course approval for major, minor, and core requirements that are not pre-approved. Keep copies of correspondence. Visit the OIP website for a list of pre-approved courses.
• Submit a signed “Course Substitution Form for Study Abroad” to Student Services when you return to BC (see page 11).

Course Withdrawal
• Withdrawing from a course abroad is not permitted. Students are expected to enroll in and maintain a full course load, equivalent to 15-16 US credit hours for each semester abroad.

Pass/Fail
• You may take a maximum of one pass/fail course per semester. Pass/fail courses cannot fulfill major, minor, or core requirements.
• You are not allowed to take business courses or mandatory BC program courses (such as courses taught by a BC site coordinator) as pass/fail.
• You must submit the full title of the pass/fail course to your OIP Program Manager (see final page of this handbook for contact details) within one month of the first class meeting.
• A pass/fail course cannot be switched to a regular letter grade later on.

BC Registration & Transcripts
• Visit the OIP website for further details on credits, grades, transcripts, and BC course registration: bc.edu/international/academics.html.
Safeguarding Your Documents and Valuables
- Keep your passport and visa in a secure place. Carry copies when not traveling. Leave copies in the US.
- Be careful with bank card numbers, receipts, and PINs. Exercise caution at ATM machines.
- Handbags, backpacks, coats, and back pockets are prone to theft. Watch your belongings, especially on public transport. Use luggage locks. Always secure your bags.
- Do not carry large amounts of cash or all of your money in one place. Use a money belt or neck pouch when traveling. Do not count money in public.
- Secure your belongings in hotels and hostels. Do not leave valuables lying around. Consider using a public locker if there is no safe place for valuables.
- If mugged, do not struggle with the perpetrator. Your safety is worth more than your belongings. Report any thefts to the OIP/on-site staff.

Obeying Local Laws
- Remember that locals will associate your behavior with the US and BC. Learn the local laws and obey them.
- Laws and legal proceedings vary worldwide. You are subject to the laws and legal system of the host country.
- Illegal or unacceptable behavior may result in BC disciplinary sanctions. OIP and on-site staff can dismiss you from the program if necessary.

Street Smarts
- Be aware of your surroundings. Walk confidently. Stay in populated, well-lit areas. Travel with friends at night.
- Pay attention to the local health, safety, and travel recommendations.
- Avoid checking your map on the street. Go into a café or shop.
- Blend in with the local culture in terms of dress, language, and behavior.
- When crossing streets, remember that in some countries vehicles drive on the left side of the road. Remember to look both ways before crossing.
- You should not drive while overseas. Use caution when riding in vehicles. Driving behavior and laws vary by location.
- Know the local phone system, emergency numbers, and how to say “help.”
- Avoid demonstrations or large political gatherings.
- In some locations, exercise caution with water and dairy products. Avoid raw or undercooked food. Be wary of food available at street vendors.
- Carry your HTH medical insurance card at all times.
- If you need assistance, notify your on-site contact, BC, and/or HTH. In case of emergency outside of BC office hours, call the BC Police at +1.617.552.4444.
- Let relatives know your travel itinerary and contact them upon arrival. If you have a roommate/host family/site coordinator also let them know your plans.
As a study abroad student, you are expected to:

1. educate yourself about, and fully integrate yourself into, your host country’s culture; fully participate in host university-sponsored events and become integrated with the local community;

2. be an exemplary BC ambassador to your host country and university by taking full responsibility for your personal conduct and academic performance;

3. learn about and obey the local laws and customs of your host country, and understand their implications for you as an individual;

4. maximize your personal safety by taking all reasonable precautions, safeguarding your belongings, and keeping emergency contact information at hand;

5. be aware of any existing disabilities, chronic illness, or mental health issues and share that information with your Program Manager or program provider who can help you plan for a safe and healthy experience;

6. consider host country culture, attitudes, and laws regarding personal relationships, sexuality, race, religion, gender, etc.;

7. achieve your own study abroad goals by carefully reading all program materials and responding in a timely manner to communications from the OIP, onsite staff, and program provider.
EMERGENCIES ABROAD

What to Do in an Emergency

1. Prior to traveling anywhere, register with the US Department of State’s Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) to receive travel information and warnings, as well as assistance abroad if you need it. Visit the STEP site at: https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/.

2. Take careful note of your program’s emergency procedures. Pay close attention to instruction provided in the program orientation and materials. Always keep your program emergency contact information with you: this may include entering the primary contact’s cell phone number into your phone and keeping an emergency contact card in your wallet or purse.

3. For a medical emergency, go to the nearest hospital or clinic. If you are enrolled in HTH insurance always keep your HTH card with you and call them as soon as possible if you have a medical emergency. Alert program staff of an emergency so that they can notify BC and your family and provide assistance as needed.

4. In a politically volatile situation or natural disaster, contact program staff immediately so they can take inventory of their students. Heed any instructions they provide. If necessary, contact the US embassy for assistance.

5. Notify the OIP as soon as possible in the event of an emergency abroad. Procedures and contact information are located on the next page of this handbook.
OIP CONTACT INFORMATION

Location: Hovey House, 258 Hammond Street
Hours of Operation: Monday-Friday 9-5
Tel: +1.617.552.3827   Fax: +617.552.0647   Email: oip@bc.edu

Call OIP during business hours. For emergencies outside of office hours, call:
Boston College Police Department
Tel: +1.617.552.4444 (24 hour emergency number)

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