Boston College
Study Abroad Handbook

Asia
Africa
Europe
Latin America
Australia

Office of International Programs
Dear Study Abroad 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. Do not 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
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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 any questions or concerns that you might have.
Passports

You are responsible for being in full compliance with immigration regulations. You must have a passport valid for at least six months after your US return date. If you do not currently have a passport or it will expire soon, you should apply for or renew your passport immediately. Processing time is usually 4-6 weeks but can be longer, if you need a passport quickly you should pay the additional fee to expedite your application. Visit www.travel.state.gov/passport for passport information.

Visas

What is a visa? A visa is an official stamp or document affixed within a passport, or given to you as a separate document, that has been issued by a foreign government granting permission for entry specifically to study, work, or live in a particular country. Non-US citizens should check with the appropriate consulates about visas and passport renewal procedures.

Where do I apply? In most cases visa applications are submitted by the student via an in-person appointment at the host country’s consulate in the US. You can find the relevant consulate and visa requirements on the host country’s embassy website. In most instances, you will submit your visa application to the consulate, which has jurisdiction over either your home state or Massachusetts.

When do I apply? Requirements and processing times vary greatly; apply early and make copies of all of your documents. In many cases you cannot apply for a visa more than 90 days before your program begins abroad.

Obtaining a visa is YOUR responsibility. The OIP may be of assistance in basic “common sense” visa advising, such as reviewing forms, but we are not able to speak on behalf of consulates or intervene on your behalf with a visa problem. Consulates are representatives of a foreign country in the US and set their own rules and procedures.

If you attend a BC program and your host country requires a visa, your OIP advisor 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. External program students should check with their program provider for visa procedures.

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.

A visa is a privilege, not a right. A consular office may deny your visa application, so it is best to adhere to their requirements strictly.

Common Visa Requirements may include:

- Acceptance letter to a foreign university or program abroad
- A passport valid for at least 6 months after the end of your stay in the host country
• Proof of Enrollment at Boston College (can be requested from Student Services via Agora)
• Round-trip flight itinerary
• Background Check
• Evidence of funding for your time abroad - to be proven with a student or parent’s bank statements and/or financial aid information.
• Some documents may need to be notarized. There is a list of Notary Publics on the Boston College campus online at http://www.bc.edu/offices/hr/resources/campusinfo/notaries.html. Notaries are also available in many banks and law offices.

Keep copies of all passport and visa application documents you submit. Make copies of your passport and visa and keep them in a separate place from the originals when you travel. Leave a copy at home.

Travel Arrangements

You are responsible for making your own travel arrangements. If you will 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 you should have an alternative way to secure and lock your belongings.

You are expected to arrive on time for your program and to attend any orientations and/or early-start programs. Inform on-site staff immediately if you will be delayed. Err on the side of caution when booking your return date, your return flight should be booked for a date after your last possible final exam.

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 to make travel arrangements 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.

Many US banks have international partners that either do not charge ATM fees or charge reduced fees. Ask your bank about their international partners before departure. You should also plan to take a second ATM or credit card as a back-up and should leave copies of all your cards with someone you trust in the US. Notify your ATM, credit, and debit card banks about your travel plans and dates before departure, otherwise, they may think your cards were stolen when you use them abroad. If this happens they may freeze your account and you will need to contact them from abroad to reactivate it. It is easier to deal with this while you are still in the US, but just in case you should also bring your banks’ international customer service numbers abroad with you.

Some vendors and ATMs may require a special ‘chip’ card for transactions, making it impossible to
use your card in certain situations. However, many US banks have recently switched to chip cards; if you do not yet have one you should check with your bank. Prior to departure you should also check if your bank charges foreign transaction fees on credit card purchases made abroad. If so, you may want to research obtaining a new card that does not. You should also request and know your credit card PIN; having a PIN may make it possible to get cash with your credit card.

You should keep backup local currency on hand and bring some US currency, which can be exchanged in an emergency.

Research what is needed to open an overseas bank account. It may not be possible to open an account everywhere, although some countries may require it. It may take up to two weeks to activate a new account and you will likely be required to show proof of residence in your host country.

Evaluate your program’s cost (see the Finances section of the OIP website for BC program estimates) and prepare a budget. Take local currency with you for your arrival as 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 will vary by location. The amount needed will vary by location. BC students who have already studied in your host country are a great resource on tips for budgeting and getting student discounts abroad.

**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) or Viber (www.viber.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**

Boston College will communicate with you via your BC email account. Be sure to check it while abroad. Also use Agora while overseas.

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.

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 (facebook.com/bcstudyabroad), Twitter (twitter.com/@BCStudyAbroad1), and Instagram (instagram.com/bostoncollegestudyabroad).
Health Preparations

Medical Insurance
You will need to have several types of medical coverage while abroad, which will include your domestic insurance plan, HTH insurance, and in some cases in-country insurance. All serve different purposes.

Domestic Coverage: All students must maintain domestic coverage while studying abroad. You can use 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.

HTH: All BC students who study abroad will also be enrolled in the HTH Worldwide Insurance plan for the duration of their program. HTH provides worldwide medical coverage. 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. Visit www.hthworldwide.com for a full description of HTH Worldwide’s benefits.

An HTH fee is placed on your BC bill each semester you are abroad. 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. With HTH, there is no need for a separate claim to your health insurance company in the United States. In case of an emergency abroad, you should go immediately to the nearest physician or hospital without delay and then contact HTH worldwide. This policy is in effect for both BC and approved external programs.

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 including learning disabilities. Do this prior to departure. Host universities require ample notice, cases must be documented, and we can’t guarantee that accommodations can be made.

If you have a serious health condition like diabetes or an allergy to penicillin, wear a Medical Alert bracelet.

Bring translations for your condition or allergy in the local language(s) where you will be traveling, so that you can explain your condition in the event of an emergency.

If you are on medication, discuss the type of care you may need abroad and the best way to continue your regimen. You may also contact the following BC services if needed while abroad:

BC Health Services
www.bc.edu/offices/uhs

www.bc.edu/international
Check-Ups and Vaccinations
Schedule routine medical and dental examinations before departure. Ensure that you are in good health, and check that your vaccinations for measles, meningitis, mumps, rubella, polio, diphtheria, and tetanus are current. Remember that some immunizations need to be administered months in advance.

Certain countries may also require or recommend vaccinations against specific diseases such as yellow fever, cholera, and typhoid. Check if any vaccinations are recommended or required for all travel destinations by consulting the following websites for details:

- [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov) (US Department of State)
- [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- [www.hthworldwide.com](http://www.hthworldwide.com) (HTH insurance)

Malaria is one of the most frequent problems faced by travelers to the tropics and sub-tropics. The mosquito-borne infection is most common in Central and South America, Africa, India, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and the South Pacific islands. Different forms of malaria have a variety of impacts, from fever and chills to vomiting and diarrhea. If left untreated, serious infection can lead to death. Be sure to ask your health care provider whether a vaccine and/or medication are recommended.

Prescriptions
Bring medications in their original labeled bottles and bring copies of all written prescriptions with their generic names. Do the same with eyeglass and contact lens prescriptions. When feasible, bring medication that lasts for your entire stay abroad. It is not always possible to obtain all medications abroad. Pack medication in your carry-on bag, not your checked luggage. Do not ship medications overseas; they may be retained at customs, which could require you to submit additional documentation and pay fees to get them released to you. Visit the HTH website ([www.hthworldwide.com](http://www.hthworldwide.com)) for information on HTH’s prescription benefit.

Plan to bring your own basic drugstore supplies such as aspirin or Tylenol, motion sickness medications, antacids, antihistamines, decongestants, antiseptics, and Band-Aids. Depending on your destination and how long you will stay, your doctor may recommend that you bring antibiotics in case you become ill abroad. If you bring injectable medications, make sure to bring some of your own needles. If you wear contacts, you should also bring an extra pair of contact lenses and solution as you may not be able to find the kind you need abroad.

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, a change of clothes, medication in original containers, in case your luggage is lost. Read federal guidelines ([www.faa.gov](http://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(s)
- 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
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 must 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 November 4, 2015 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, which 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](https://www.bc.edu/international) for details on study abroad scholarships.

## Course Approval

You must obtain course approval from the appropriate BC department if you would like to have courses count 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. Remember, not all courses require approval. All courses by default will count as general elective credit at BC.

Complete a "Course Substitution Form for Study Abroad" for each course you want to count for major, minor or core requirements, and obtain the appropriate BC department signature. Forms are available at Student Services in Lyons Hall. 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](https://www.bc.edu/offcampus)) to post a vacancy.

Housing questions should be directed to the BC Office of Residential Life ([www.bc.edu/offices/reslife](https://www.bc.edu/offices/reslife)).
The first few days in your study abroad destination may be some of the most exciting days you’ve experienced since starting college. It is important to let your family know you have arrived safely within the first day of arriving. Your first days are a good time to share any important medical or personal information with your on-site coordinator, university contact, and/or host family. If you take daily medications or have allergies, share this information with the people you live with and other friends.

Keep in mind that once you arrive overseas your resistance will be lowered due to the new environment and changes in diet and sleep. It is easier to get sick. In some parts of the world, you must be careful about drinking water, juice, or consuming produce you have not cleaned yourself. Standards of food preparation differ from the U.S. and it may take time for you to adjust to local food.

When you are first in a new country, it can be easy to get overtired, anxious, or overwhelmed even when you are having a good time. It is important to take care of yourself, get sleep, take time to eat regular meals, and exercise. Maintaining a regular schedule can help you adjust to a new time zone, city and lifestyle.

Many countries require you to register with a local authority (e.g. police station, governmental office) upon arrival. You should also register with the local U.S. embassy or consulate upon arrival. This allows US authorities to keep you informed of any travel advisories and to contact you in the event of an emergency.

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.

Student Tip: “Talk to the students in your classes and do volunteer work for the community. Also participate in the university social events. It's easy to stay in the international bubble, but by doing these things, I met many locals who greatly enhanced my abroad experience.”
- 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.

If at any time you feel overwhelmed, lonely, or are struggling to cope with day-to-day activities, your host university can often provide local counseling services. Do not hesitate to reach out to talk to someone. Your on-site coordinator or host university contact can direct you to the best resources.

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. On-site staff can assist in helping you find medical treatment.

### Academics

#### Course Selection & Approval

You are required to 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. Contact the relevant BC department if you did not already get course approval for major, minor, and core requirements that are not pre-approved. Keep copies of any correspondence.

#### Course Withdrawal

Students are expected to enroll in and maintain a full course load, equivalent to 15-16 US credit hours for each semester abroad. You may not withdraw from a course while abroad if this will take you below the 15-16 credit minimum. You are also expected to follow the guidelines regarding withdrawals at your host institution; in some cases, withdrawals may not be permitted.

#### 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 Advisor (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.

**Student Tip:** “The independence as a student makes one think like an adult in the real world.”
BC Course Registration & Transcripts
Visit the OIP website for further details on credits, grades, transcripts, and BC course registration: bc.edu/international/academics.

Academic Expectations

While the ability to explore the world is a major benefit of studying abroad, your academic experience should be your top priority. Personal travel will sometimes need to take a backseat to your coursework. Students are expected to attend all class sessions regardless of extracurricular travel plans, and all students are subject to the absence policies of their host institution or program provider. While you should certainly make the most of your time abroad, you must also make sure you do not neglect your studies.

The academic system abroad may be very different what you are used to at Boston College. For example, you may not receive a detailed syllabus for each course or have as much homework and/or graded work as you do at BC. In many places you will need to be more independent and self-motivated in your studies than you are accustomed to. You may not have to submit graded work until late in the semester, but this does not mean you can expect to cram at the end of the semester and do well. If you have fewer graded assignments each will count for a larger proportion of your final grade, so it is very important to be prepared.

In all likelihood, you will have to develop new study skills, modify expectations and classroom behavior, and make a concerted effort to balance work and play. Every returned student has said that courses are not necessarily harder at his or her host university, just different. Many students report that there seems to be a lack of academic pressure in their courses. This belief can be reinforced by the rate of student absenteeism at some universities. This can be very deceptive as it does not take into account the work that local students are doing outside of class.

Here are some tips for achieving academic success abroad:

Attend class regularly - The academic support that exists at BC will probably not be available abroad, so make it a policy to attend every class. Miss class and you could miss vital information. How will you catch up if there is no class syllabus, faculty office hours or students to borrow notes from? Some schools will have attendance policies that will affect your grade if you have too many absences.

Stay Motivated - There is generally less hand-holding in universities overseas. Chances are, you will not be able to rely on external checks from your professors or weekly assignments to let you know how you are doing. It will be up to you!

Know what it takes to succeed in class - Ask professors and classmates what you need to do to be successful in class. For example, in Europe classes are less structured but the students know what is expected of them and are used to studying with less guidance. In Asia, on the other hand classes are more highly structured and students can be quite competitive. BC students who have already studied in your host university are also an excellent resource.

Work Hard - Study abroad is above all else an academic experience. Take your classes seriously, attend regularly, work hard and ask for help if you need it.

Student Tip: "You have to work hard to earn your grades [at BC], and I felt that I was prepared to do the same thing abroad. I worked the same amount that I did at BC and saw the grades I wanted to see.

I also had learned much about the region at BC so it was easier to understand the culture, and we were able to go into detail about topics because I and my classmates had learned about the general topics at home.”
Safety and Responsibility

Personal Safety
Many regions of the world are considered as safe as, or safer, than large urban areas of the U.S. Other regions may require extra caution. Research your host country using travel guides, newspapers and magazines from your destination, tourist information web sites, and the local embassy.

Be certain to consult the US State Department website for important travel updates about your region. Remember that the possibility for non-violent crime exists everywhere. Use your best judgement to avoid situations that may put you in danger. Some countries or areas may have political and/or social instability, and you should avoid demonstrations or large political gatherings.

Pay close attention to all health/safety information provided by your host school, and ask trusted locals for safety tips/information on where you should and should not go.

Being an US citizen or resident abroad
In some countries, Americans should maintain a low profile due to the current political climate. Blend in with the local culture in terms of dress and behavior. In foreign language destinations, try to use the local language as much as possible in public, and avoid sites and landmarks abroad that are typically associated with the US. When dealing with a US embassy or consulate, conduct your transactions by phone or online whenever possible.

Be prepared for interaction with locals who want to talk about politics. By knowing about US politics and your host country’s political system, you will be able to engage in friendly and intelligent dialogue. Try not to take anti-American sentiments or opinions personally and avoid arguments and confrontations. If someone makes a critical statement to you directly as an American, it is often best to simply walk away and avoid verbal or physical confrontations.

Do not participate in any political demonstrations. This may be tempting, given that you are interested in learning about the political processes taking place in your host country. Still, you never know when a demonstration may turn violent or get out of control.

Watch and read the local, national, and international press to stay informed about local events in your host country and international events and perspectives.

Registering with local authorities
Many countries require you to register with a local authority (e.g. police station, governmental office) upon arrival. Check your program information for details.

You should also 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/.

The US embassy or consulate in your host country can provide the following services to you:
- Issue you a new passport if yours is lost or stolen.
- Help you find medical or legal services in the case of emergency, and help notify friends or family members.
- Explain what to do if you are robbed, and help have funds wired to you from home.

The US embassy or consulate will not:
- Provide bail or help you to get out of jail.
- Act as an interpreter, courier, travel agent, or information bureau.
- Give or lend money, or cash checks.
- Arrange for free medical or legal services.

**Representing BC and the US**

You are considered a representative of BC and the US while abroad, so keep in mind that the locals will associate your behavior with your home institution and home country. Be aware that inappropriate, dangerous, or illegal activity abroad may result in disciplinary sanctions at BC.

**Obeying Local Laws and Customs**

As a US citizen in another country, you are subject to that country’s laws. Local laws may be stricter than those in the US (and the penalties for disobeying them more severe). Learn about the local laws and obey them. Laws and legal practices will differ in terms of arrest, court, and punishment procedures. Conditions may be harsh in many countries. You could face stiff fines or sentences if found guilty of a crime. Illegal or unacceptable behavior may result in BC disciplinary sanctions.

Be aware that local customs regarding alcohol, drugs, and other activities are different in other countries. Respect local customs.

The OIP director, on-site coordinator, and/or your host institution representatives have the authority to discontinue your participations in your program if it is determined that your conduct is unacceptable.

**Maximizing Your Personal Safety**

Always be aware of your surroundings and stay in populated, well-lit areas. Try to blend in with the local culture in terms of dress, behavior, and language. In general try to avoid very bright colors, sneakers, baseball caps and college T-shirts and sweatshirts. Avoid moving around in large groups of Americans and speaking English loudly. If in a foreign language destination, use the local language in public.

Walk confidently as if you know where you are (even if you don’t), but if you feel nervous or lost, walk into a café or shop and check your map there- rather than on the street. Avoid eye contact with strangers. Always travel with a companion at night. Know the local phone system, emergency numbers, and how to say help in the local language.

Be a smart and careful pedestrian. When crossing the road, keep in mind that certain countries drive on the opposite side than in the US. Do not drive while overseas. Use caution when riding in vehicles. Driving behavior and laws vary by location.

Pay attention to local health, safety, and travel recommendations. Always carry your HTH medical insurance card and emergency contact information for your host school and Boston College.

**Safeguarding Your Belongings and Valuables**

Non-violent theft is the most common crime directed at travelers. Handbags, backpacks, coats, and back pockets are most prone to theft. Wallets should be carried in a front pocket; purses should be slung over one shoulder and under the opposite arm; backpacks should be carried in front of your in crowded places (such as subway trains). Always secure and watch your belongings. Use luggage locks. Keep alert for ploys to distract your attention. Carry as little cash as possible. Never carry all of your money in one place. Money belts or neck pouches are best to use when traveling. Never count your money in public. Be aware of groups of people (even children) who work together to distract or confuse travelers in order to rob them. Don’t wear expensive jewelry.

Be careful with bank card numbers, receipts, and PINs. Exercise caution at ATM machines.
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.

Leave your passport and visa in a secure place when you are not traveling, and carry a copy with you at all times. Leave a copy with a relative in the US.

If you are mugged, do not struggle with the perpetrator - your safety is worth more than the loss of your belongings. Report any thefts to onsite staff and OIP.

For information in identity theft, visit [www.consumer.gov/idtheft](http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft).

**Alcohol and Drugs**
Countries have different laws and customs regarding alcohol use and it is your responsibility to be aware and follow them. Additionally all study abroad students are expected to observe Boston College student conduct and host university policies regarding the abuse of alcohol and drugs.

**Sexual Health**
Relationships in other countries may be different than what you consider “typical” romantic and friendly relationships here in the US. Both men and women may play different roles and interact with each other in manners you have not encountered before. It is helpful to learn more about your host culture and the dating/relationships customs that are common in your new location.

You should behave in a way to keep yourself safe. Do not take drinks from people you do not know, do not leave parties or bars with people you do not know, and look after your friends. In sexual encounters, use protection and practice safe sex.

Same sex relationships are viewed differently around the world. In some countries, certain types of sex acts between partners of the same sex are illegal and can be punishable by law. It is helpful to learn more about how your host country views GLBTQ relationships before you study abroad. If you have concerns, feel free to speak with your OIP advisor at any time. Conversations will be kept confidential.

**Sexual Assault**
In the case of an incident of sexual assault, get yourself to a safe place and take time to decide how you wish to proceed, i.e. reporting the incident to the local authorities, reaching out to BC, speaking with someone you trust, etc. Your host university contact and/or on-site coordinator are available to help you in any situation.

Any student who is a victim of sexual assault while overseas is highly encouraged to utilize the services of the Sexual Assault Network at Boston College. SANet resources are available to you while overseas and when you return to campus. Call (617)552-BC11 for assistance.

**HIV/AIDS/STDs**
HIV/AIDS remains a serious health threat to millions of people worldwide. Be informed about HIV/AIDS in the countries where you will reside and visit.

ALL travelers should protect themselves when engaging in sexual activity. If you are sexually active, latex condoms (used with a water-based lubricant) are the most effective form of protection. Keep in mind that “safe sex” does not completely guarantee protection against sexually transmitted diseases. Women are at the greatest risk, but these precautions apply to everyone regardless of gender/sexual orientation. The same precautions apply to hepatitis and other STDs, which are prevalent worldwide.
Foreign Medical Practices
Be aware that the manner in which medical help is obtained, the way patients are treated, the conditions of medical facilities, and how health care isafforded may be quite different from U.S. practices.

US health care values, assumptions and methods are not universal practices, and even notions regarding illness onset or the timing of expert attention can be considered culturally based. You should seriously consider the consequences of stress from cultural adjustment and relying on different medical practices.

Diversity and Inclusion Abroad
Attitudes toward women, the LGBTQ population, disabled people, and various ethnic/racial groups vary worldwide. Customs, beliefs, laws, facilities, and social practices relating to these populations may be different than in the US.

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 (http://www.bc.edu/offices/dos/subsidiary_offices/GLBTQ.html) for further information.

Women Abroad
While it is widely recognized in our society that women are equal to men, capable, and independent, and that it is their right to do anything and go anywhere, this American attitude is not necessarily found or accepted worldwide. Attitudes toward women vary tremendously, and awareness of this is an important aspect in preparing to enter a new culture.

BC does not recommend that women travel alone, but if you choose to travel alone or with other women you should be aware of the situations you may encounter. It is recommended that female students speak with women who have traveled and lived abroad, and read about the position of women in different countries.

Women’s roles around the world differ greatly from what may seem typical here in the United States. Learning about women in your host country can help inform your time abroad and help make the most of your experience. Before you travel it is recommended that you look at the following information.

University of Michigan’s website - http://www.internationalcenter.umich.edu/swt/diversity/women.html
Diversity Abroad - http://www.diversityabroad.com/women-study-abroad-safety

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning Students
Customs, attitudes, laws, and social practices relating to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people vary throughout the world. Some countries are more progressive than the US in their perspectives on LGBTQ issues. Many other countries are far more conservative and restrictive in their dealings with LGBTQ issues. If you are a LGBTQ student it is important to learn more about relevant issues in your host country and your travel destinations, which will vary by location.
Regardless of where you are studying abroad, it will be helpful to learn about the social environment, recent news, and brief history of LGBTQ rights and issues in your host city and country. Reading local news and talking to other student who have studied abroad in your region is a good place to start.

Laws concerning sexual orientation and sexual expression vary worldwide. You are subject to the laws of your host country even if they are discriminatory. Know the local laws before you leave home. The following resource will help you to become familiar with the laws, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_rights_by_country_or_territory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_rights_by_country_or_territory).

While you may or may not be open about your sexuality or gender identity at home and/or at BC, going abroad has sometimes been described as a second “coming out” since you will meet many new people with varied opinions, perspectives, and backgrounds.

All OIP staff members are available to speak with any student about his/her concerns about studying abroad as a member of the LGBTQ community. Alternately, you are welcome to contact the OIP liaison for LGBTQ students: Maria Segala at maria.segala@bc.edu.

Below are some additional resources:
- [Resource Guide: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer & Questioning Students](http://www.bc.edu/offices/ahana/)
- [LGBT Students: Things to Consider Before Going Abroad](http://umabroad.umn.edu/assets/files/PDFs/students/raceAbroad.pdf)
- [LGBT in Global Context Overview](http://www.diversityabroad.com/minority-study-abroad)
- [Rainbow Sig – Student Resources (NAFSA)](http://abilitytrip.com/index.php)

### AHANA Students

Race and ethnicity may be defined and talked about differently in other countries, and you may encounter situations that differ from those you might experience in the US. Studying abroad gives all students the opportunity to engage dialogues in a new and different manner, it may be helpful for you to research how questions of race and ethnicity are addressed and talked about in your host country.

You may want to consult the following AHANA Resources:
- [http://www.bc.edu/offices/ahana/](http://www.bc.edu/offices/ahana/)
- [http://umabroad.umn.edu/assets/files/PDFs/students/raceAbroad.pdf](http://umabroad.umn.edu/assets/files/PDFs/students/raceAbroad.pdf)
- [http://www.diversityabroad.com/minority-study-abroad](http://www.diversityabroad.com/minority-study-abroad)

### Students with Disabilities

Access to facilities and resources for people with disabilities may not be the same abroad as they are in the US. If you have concerns related to disabilities you should meet with your OIP Advisor before departure. Advisors will work with OIP staff, the BC Assistant Dean for Students with Disabilities in the Dean of Students Office (DOS), and on-site personnel to ensure access for you abroad. The OIP strives to help each student find the most suitable study abroad experience. You should also consult the Mobility International USA website at www.miusa.org or call them at (541) 343-1284.

Additional resources are available online:
- [http://www.bc.edu/offices/dos/disabilityservices.html](http://www.bc.edu/offices/dos/disabilityservices.html)
Preparing for Your Return

Before you leave your study abroad site, make sure to collect names and contact information of your local friends, professors and key administrators so that you may get in touch with them at a later date if necessary. If you developed a good relationship with any faculty members, you may wish to have them write a letter of recommendation for you at some point.

Many students, once abroad, are eager to learn about ways to pursue graduate studies overseas and may wish to pursue national fellowships that will help them do so. Keep in mind that many of the major fellowship programs of interest to students returning from study abroad, such as the Rhodes, Marshall, Fulbright and others, have early fall deadlines. Students who are considering applying to one of these programs should look into the requirements and the application process before as early as possible. More information is available at [www.bc.edu/offices/ufel.html](http://www.bc.edu/offices/ufel.html)

The OIP offers many opportunities for returned study abroad students to get involved. Your OIP Advisor will contact you about opportunities to participate in our Study Abroad Fair in September, our Pre-Departure orientations each semester and possible opportunities to speak on student panels about study abroad. We also encourage you to get in touch with us if you would like to be a resource for students considering study abroad in your host country.
As a study abroad student, you are expected to:

- 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;

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

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

- Maximize your personal safety by taking all reasonable precautions, safeguarding your belongings, and keeping emergency contact information at hand;

- 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;

- Consider host country culture, attitudes, and laws regarding personal relationships, sexuality, race, religion, gender, etc.

- Educate yourself on the academic policies at B.C. as they pertain to study abroad and at your host institution and comply with those policies;

- 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.
What to do in an Emergency

- 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/.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- BC and the Office of International Programs are always available to assist you in any situation. In the event of an emergency outside of normal business hours, contact the Boston College Police Department at 617-552-4444. Do not hesitate to contact your OIP Advisor or another OIP staff member if you have any questions or concerns before, during, or after your time abroad.

Preventing and Handling Emergencies

- Provide your family and any other who may need to know with emergency contact information for you abroad.

- Keep them informed of your travel plans.

- Keep your STEP profile on the US State Department website up to date.

- Know your program’s emergency procedures.

- Always have an emergency plan- e.g., let someone know where you are at all times, arrange to call a specific person in an emergency, have a predetermined rendezvous point when traveling with friends (in case of separation).
• If you find yourself in a potentially bad situation, try to walk or run away. If you cannot, try to seek assistance or attract attention to yourself.

• Know how to say “HELP” in the local language, or another word such as “FIRE” in order to attract attention.

• Familiarize yourself with the local phone system and emergency numbers.

Below are some resources that can help you prepare for a safe study abroad experience:

  R.A.D. Training
  Safety Tips
  US State Department STEP
  HTH Worldwide Insurance Services
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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