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,

Richard Keeley
Associate Dean, Carroll School of Management
Interim Director, Office of International Programs

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 at a travel store
☐ Give a relative your travel itinerary and contact information

Contact OIP with Questions and Feedback
Travel Documents

Passport and Visa

- To study abroad, your passport must be valid for at least six months after your U.S. return date. Visit www.travel.state.gov for passport and student visa information. Non-U.S. citizens should check with their consulate about visas and passport renewal 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 application process. OIP also provides visa assistance for some external programs. External program students should also check with their 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 also need a transit visa. Check on this before departure.

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 are a less expensive alternative to hotels.
- Keep in mind that most rail and airline passes must be purchased in the U.S. 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.

Web sites:
www.statravel.com
www.expedia.com
www.orbitz.com
www.kayak.com
www.travelocity.com
www.priceline.com
www.hiusa.org
www.hostels.com
www.raileurope.com

www.bc.edu/international
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. Check on overseas fees, which can vary by bank. Have a credit card PIN for possible cash advances.
- Many U.S. banks have international partners that do not charge ATM fees or charge reduced fees. Ask your bank about their international partners.
- Take travelers checks and another ATM or credit card as a back-up. Leave copies of all bank cards in the U.S. 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 5-10 business days to activate a new account.
- Evaluate your program’s estimated cost (see the Finances section of the OIP web site for BC program estimates). Prepare a budget. Take $150-$400 in local currency with you upon arrival. The recommended amount you will need varies by location.

Medical Insurance

- You must maintain your domestic medical insurance coverage. HTH insurance only covers students while abroad (for their program’s duration).
- 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. External program students with comparable coverage may be eligible for an HTH waiver. Visit the OIP web site for details on eligible programs.
- You are required to register online for HTH medical insurance (www.hthstudents.com) after receiving your insurance certificate number.
- For a comprehensive description of HTH Worldwide Insurance Services, visit the HTH portal (www.hthworldwide.com) or see www.hthstudents.com.
- 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 web site. 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 United States.
- Download your HTH membership card from their web site. 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 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 before you arrive.

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 web sites for details:
  - www.state.gov (U.S. Department of State)
  - www.cdc.gov (Centers for Disease Control)
  - the HTH link (www.hthworldwide.com) on the OIP web site

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.
- Do not ship medication overseas—it may be retained at customs.
- Visit the HTH web site (www.hthworldwide.com) for information on HTH’s prescription benefit.

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.
Packing

- Use sturdy luggage and pack lightly. A durable backpack is a good option.
- Be sure you can lift your own luggage, since you often have to carry it yourself. You increase your theft risk if you set down bags frequently.
- Secure a luggage tag on each bag. Place your overseas and U.S. contact information inside each suitcase.
- Take a small carry-on bag packed with essentials (i.e., 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 when you arrive at the airport.
- Pack toiletries in a zippered plastic bag. If flying to a much higher elevation, squeeze the excess air out of bottles or tubes. Otherwise they may leak.
- The government, airports, and airlines enforce strict regulations on the content and weight of baggage. Consult airline and government web sites (i.e., www.faa.gov) before packing. Most international airlines allow two pieces of checked luggage weighing no more than 50 lbs each. Luggage fees may apply.

Suggested Items to Pack

- Sturdy, interchangeable clothing appropriate for your host country’s culture and climate. Do not pack as many clothes as you can fit into your suitcase. You can purchase additional clothing on site.
- Prescriptions in original containers
- Extra eyeglasses and prescription, including sunglasses
- Contact lenses and solution
- A small supply of toiletries. Plan to replenish them abroad
- Your host institution’s acceptance letter
- Copies of your passport, visa, medical prescriptions, and all bank cards (in case of loss or theft)
- Money belt or neck wallet
- Cell phone (be sure it will work abroad)
- Adapters and voltage converter if you bring electronics
- Ipod or Mp3 player
- Laptop computer. Consider insuring it against theft
- Battery-operated alarm clock (if your cell phone does not have an alarm)
- Large backpack for lengthy traveling, and a small daypack
- Sturdy walking shoes or hiking boots which are waterproof
- Camera and journal to document your experience
- Study Abroad Handbook
- A little of yourself (i.e., photos of your home, family, and Boston)
- Contact information for your host institution and OIP (see p. 16)
- HTH insurance card
Pre-Departure Research

Recommendations for Everyone

- Research your host country using the internet, travel books, newspapers, magazines, and international news programs. BC program participants should also read their OIP Program Guide, which is on the OIP web site.
- Talk with study abroad returnees, OIP staff, BC faculty, and international or exchange students who have studied or lived abroad.
- Be informed and capable of discussing U.S. history and current events while abroad.

Health/Safety

- www.state.gov/ (U.S. Department of State)
- http://studentsabroad.state.gov/ (U.S. Department of State)
- www.hthworldwide.com (HTH insurance)
- www.cdc.gov (Centers for Disease Control)

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 Globe Corner Bookstore in Harvard Square (www.globecorner.com) has an extensive selection of travel books.

The OIP Resource Room has host university materials, student evaluations, and books available.
Special Interest Groups

Attitudes toward women, the GLBT 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 U.S. Some countries are very progressive, while others are far more conservative. 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 International Study Advisor if you have any concerns. All matters will be kept confidential.

Communication and Technology

- It is very important that you send your international contact details to OIP (via the OIP web site) soon after you arrive abroad.
- Your U.S. cell phone can work abroad if it is a world/tri-band phone. You must unlock it to use a local SIM card. Contact your provider for details.
- If your U.S. cell phone will not work abroad, investigate whether you can purchase a cell phone and plan in your host country.
- Consider a subscription to Skype (www.skype.com) for international calls.
- You can bring a U.S. phone card or use local calling cards. Check with the provider about rates and how to make calls.
- Keep in mind that making international calls from your U.S. cell phone can be very expensive. Contact your provider for rates.
- Ask study abroad alumni or locals for advice about making calls abroad. Some methods work better than others.
- Boston College will communicate with you via your BC email account. Be sure to check it while abroad.
- Utilize Agora while you are overseas.
- You may need to set up a VPN (Virtual Private Network) connection while abroad, particularly in locations that restrict internet access. When using your computer in public places (cafe, hotel, etc.), you should connect to VPN before accessing sites that require entry of personal information. Visit www.bc.edu/vpn for details.
- Travelers can enroll in the U.S. Department of State’s Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) at https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/. Enrollment allows the State Department to send you a variety of information and better assist you in an emergency.
OIP Final Confirmation

- External program participants must notify OIP when accepted to their program. Provide OIP with a copy of your acceptance letter. 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 web site and needs to be returned to OIP.
- Once we receive your Final Confirmation and Clearance Form for Study Abroad, OIP will register and bill you for study abroad. Any next-term BC courses for which you registered will be dropped. If you are not accepted yet or are a ‘conditional’ student, we 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 OIP immediately. External program students should also contact the external program provider. Students (except CSON) who return to BC within the first 2 weeks of the BC semester may re-enroll at BC.
- If you withdraw from a BC or external program after June 4, 2012 (fall/year programs) or November 5, 2012 (spring programs) you will be charged a $500 withdrawal fee ($1,000 if your program already began) AND other program expenses incurred. 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 put on the BC bill. Participants are responsible for handling all other expenses. Visit the Finances section of the OIP web site 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 on the form.
- 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 funds arrive at BC, and no earlier than the start of the BC term for which you are abroad.
- 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 web site 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 you leave campus. Visit the OIP web site 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 OIP in Hovey House or at Student Services in Lyons Hall. You are encouraged to obtain approval for two courses for each requirement.
- Return completed forms to Student Services and keep a copy for yourself.

BC Housing

- Students with 4 years of BC housing should complete a “Leave of Absence Form” for their time abroad. This form can be completed on Agora (see "My ResLife Forms").
- If you need to sublet your 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 such factors 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 and will get through it.
- 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.

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 617/552-4357.
Academics

Course Selection

- Take a full course load at your host institution. BC program requirements are on the OIP web site. External program students should take the equivalent of 15-16 U.S. credits per semester. If you wish to overload on courses abroad, contact OIP before finalizing your course registration.
- Non-academic/audited courses do not earn credit or appear on BC records.
- After you enroll in courses, submit your course information to OIP via the web. Visit the ‘OIP Course Registration’ link under ‘Academics.’
- 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 web site 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

- If you must withdraw from a course, contact the OIP registrar immediately (oipreg@bc.edu), since withdrawing may impact your BC status.
- Follow your host institution’s normal protocol for course withdrawal, and officially withdraw by their deadline. Ensure that the course will not appear on the host school transcript, or otherwise appear as ‘withdrawn.’
- For BC programs, courses listed as ‘withdrawn’ on the host institution transcript will be listed as a W on the BC transcript. If a failed grade appears on the host transcript, an F will be posted at BC.

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 the OIP registrar (oipreg@bc.edu) 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 web site for further details on credits, grades, transcripts, and BC course registration.
Safeguarding Your Documents and Valuables

- Keep your passport and visa in a secure place. Carry copies when not traveling. Leave copies in the U.S.
- 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. Be aware of ploys to distract your attention and rob you. 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.

Obeying Local Laws

- Remember that locals will associate your behavior with the U.S. 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.
- Use caution when driving or 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 617/552-4444.
- Let relatives know your travel plans. Contact them upon arrival.
1. Keep an open mind

2. Remember that every culture has its own way of teaching and learning

3. Get out of your comfort zone

4. Join a club

5. Remember that the world knows more about the U.S. than the U.S. knows about the world

6. Countries have different laws regarding alcohol use. Behave responsibly

7. Explore your host city and region as much as possible

8. Create a budget for your time abroad

9. Keep a diary

10. Watch your wallet
OIP CONTACT INFORMATION

Location: Hovey House, 258 Hammond Street
Hours of Operation: Monday-Friday 9-5
Tel: 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: 617/552-4444 (24 hour emergency number)

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www.bc.edu/international