EDUCATION ABROAD
PRE-DEPARTURE HANDBOOK

FINANCES & BUDGETING
ACADEMICS
PACKING & TRAVEL
SAFETY & INSURANCE
COMMUNICATIONS
CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT
Finances & Budgeting

Finances and budgeting can be stressful subjects, and it is very important to make sure that you have a good understanding of both prior to departing on your study abroad program.

**BUDGETING BEFORE YOU GO**
Ensure that you are aware of all program fees involved, when they are due, how to pay them and other costs, such as personal expenses.

Also determine how much you have to spend. Your program should have estimates recommending how much you should budget for additional expenses beyond the program inclusions.

Be aware of all deadlines and how to pay the fees. All participants will have fees due to WSU that are billed through myWSU. Other fees will be billed by your host institution or program provider.

**BUDGET**
Spending can get out of hand when you are in a new and exciting environment, but there are many ways to keep from overspending:

- Review cost of living in your destination.
- Make a weekly or monthly budget and stick to it.
- Plan your personal travels in advance
- Cook your meals at home rather than eating out.
- Eating lunch at a restaurant can be cheaper than the dinner menu.
- Consider small and inexpensive souvenirs such as postcards to let people know that you are thinking of them. Large items can be expensive to ship and cause you extra fees if you exceed the baggage weight limit when flying home.

**AIRFARE**
International airfare is rarely included in the program fees. Wait to purchase airfare until you have been accepted and your program is confirmed, but you should not wait until the last minute, as the cost will increase the closer your departure gets. Some websites can secure student discounts on airfare, and some have ‘book now, pay later’ plans.

Check with your program for travel dates and locations. Some cities have multiple airports, or programs may start in one city and change location, requiring you to depart from a different airport.

**CURRENCY**
Foreign currency has different values and may be worth more or less than the U.S. dollar. Look up current exchange rates online and remember that exchanges rates change daily.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM EXPENSES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global Learning Application Fee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSU Health Insurance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program/Tuition Fee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider Application Fee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmation Deposit(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passport &amp; Visa</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Housing Costs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roundtrip Airfare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation in Host Country</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks &amp; Course Materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication (phone, internet)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment &amp; Travel Funds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Expenses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immunizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
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It can be easy to overspend when abroad, especially if the foreign currency is valued as higher than the U.S. dollar.

Exchange some money several weeks before your departure. Shop around for the best rate. Banks that offer the service usually offer a much better rate than exchange kiosks at airports.

DEBIT & CREDIT CARDS
- Notify your bank and credit card company that you’ll be abroad, and locations you expect to visit.
- Ask your bank what international fees there may be for transactions abroad, such as ATM withdrawals.
- Ask your bank if they have a “sister bank” or other partnership in your host country that have reduced or no fees.
- The ATM fee is usually a set fee, rather than a percent, so you’ll pay less overall if you withdraw more money less often...but don’t keep too much money on you at one time.
- Some countries are more cash based than the U.S. and you may not be able to use your credit or debit card for certain transactions.

JUST IN CASE:
- Make two copies of both sides of everything in your wallet. Leave one set of copies with someone at home and keep a set for yourself, separate from your wallet. If your wallet is lost or stolen, you will know everything that was in it and the relevant contact information.
- Take more than one form of payment (e.g, 2 credit cards, or 1 credit and 1 debit card), but DO NOT keep these in the same wallet. If your wallet is lost or stolen, you’ll have a backup.

BANKING ABROAD
If you’ll be abroad for a longer period of time you might consider opening a foreign bank account. If you are interested in this option, ask your program coordinator or provider and students who have studied in that country for advice. Keep in mind that banking laws are different abroad than in the United States.

FINANCIAL AID
Financial Aid is a complex process, but is often a crucial part of paying for education abroad. In order for Student Financial Services (SFS) to adjust your aid for education abroad, you must have done three things:

1. completed a FAFSA for the year relevant to your program
2. indicated on your myStudyAbroad application that you intend to use financial aid (including loans)
3. removed any holds (so Global Learning can enroll you in ‘placeholder’ credits)

Once the above criteria are met, SFS can readjust your aid based on the costs of your education abroad program (includes all program costs, tuition, housing, meals, international airfare and any additional estimated expenses you are likely to incur). Financial aid eligibility for every WSU participant is unique to their particular cost of attendance, Expected Family Contribution (EFC), so the adjustments are done individually, and takes time. Your patience is appreciated.

Some participants consider taking out private educational loans. Remember that these must also be processed via SFS, and cannot be dispersed any earlier. Check with SFS in addition to your private loan provider if you are considering this option.

Once completed, you will need to accept or deny aid offered to you. Remember to complete ALL requested forms and make sure you are checking all communications and following directions from SFS.

IMPORTANT! Financial aid cannot be released to you until 10 days before your program’s official start date, and the first day of the WSU term at the earliest. This is a federal regulation and cannot be changed.
If you have not already done so, check what date your program starts and calculate when your aid will be released. Many program fees and additional expenses, such as airfare, will be due prior to aid releasing. Make sure you know when fees are due and how you will pay for them far in advance.

**FINANCIAL AID & CREDITS**

You must be enrolled in a minimum of 12 WSU credits for the fall or spring semester, and at least 6 credits during the summer term. This is cumulative, so you can enroll in a WSU online course or if it is a summer program, and your schedule permits, you might consider enrolling in a course within another WSU summer session. Keep in mind that you will be billed for the additional tuition.

Graduate participants, on the other hand, must be enrolled in a minimum of 5 credits during the fall or spring terms and a minimum of 3 credits in the summer term to be eligible for state and federal aid.

Generally speaking, loans, grants, and many scholarships can apply to education abroad opportunities; however scholarship waivers are not usually available. Please speak with a counselor at SFS if you have any concerns about which aid you can use for education abroad.

**FINANCIAL AID TIPS**

- Set up Direct Deposit in myWSU. Otherwise, a paper check for any funds will be sent through the U.S. mail to the address on file in myWSU. Direct Deposit set up for a campus job is entirely different.
- Consider setting up Third Party Access to your account. This allows someone, such as a parent or guardian, access to your WSU student account. Do a test run to ensure that this access is completed.
- Consider setting up a Power of Attorney for your bank account, giving someone the authority to act on your behalf for a specified date range. If you encounter banking challenges abroad, the person with Power of Attorney can assist you from home. If you choose to do this, you should carefully consider whom you give this authority to.

**STANDARD ACADEMIC PROGRESS (SAP) DENIAL**

Students receiving financial aid will likely receive an Academic Deficiency letter or e-mail after the end of the WSU term for which they will be abroad.

**Do not panic!** This is standard, and an easy issue to address:

- If you are abroad for only one term, you simply need to send an email to sapappeal@wsu.edu informing them that you’ve been abroad.
- If you are abroad for two consecutive terms:
  - Send an email after your first term to sapappeal@wsu.edu informing them that you’ve been abroad, and will be abroad for another term.
- After you return, you may have to submit the full SAP appeal as requested in the academic deficiency email. Keep any grade report, including unofficial transcripts, to support your appeal. Grade reports or transcripts submitted for a SAP appeal must be in English.
Academics

You are about to embark on a potentially life-changing experience full of amazing opportunities, but the main goal is your education. This section reviews the steps you need to take before departure, while abroad, and once you return to make sure that you are successful academically.

COURSES

The Course Pre-Approval Form must be filled out with all of the courses you intend to take abroad, along with any backup courses before your departure. Remember that getting in to see your academic advisor can take time, so plan accordingly!

PLACEHOLDER CREDITS

No matter what program you are going abroad on, you will need to be enrolled in WSU credits. You will not enroll yourself! You will be enrolled through either Global Learning, or the department sponsoring your program. Do not withdraw yourself from these credits without contacting Global Learning.

All students earning credit from another university or institution will be enrolled in placeholder credits (EA or ISE 300/301). These credits hold a space on your academic account and serve three purposes:

- reflect that you’re abroad and have a foreign transcript that term
- allow coursework from a foreign transcript to be counted as WSU resident credit, as if it were taken here at WSU
- permit financial aid participants to receive aid despite not taking courses at WSU

At the end of the WSU term, these placeholder credits will turn into an “I” or “Incomplete” until your foreign transcript is received and your foreign courses replace the placeholder credits. If your transcripts do not arrive within 1 year after your program ends, the placeholder credits will turn into “Fs” or failed classes, and will be calculated into your cumulative GPA.

Faculty-led participants should not enroll themselves in courses for coursework taken abroad. There are special restricted sections of these courses and participants must be enrolled in the correct one:

- a specific WSU courses by the department sponsoring the program,
- a placeholder course by Global Learning, or
- a combination of WSU courses and placeholder credit

STUDENT ACCOUNT HOLDS

Check the Holds tab of your Student Center in myWSU to make sure that you have no holds. If you have a hold on your student account, then you cannot be enrolled in the relevant credits. If you are not enrolled in placeholder credits for your education abroad program, then you cannot receive financial aid or WSU credit for any courses taken abroad.

If you have any holds, get them removed as soon as possible! Contact your academic advisor for advising holds, or Student Accounts for other holds. Global Learning recommends checking your student account again before you leave the country to ensure that you have no holds on your account and that you are enrolled in the appropriate class/classes or placeholder credits.
COURSE APPROVAL WHILE ABROAD
Courses can change abroad just as they do at WSU. If you find that you cannot enroll in the course(s) you originally had approved and need to enroll in a course that was not pre-approved, follow these steps:

- Email the relevant Academic Advisor (major, minor, Honors, Office of Undergraduate Education) and your Global Learning Advisor:
  - title and course number of 2-3 alternate foreign course.
  - WSU course/requirement you want the foreign course to fulfill,
  - course description or syllabus (for UCORE courses, send a full syllabus, in English, to the Office of Undergraduate Education).
- Ask the Academic Advisor to email the above information and approval to Global Learning as well as you. Global Learning will not accept emails forwarded from participants.
- Be patient and understand that you may not receive a response immediately. Having “back-up classes” approved before you depart may help you avoid this stressful situation.

ACADEMIC SUCCESS ABROAD
You will have many exciting opportunities as well as challenges while abroad. It is important to remember that no matter what you experience abroad, your coursework and academic success need to be a priority.

Part of this is the adjustments you may need to make to a different institutional system, educational structure or academic standard. Some of the differences you might encounter are:

- few or no assignments given during a term with a single final exam to determine an entire course grade
- different forms of exams, i.e. a verbal exam
- use of different grading scale
- higher expectations for doing research on your own
- different appropriate behavior when in-class

In addition to adjusting to a new academic culture, you will also have to balance your coursework with cultural adjustment, living situation, and extracurricular activities, so it is important to prioritize and plan your time carefully. You may have to postpone that long weekend away in order to study.

Being prepared for the academic differences and expectations before you leave may help you adjust more easily while in-country. Learn as much as you can about your host country, its culture, and its academic system. Once you are in-country, your program provider, and on-site director or faculty member can provide you with guidance and advice that can help you navigate and adapt to these changes. Your host university may also have tutoring or other resources to help you succeed. Don’t forget that even though you are abroad, you are still a Coug and can utilize WSU resources for assistance, including the library and writing center.

PREPPING FOR YOUR NEXT TERM AT WSU
To register for courses at WSU when you get back, you should be in communication with your Academic Advisor about:

- what courses you need to take when you return
- when you can register
- how to remove any advising holds before registration

When it’s time, you will enroll in classes using myWSU, just like you usually do. Remember that your registration time will be in Pacific Standard Time, which means that you will have to determine what time that is in your host country.
GRADUATION & COMMENCEMENT

Graduation is the process of paying a fee to get your actual diploma and finish your requirements; commencement refers to the ceremony. These are separate application processes and more information is available at https://commencement.wsu.edu.

If you are graduating the term that you are abroad, then you will need to make sure that you have met all of your requirements and apply to graduate and/or walk in the ceremony by the stated deadline. Check your myWSU account and communicate with your Academic Advisor to ensure that you have taken all of the necessary steps to graduate.

If you are receiving a foreign transcript from abroad, then you need to be aware that your transcripts will probably not arrive in time for you to graduate that term. As mentioned previously, placeholder credits turn into an “I”/“Incomplete” at the end of your term abroad, and you cannot graduate with an incomplete course or credit on your student account. Transcripts can take several months to arrive at WSU, and often times they do not arrive by the graduation clearing date. If your transcript does not arrive in time for your scheduled graduation, then you will need to work with your Academic Advisor to change it.

TRANSCRIPTS

If you are enrolled in placeholder credits*, your host university or provider must physically mail an official sealed transcript in order for you to receive credit. You must let your program or host university know to send the transcript to Global Learning and NOT to the Registrar or Admissions.

Washington State University
Office of International Programs
Global Learning Department
PO Box 645110
Pullman, WA 99164-5110

It is common for transcripts to take 2-6 months to arrive, once they have been received by Global Learning your WSU application will be updated.

After your transcript is received, it will be evaluated by an International Credential Evaluator, converted based on the WSU grading system, and entered into your WSU academic records. It can take two or more weeks for your transcript to be processed and your evaluated coursework applied to your student account.

You will receive an email when your transcript has been received by Global Learning, and another email when it has been entered into your WSU academic records. Please be patient with this process.

*Faculty-led participants who are taking WSU classes while abroad may or may not be registered in placeholder credits. Most participants receive their grades from the department sponsoring the faculty-led program. Faculty-led programs receiving foreign credit will have transcripts sent directly to WSU by the foreign institution.

GRADES & GPA

The grade you receive at your host university may use a different grading system and may not be the same at WSU once converted. For example, a “C” earned in Australia might be a “B” at WSU, while a “B” in Spain might equate to a “B-” at WSU.

Foreign credits applied to your WSU degree are viewed as WSU resident credit and will appear on your transcript, but the grades for those credits will not be calculated into your cumulative WSU GPA.

If you have questions about transcripts or grade conversions, please contact Global Learning.
Packing & Travel

When flying internationally there are important factors to consider and prepare for.

**CARRY-ON**

Your carry-on luggage should always have the following:

- Passport, insurance card, credit cards, and money should be kept on your person, in a money pouch, or money belt
- You will be given an emergency contact card by Global Learning which should be kept with you at all times
- Any documents needed to enter your host country. This may include your acceptance letter, financial documents, and vaccination records
- In-country contacts and all addresses where you’ll be staying
- Any essential electronics (chargers, converters, adaptors)
- Glasses and anything else you wouldn’t want to live without
- A change of clothes, in case your luggage is lost or delayed

If you are planning to take any medications with you, there are a few important points to be aware of:

- Medication should be in the original container, and be clearly labeled. Prescribed medications should be accompanied with a note from the prescribing doctor
- Confirm the name, availability and legality of you medication in your host country
- If your medication is not available in the country you are going to, take enough medication to last the entire program (Tell your insurance company you are traveling for an extended time to purchase additional refills in advance.)
- If you have a serious medical condition, consider keeping a medical bracelet on you at all times

**CHECKED BAGGAGE**

When packing your checked bag, pack to fit the length of time you will be abroad, and prepare for the climate or climates that you will encounter. Always be aware of weight restrictions, and be realistic about what you can carry. Make copies of your debit/credit cards, passport, and visa to leave with a trusted family, guardian, or friend back home. This will help if any of your items are lost while you are abroad.

There are a few items that GL recommends leaving behind:

- Expensive or personally sentimental jewelry
- Bulk products that you can buy abroad, like shampoo
- Electrical appliances that may not be the right electrical voltage abroad, such as hair dryers or electric shavers
- Drugs, weapons, or drug paraphernalia - even if it is legal in Washington, that doesn’t mean it is legal everywhere in the U.S. or abroad, and especially not across international borders

**ENTRY/EXIT REQUIREMENTS**

Every country in the world has specific requirements for foreign citizens to enter or exit their country. If you do not have the required documents or information, you may not be permitted to enter the country. It is essential that you know what these requirements are prior to your departure. Check the Department of State’s website at [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov) to [Learn about Your Destination](http://travel.state.gov) and visa requirements for U.S. citizens.
Safety

The key to staying safe overseas is to be a smart traveler. Do your homework before you go to learn about your destination. The more information you have, the safer and smarter you’ll be. Remember that you are a guest in your host country but being “foreign” does not excuse you from knowing and obeying the laws of your host country.

SAFETY TIPS

- **Familiarize yourself** with your new surroundings and with the local culture and laws.
- **Learn the local traffic laws** - pedestrians don’t always have the right of way!
- **Learn public transportation schedules** and when the last bus or train runs, so you don’t find yourself stranded without a way home.
- **Avoid protests and rallies**. Even innocent bystanders can be hurt or arrested and it may be illegal for you, as a foreigner, to attend or participate in such events.
- **Learn key phrases in the local language**.
- **Dress appropriately for the country you are in**.
- **Look up the local equivalent of 911**.
- **Share your travel itinerary** with on-site program staff, family and/or friends. Research a destination before you travel there.
- **A good rule of thumb is to do as the locals do**. If the norm is to stay quiet on public transport, you should stay quiet, too.

Avoid being a target for pickpockets and scam artists. Theft can happen to anyone, but there are things you can do to try and avoid being an easy target of these kinds of crimes:

- **Don’t carry too much cash** with you or flash it out in public.

- **Keep an eye on your stuff** and make sure you never leave it unattended. This means not even putting a bag or purse on the back of a chair where you may not see it.
- **Avoid carrying wallets or phones** in pants pockets or carrying bags that do not zip all the way shut. Carry your purses or backpacks in front of you.
- **Avoid looking like a tourist** by leaving flashy jewelry at home and dressing like the locals. Act confident in what you are doing and where you are heading.

ALCOHOL

Use of alcohol or drugs can quickly lead to trouble anywhere, but they are a specific concern when used abroad. The majority of crimes and accidents involving education abroad participants are related to excessive use of alcohol. Take care to make smart decisions, use your common sense, and follow the laws of the country you are visiting.

If you are of legal age and choose to drink in your host country, then be a responsible and intelligent drinker. Know your limits and when to stop. A good rule of thumb is to “stop drinking while you’re still thinking”. Pay attention to how much you consume. Serving sizes and alcohol concentrations vary. A beer in Belgium, for example, may have a higher alcohol content and therefore have a stronger effect on you than a beer in the U.S.

Part of being a responsible and intelligent drinker is knowing the local drinking culture and the local laws around drinking. Your right
to drink is governed by the local laws and you are obliged to follow those laws. Remember that the country you are in may have a different legal limit so while the drinking age may be lower in some countries, other laws may still apply to your behavior or actions while intoxicated.

Cultural norms also dictate how and when you consume alcohol. For instance, in many countries drinking to get drunk is unacceptable and binge drinking is seen as disrespectful and problematic. Think about these issues as you choose how to represent yourself abroad.

Never leave your drink unattended and keep your hand on top of your drink if it is not in front of you. Drugs can be slipped into your drink order anywhere in the world. Watch the bartender/server take the caps off bottled drinks or how the drink is prepared.

**DRUGS**

**DO NOT** do drugs abroad! **DO NOT** transport drugs for anyone or even consider taking them across any border– the consequences and penalties are high! Despite what you may have heard about less restrictive laws outside of the U.S., drugs are illegal in most countries and drug penalties are often harsh. According to the U.S. State Department depending on the crime and the country, you may face “a sentence ranging from fines and jail time, to years of hard labor or even the death penalty. Sometimes the penalties are much more severe than they would be in the United States. For instance, U.S. citizens have spent years in overseas jails after being caught with only one gram of marijuana.” It’s not worth the risk.

**SEXUAL SAFETY**

Different countries have different norms, customs and laws when it comes to flirting, dating and sexual activities. Make sure that you are aware of these and know how to keep yourself safe, rather than let yourself be taken advantage of. Remember to respect your choices while still being respectful to your host culture’s views on gender and sexuality.

It is important to recognize that sexual assault equals ANY sexual activity that is lacking explicit consent. While most research on the topic of study abroad focuses on female victimization, other populations – for example, male participants, participants of color, and LGBTQ participants – can also be targeted by perpetrators of sexual assault.

College women face higher rates of sexual assault while studying abroad than while on their home campus even though the risk factors faced abroad are similar to those on a domestic campus. Women are targeted by individuals who see them as vulnerable because of their lack (or perceived lack) of familiarity with culture, increased access to alcohol and other substances, and fewer social supports, and being unaware of resources and reporting options.

Risk reduction is taking steps to reduce the likelihood a behavior will occur or get worse and making choices that will increase the likelihood of safety.

To reduce your safety risks abroad:

- Go out with a group of friends and have a safety plan in place.
- Be a proactive bystander. Agree to “look out” for one another. Leave with the group, not alone.
- Abstain or drink in moderation (know the drinking age of the country you’re visiting).
- Don’t post pictures or information on social media that may put you at risk.
- Pay attention to your instincts and respond immediately to what makes you uneasy. If you feel uncomfortable or think you might be at risk, leave the situation immediately and go to a safe place.
Before you go abroad familiarize yourself with the local customs surrounding personal relations. When you arrive, observe how locals interact, how they define “personal boundaries,” how people dress, and what is considered appropriate socializing between genders and for same-sex interactions. How one defines or maintains personal boundaries is, in part, determined by culture. In some countries, standing very close with frequent touching between people is acceptable, while in other countries it is inappropriate. Be aware and understand the culture of personal boundaries/space of the culture you are visiting.

Be firm and direct when communicating your boundaries. If someone touches you in a way you do not like, remove yourself from the situation. Whether overseas or at home predators may push personal boundaries to see what you will allow and escalate inappropriate and criminal behavior if they feel successful. It is imperative that participants traveling abroad recognize personal safety and understand that cross-cultural sensitivity does not include relaxing your boundaries.

The definition and practice of sexual consent varies from country to country. Criminal justice systems around the world vary dramatically in their response to crimes of a sexual nature. Research the countries you will be living in or traveling to, and know what you your rights in these countries are.

If you are the victim of a crime, always let your program provider and/or faculty and Global Learning know. Seek assistance from your study abroad program staff and always report all crimes. The staff in your host country may be in a much better position to deal with local authorities and cultural differences, and can advise you through the process.

SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS & SURVIVORS

Remember victims are never to blame when a sexual assault occurs. Support is available for anyone affected by sexual assault including friends of the victim.

For more information contact Kimberly Anderson the WSU Title IX Coordinator. You may also speak with someone in Counseling and Testing Services and check out www.sexualassault.wsu.edu for more resources.

STUDENT CONDUCT

While abroad, you are a representative of Washington State University, and all student conduct policies listed in the WSU Student Code of Conduct continue to apply. All incidents of misconduct (including underage drinking or doing drugs) will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct. Certain misconduct may be considered violations of the WSU Standards of Conduct AND the code of conduct for your host institution. Any conduct violations abroad can be grounds for disciplinary action here at WSU, including expulsion, so before you go abroad, make sure that you read WSU’s Standards of Conduct and the rules and regulations for your host institution or program.

IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY

In the case of an emergency, first ensure your own safety; this may include contacting local emergency services. Then contact the staff or faculty of your program. They are well informed in how to deal with emergencies in your host country and will know the best course of action and may be able to translate if necessary. Once you have called emergency services or the embassy call the Global Learning Emergency Line and your parents or guardians.
It is essential to gather names, numbers, and emails of people that you might need in an emergency, including:

- Local emergency service numbers - Make sure that the numbers you find are available in a language you speak. Sometimes only certain emergency numbers abroad have English versions
- Emergency number for the program leaders, along with any essential local connections such as host family or roommates
- Your international insurance and local hospitals
- Parents’ or guardians’ home, work AND cell numbers
- Global Learning Department
- Your doctor
- U.S. Embassy or consulate phone number and email address - Consular officers are available 24/7 to provide emergency assistance to Americans

An easy way to keep important contacts with you at all times is to always have your “In an Emergency” Card which will be provided by the Global Learning Department. On this card you are able to add important emergency numbers.

If you have an emergency you can call Global Learning any time at +1-509-332-2521 and say “I am abroad and need to contact WSU Global Learning.” You will be connected to the appropriate person. Remember that the best way to stay safe abroad is to be a smart and prepared traveler.

**INTERNATIONAL INSURANCE – ON CALL**

All participants are enrolled in WSU’s Study Abroad Insurance Program with OnCall International Insurance, unless a waiver is submitted by the application deadline and approved. Although you may have additional personal coverage or insurance with your program provider, OnCall will be considered your primary insurer while abroad. To view this comprehensive international plan, visit [wsu.mysearchlightportal.com](http://wsu.mysearchlightportal.com).

The OnCall wallet card and policy information is emailed directly to students from OnCall several weeks after the deadline. Check your email (including spam folders) for this information. You will need to print the card and take it with you abroad.

Global Learning recommends that you purchase additional coverage if you decide to extend your time abroad. You can do this once you have your OnCall information by extending the existing coverage policy.
Communications

Whether trying to learn the local language or connect with friends back home, the ability to communicate is an important consideration.

**COMMUNICATING WITH LOCALS**

If you are going to a country and are not already fluent in the local language, it is wise to try to learn some basic phrases, such as asking for directions, getting help, and ordering food. Don't forget to learn possible answers, so you can understand the response. When asking if an individual speaks English, it is often polite to do so in the local language. As a visitor in that country, you should not expect the locals to speak your language.

Even if you are going to a country in which the primary language is English, they likely have colloquialisms and slang that you may be unfamiliar with. At the same time, words and phrases that you are familiar with may have a different meaning in your destination so be sure to learn what some of these phrases are in order to avoid confusion and embarrassing situations.

Physical cues, or nonverbal communication may also have different meanings. Gestures that you commonly use in the United States, such as a thumbs up, may be considered rude in your host country.

Personal space may be different; it may be the norm to stand further apart or closer together than what you are used to. Similarly, there may be different implications of eye contact or facial expressions. For example direct eye contact may have different meanings and may be disrespectful or lead to unwanted attention.

**STAYING IN TOUCH WITH FAMILY & FRIENDS**

While abroad, your ability to connect may not be what you’re used to at home. Many countries don’t have internet, Wi-Fi hotspots, or cellular access everywhere. And even where they are supposed to have this access, it may not work consistently. So be patient.

Prepare your family for the possibility of a temporary communications black-out. During your first few days in-country, you may be busy with orientation, jet-lagged from your international flight, or simply not yet have access to Wi-Fi or internet connection. Though you may be unable to reach them immediately, they can track your flight number online and will be able to confirm you landed safely.

If your friends or family will send you care packages, ask the sender to write “No Value—Used Items” on the customs slip to avoid fees.

If you plan to take your cell phone with you, check with your cell phone provider to make sure they have service in your host country and that high roaming charges won’t be added to your bill. Depending on the country and duration of stay, you may consider getting a cell phone, or even just a SIM card while you’re there, as that can make it easier to connect with local friends.

**A NOTE ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

Social media and technology can be helpful tools, but they should always be used in moderation. Social media and the internet have changed the study abroad experience. It is easy to stay in a comfort
zone of only communicating with those from home or other Americans on your program, however making connections with locals will help you adjust and bring new and exciting adventures to your doorstep!

Consider how often you communicate with friends and family back home compared to how much time you spend building relationships with people in your host country. You may also want to consider how much time you spend communicating in English, rather than the local language, or with other people from your program vs. locals of the host country. Make sure that you establish a balance that is right for you and your goals and is respectful to the people around you.

STAYING IN TOUCH WITH WSU
It’s very important that you continue to check your WSU email before your departure, throughout your term abroad and upon return. Email is the primary mode of communication used by Global Learning and WSU in general while you are abroad, to both inform you of important information and confirm you are safe in the event of either natural or political concerns in your host country.

Be aware of who you need to contact at WSU in various situations, depending on whether it’s academic, program related or an emergency. Email is usually the best way to contact Global Learning with non-emergencies and general questions or to keep us updated of any program changes. As previously mentioned, Global Learning provides participants with an Emergency Card that has a 24/7 contact number, as well as other essential contacts.
Understanding Culture

Adjusting to the culture can be one of the most challenging aspects of life abroad. An awareness of common symptoms and strategies for overcoming cultural stress will help you identify and overcome hurdles in your study abroad experience.

There are many aspects that make up a culture. Think of all the things that make up your culture. A popular metaphor is that culture is like an iceberg. Only 10 percent of an iceberg is above the surface, while the rest of it is hidden from view. In the same way, there are many aspects of culture that are quite obvious at first glance while others are much more subtle.

Think about your own culture. What language and gestures do you use to express yourself? What clothes do you wear? What food do you think of when you think of your culture? What artwork and literature are important? What type of music do you and others in your culture listen to? These are all visible aspects of culture.

Now think more deeply about your culture. Things like personal space, sense of beauty, concept of time, and religion may seem obvious to you, but a newcomer to your culture may not understand the nuances so easily. Gender norms, relationship to superiors, work ethic, concepts of fairness, and independence are often so ingrained in a culture that people within the culture may not even be able to explain them.

PERCEPTIONS

It’s important to understand your own cultural perceptions. You may judge other cultures negatively based on your own culture’s norms. For example, in the United States, you probably expect a friend to arrive at the prearranged time. While abroad, you may find yourself waiting a while for a friend – who might not consider themselves late at all! You feel frustrated or upset, but it may just be a different approach to the concept and importance of time and lateness and is perfectly acceptable, and possibly expected, in that culture.

Take a step back and look at the situation more objectively without relying on preconceived notions. Learn about it rather than rushing to judgments based on stereotypes that your home culture has about your host culture.

STEREOTYPES

Stereotypes are human’s way of categorizing things and making sense of our world. When we think of stereotypes we usually think of the negative ones first such as: “All the drivers here are terrible!” However, there are seemingly positive stereotypes like: “Everyone here is friendly!” and stereotypes that can be more neutral, such as: “They all like spicy food.”

Whether they are based on a slice of truth or not, the real trouble comes when you automatically apply a stereotype to people before you meet them, because that means you are putting that person into a box, which doesn’t allow for variation or individual characteristics. What’s more, it usually means that you are unconsciously trying to force that person into the box, in order to maintain your own world view.
So instead of applying stereotypes and making assumptions, first try to understand what the stereotypes are and then reevaluate them. One strategy is to use generalizations, which are slightly different from stereotypes, and allow you to wait before judging those you encounter. Instead of saying “Everyone” from your host culture has a certain characteristic, use phrases like “most people.”

**STEREOTYPES OF AMERICANS**

Those you meet abroad may have stereotypes of Americans, as well. Below is a list of 15 common stereotypes that citizens of other countries have of Americans as a group. Be prepared to discuss both cultural and political differences in a calm manner. Remember that you are an ambassador for your country, as well as Washington State University, so it’s up to you to be a considerate global citizen and not perpetuate negative stereotypes.

1. Boastful/arrogant
2. Disrespectful of authority
3. Drunkard
4. Extravagant/wasteful
5. Generous
6. Insensitive
7. Informal
8. Ignorant of other countries/cultures
9. Lazy
10. Loud & obnoxious
11. Sexually promiscuous
12. Racist
13. Rich, wealthy
14. Rude or immature
15. Snobbish

[edupass.org/culture/sterotypes.phtml](http://edupass.org/culture/sterotypes.phtml)

**CULTURAL STRESS/SHOCK SYMPTOMS**

Even when you are open to learning about your host culture, you may have some trouble adjusting to it. This is called ‘cultural stress’ or ‘culture shock’. Cultural stress happens to nearly all people who live abroad, to some degree. It can happen at different times so avoid comparing yourself to how others appear to be adjusting. This graph shows a common progression:

There are many different possible symptoms of Cultural Stress. You may not experience all of the symptoms, but if you notice any, you can utilize some of the following strategies to help yourself adjust to your new environment.

- Learn about your country before you go, so you have a better idea of what to expect.
- Be open to things you DON’T expect!
- Take time to reflect on the experience while it’s happening. (i.e., journal, blog, or send mass email updates to family and friends).
- Get involved and connect with locals through activities or a language exchange.
- Avoid sleeping too much or isolating yourself.
- Stay positive.
- Don’t take missteps too seriously. Laugh at yourself or the situation and move on.
- Acknowledge that a new way of doing things isn’t right or wrong, it’s just different.

**RE-ADAPTING WHEN YOU RETURN**

When you come home, you may experience another round of stress similar to when you went abroad. This is because you are RE-adjusting to your home culture. The symptoms may be different, but...
it can progress just like your adjustment to life overseas. At first you’ll be excited to see your friends and family again, and do all the things that you missed while you were away. However, after this initial excitement you might start to get homesick for the culture you left behind. Or the reality of your return may not match the expectations you had. This is because you’ve been off experiencing different things from those your friends and family have experienced in your absence. The Global Learning Department has resources to help you with this phase:

- Course for returned participants
- Workshops on internationalizing your resume
- Global Learning Peer Advisors and/or Ambassadors
- Global Leadership Certificate
- Global Case Competition
- And more!