

PRE-DEPARTURE HANDBOOK FOR STUDENTS STUDYING ABROAD ON FACULTY-LED PROGRAMS

PRE-TRAVEL LOGISTICS

PASSPORT

Many countries require that your passport be valid for six months **beyond the dates of your trip**. Keep this in mind, in case you need to renew your passport. In addition, some Middle Eastern and African countries will not allow entry if your passport indicates travel to Israel; check with the embassy or consulate of the country in which you will be studying for their requirements.

For more information on applying for a passport or replacing an expired passport, see: <https://travel.state.gov/en/passports.html>. *Note to UMW international students: Please remember that traveling abroad may affect your international student status. If you have questions, please contact CIE immediately.*

CELL PHONES

Most US cell phones will work just fine in urban areas abroad, but using them abroad can be very expensive. Check with your carrier for international texting, data, and call rates/plans. Blocks of minutes or data may be available for pre-purchase. If you are going to be abroad for more than a few days, you may want to consider purchasing a SIM card using a local carrier. Many newer phones now have the option of an “eSIM” as well. Do your research well in advance of your travels on what option best suits your communication needs. WhatsApp, Viber, GroupMe, Zoom, and Teams are inexpensive/free alternatives for communicating with home that can be used via computer or smart phone on WiFi. You should set up any apps/accounts prior to departure.

In most cases, don't forget to turn off cellular data while traveling abroad to avoid extremely costly charges on your bill. Phones set to automatically download email can result in international roaming charges. Smart phones can be used in WiFi mode (or airplane mode) free of charge wherever WiFi is available, as it is in many restaurants and pubs.

ELECTRICITY: 110 VS. 220 VOLTAGES

Most international wall outlets provide electricity at double the strength of US outlets. Check the standards for your destination country prior to departure. Any appliances with a motor (such as a hair dryer) or that heat up (such as a flat iron) will quickly burn up on 220 voltage. Either leave these items at home, or pick up a dual voltage model prior to departure. Most items that simply charge up, such as computers, e-readers, or cameras, will work fine on 220 voltage, but it's best to check the specifications on your electronics to be sure. International wall sockets do not look the same as US outlets. It's easy to purchase plug adaptors prior to departure in the travel section of your local store (Target, Wal-Mart, Amazon, etc.).

ACADEMIC MATTERS

TRANSCRIPTS AND GRADES

All credit-bearing winter and spring break programs are offered as part of your regular UMW fall or spring course load. You will register for these courses via Banner. These grades will be reflected on your UMW transcript and do affect your UMW GPA.

There are two types of Faculty-Led Summer Programs:

For Faculty-Led Programs that include study at/with an overseas university or partner, at the end of your program the Faculty Director and/or program staff will arrange for an official transcript to be sent to

UMW. Grades earned through an international university are *not* calculated into your UMW GPA though they will show on your UMW transcript. **You must receive the equivalent grade of a “C” or better for the credits to transfer.** It may take several weeks for your transfer credit to appear on your UMW record after the conclusion of your program.

For Faculty-led programs where students pay both a program fee and UMW tuition (even if it rolled into your regular full-time semester course load as is the case for some programs, especially those that travel in the following May), grades will be calculated into your UMW GPA as you are participating in a UMW course and you register for the course in Banner. Grades for these classes will post to student transcripts following the conclusion of the program. *Graduating seniors should be aware of any implications that their participation in these programs may cause on their graduation status and ability to walk at Commencement.*

COURSE SELECTION AND TRANSFER CREDIT (SUMMER PROGRAMS ONLY)

If studying at an overseas university or through a partner, keep in mind the following information regarding selecting your courses abroad and transfer credit:

Select the courses you take abroad with a careful eye to what you need to fulfill your graduation requirements. Study abroad courses may transfer as UMW equivalent credit, major elective credit, or elective credit. **Students must receive approval from the appropriate department via the Study Abroad Course Approval Form for UMW equivalent credit or major/minor elective credit.** Be prepared to provide course descriptions and/or syllabi to the department chair in order for him/her to evaluate the content of each course and best determine how the credits should transfer. Elective credits may be approved by CIE.

You must submit the Study Abroad Course Approval Form to CIE prior to departure. Only those courses that are pre-approved for transfer credit *before* departure are guaranteed to transfer back to UMW. As is often the case, however, students may need to make changes to their course selection after departure. If there are changes to the course selection, students must communicate these changes to CIE and the department chair from whom they need approval. In some cases, students may not be able to register for courses until after they arrive to their study abroad program. If this is the case, students should contact CIE and the appropriate department chair as soon as they register for classes and obtain approval via email.

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM AND DIVERSE AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES GEN-ED CONTRACT

Students interested in fulfilling the Beyond the Classroom or Diverse and Global Perspectives General Education requirement should complete the Beyond the Classroom/Diverse and Global Perspectives Contract available through CIE. **Students must complete this contract BEFORE departure for study abroad.** An approved study abroad or other field program can fulfill this requirement if the student produces a significant reflective component (e.g., essay, portfolio, video project, travel blog) which is then approved and graded by a UMW faculty member. Once submitted, a “course” titled SAGE 000 will appear on your UMW Transcript as a placeholder for the grade of Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory.

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH UMW

It is very important that you continue to check your UMW email while abroad, as this the primary way for UMW to communicate with you while you are away.

TRAVELING ABROAD

FLIGHT ARRANGEMENTS

If air travel is *not* included in your program, you should start looking into arrangements for your flight as early as possible, once given the “green-light” from CIE and/or your Faculty Director. Your Faculty Director or program host can tell you the exact date you are expected arrive and when your program is scheduled to end.

When making your flight arrangements, check with several different travel agencies, airlines, or search engines to compare prices and options. Be sure to ask for student fares and/or student discounts wherever possible. Check into price differences (and flexibility options) between buying a round-trip or two one-way tickets. Keep in mind that baggage policies vary widely across airlines and ticket options.

PACKING

There are two words of advice that returning study abroad students offer regarding packing: **PACK LIGHT!** It is nearly impossible to take everything you want, and remember, you are the one who has to carry your belongings. A common suggestion is to pack your bags, then carry them around the block and up and down some stairs (by yourself!), then re-evaluate what is really necessary to take. Also, remember that every airline has restrictions on how many bags you can check and carry, and how much they can weigh. Check with your airline before you leave home, as airlines are becoming more restrictive about what they allow.

Keep in mind that you will acquire things while abroad that you will want to bring back with you, so consider taking an extra bag with you inside your luggage, or buy one abroad. If your program travels from city to city, you may want to consider packing in a backpack or rolling bag for easier portability. For these programs, the less you have to lug around, the happier you will be!

Be sure to label your luggage. Place your contact information (name, address, phone) on a luggage tag and also inside the bag in case the external tag is lost or damaged.

CARRY-ON BAGGAGE

Given the uncertainties of international travel, it's a good idea to **pack one complete change of clothes and some basic toiletry items (toothbrush, travel deodorant, comb) in your carry-on bag** in case your luggage does not arrive at the same time you do. You should also carry any electronic items (camera, Kindle, iPad, computer) AND their cables/chargers with you. Check the regulations for your airline as some carriers now restrict the weight of carry on baggage as well as the size. **Anything you can't live without, such as contacts/glasses or medications, should be carried with you and never checked.**

GENERAL PACKING LIST

Your Faculty Director may provide you with specific packing recommendations for your destination, but here are some general packing guidelines to help you prepare:

- Passport and visa (if applicable)
- Vaccination cards (if applicable)
- Photocopy of passport (kept separately from passport)
- Credit cards/ATM card
- Photocopy of front and back of credit/ATM cards (kept separately from originals)
- Money belt and/or passport pouch
- Proof of insurance and emergency contact card
- Travel information provided by your Faculty Director and/or CIE
- Airline travel confirmation (hard copy)
- Prescription medications in original containers – enough for the whole trip plus extra days
- Eyeglasses/contact lenses, including extras
- Converter and/or electrical adapter (if applicable)
- Small travel first aid kit and sewing kit
- Camera (don't forget download cables for photo sharing, and charger or batteries!)
- Portable battery
- Language dictionary
- Country travel guide
- Toiletries, including feminine products

- Contraceptives
- Dress outfit and shoes (if applicable, check with program director)
- Swim suit and towel, exercise clothes (if applicable, check with program director)
- Raincoat or portable umbrella
- Good walking shoes (wear one pair, pack one pair)
- Comfortable sleepwear that can be worn in mixed company (e.g., on an overnight train)
- DO NOT pack items prohibited by airline regulations or by law in your destination country

MONEY MATTERS

Managing your money abroad can be challenging, and advance planning is important. Before you go, pay attention to the exchange rate between the U.S. dollar and the currency of your host country, and learn to think in the foreign currency.

HOW MUCH TO TAKE

Your Faculty Director and/or CIE Advisor will be able to provide you with estimates of how much spending money you will need. Keep in mind that the amount of money you spend ultimately depends on the lifestyle you choose.

You should budget extra if you are planning to travel before or after your program. Plane tickets are often more expensive than in the U.S., but train and bus travel has remain relatively inexpensive in many countries. If you are a big spender in the U.S., bringing more money would be a good idea. Students who plan to regularly sample the nightlife of their host city should budget extra money for taxis.

Be sure to budget for potential personal expenses:

- Meals and bottled water not provided by the program
- Snacks and incidentals
- Communication costs (phone, internet service, postage)
- Gifts or souvenirs
- Personal transportation not provided by the program

HOW TO CARRY YOUR MONEY

No traveler should carry large amounts of cash, but it is a good idea to change a small amount of money into the foreign currency in some cases. You can change money at any international airport; however, the exchange rates and fees may not be the most favorable. Check with your Faculty Director or CIE Advisor to find out the best way to access funds in your particular host country.

For security in some destinations, you may want to consider using a concealed money belt or bag that hangs around your neck under your clothing in order to ensure your passport and other essential items stay with you.

ATM CARDS

In many countries around the world (especially the more developed countries or those with high levels of Western tourism), you can find ATM machines where you can use your ATM card from home to withdraw money (in the local currency) from your bank account in the United States. Be sure to check with your bank at home for availability and transaction fees, as well as making sure your PIN is valid abroad. It is a good idea to make sure your card is not just an ATM, but also has a Visa or Mastercard symbol on it. If it has either of these symbols, you can use it in machines that bear these symbols, and you can also use it to make purchases similar to a credit card. Note that fraud is widespread; only use ATM machines attached to banks. Contact your bank to notify them that you will be traveling abroad to avoid fraud alerts when you use your card overseas.

CREDIT CARDS

In most places around the world, it is a good idea to have a credit card for emergencies as well as day-to-day expenses. Visa and Mastercard are the most widely accepted. Credit cards can be useful for large purchases or for hotels, shops, and airline or train ticket purchases if you choose to do any independent travel, and they can be used for obtaining cash advances from a bank. As with ATM cards, make sure you let your US bank know that you will be using the card abroad to avoid service cancellation. Note: In some parts of the world fraud is so widespread that using a credit card is inadvisable. This applies to most African nations and some other developing countries. Your Faculty Director can provide more information specific to your destination(s).

HEALTH ISSUES

INSURANCE: MANDATORY SICKNESS & ACCIDENT INSURANCE

Travel and study abroad will likely affect your health in one way or another, as many factors that influence your daily health have to do with lifestyle and environment, not to mention that good health (or lack thereof) will have a significant impact on the success and enjoyment of your time abroad.

In order to ensure that all study abroad students are fully covered by comprehensive health insurance while abroad, UMW requires all participants to carry international health insurance. If not included by your international host institution or program, the cost of the policy is included in the program fee, and you will be covered for the duration of your program. If you plan to arrive before your program begins, or stay beyond your program end date, it is your responsibility to make sure you extend your coverage accordingly.

In addition to providing comprehensive health insurance, UMW's insurance plan, through iNext, provides emergency travel medical insurance, including medical evacuation, political and security evacuation coverage, natural disaster evacuation, and emergency reunion coverage. The insurance carrier has identified a network of doctors worldwide who will provide treatment and file claims on your behalf without requiring payment at the time of treatment. For more information, please see the insurance welcome package forwarded to your UMW email upon enrollment.

iNext will also email a printable Medical Insurance ID card to each student along with policy documents. **In addition to international medical insurance, CIE strongly recommends purchasing additional trip cancellation/interruption insurance. This is available via iNext and can be added to your medical policy at the time of enrollment.**

ASSESS YOUR HEALTH AND IDENTIFY YOUR NEEDS

Please remember that study abroad is not a magic cure for concerns and problems that you may be having at home. Emotional, psychological, and physical problems will indeed follow you wherever you go, so it is important to consider honestly your health issues and needs before you go abroad. Contrary to popular belief, travel does not minimize these problems; rather, it often can exacerbate them to the point of crisis if you are not careful.

Be clear and honest about your health needs when applying for a study abroad program and when making your housing arrangements. This includes issues such as medical needs, allergies, psychological treatments, dietary requirements (including vegetarianism), and disabilities. Services for people with disabilities vary widely around the world; if you have questions or concerns about these issues, please feel free to discuss them with staff in CIE. If you have any kind of mental health problems or eating disorders (or if you have had in the past), think carefully about your decision to study abroad, and please discuss these issues with your physician and with your mental health practitioner.

SEE YOUR HEALTH CARE PRACTITIONERS

Before you go abroad, it is a good idea to visit your family physician, dentist, gynecologist, and any other health care practitioners that you regularly see. Make sure your health records are up-to-date and that you discuss any medical issues you have that may affect your experience abroad. You should take copies of your medical records with you abroad if you have specific medical conditions or if you expect to need medical care abroad. Also, be sure you have an adequate supply of any prescription medications (in their original containers) with you. You may need a physician's prescription (in generic form) for medication and medical supplies to pass through customs in your host country.

IMMUNIZATIONS

Some countries require specific immunizations in order to enter the country, and there are also immunizations recommended for travel to specific areas of the world. Be sure to check this out well in advance of your departure, as some immunizations require a series of inoculations starting many months before your scheduled travel.

Detailed health information can be obtained from your local Public Health Department, your physician, or by contacting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov/travel). It is important to discuss these health guidelines and recommendations with your own physician or consult with UMW Student Health Center.

Check with health care providers or your own records to ensure that your immunizations (e.g., tetanus, polio, COVID) are up-to-date. Under the International Health Regulations adopted by the World Health Organization, countries may require International Certificates of Vaccination against yellow fever, and a cholera immunization may be required if you are traveling from an infected area. Prophylactic medication for malaria and certain other preventive measures are advisable for travel to some countries. No immunizations are required to return to the United States.

DIETARY CONCERNS

In the US, we live in a society which offers a wide range of food choice. When traveling abroad, it is sometimes difficult to maintain a particular diet (for example, a vegetarian or medically-restricted diet). Vegetarianism can mean a variety of things to different people. Think carefully about how your food choices might affect your friends who invite you to dinner, your homestay family, or students with whom you cook in the residence halls. Prepare yourself for societies in which ingredients are rarely listed on packaging.

OTHER HEALTH QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Are there illnesses that are endemic to the region?
- What medications should you take to prevent these illnesses?
- What is the quality of water in your host country, and what precautions, if any, do you need to take with your drinking water and food preparation? (Bottled water, in sealed containers, is always suggested until you know the state of the local tap water.)
- Are there any additional precautions recommended for safe sexual practices?
- What are the laws in your host country regarding bringing in medications, medical supplies, and contraceptives?

WHEN YOU ARRIVE IN YOUR HOST COUNTRY

Because of cultural differences, travel, and other adjustment concerns, you will need to continue to pay attention to your health (both physical and mental) when you arrive and throughout your program. Be sure you know how to get medical help should you need it, including routine healthcare, as well as emergencies. **Make sure you make your medical needs known to your Faculty Director, CIE Advisor, and anyone in your host country who can be of assistance, particularly if you are living with a host family.** Most importantly, give yourself time to adjust to the new culture, and be attentive to your personal well-being—make sure you eat healthy foods and get regular sleep and exercise, and stay hydrated.

SAFETY ABROAD

Safety is an understandable concern wherever you may be going; however, it is useful to take a comparative perspective: the United States is known around the world as a relatively dangerous country, and our street crime statistics support this view, and the U.S. certainly has more hand guns and more gun-related deaths and injuries than anywhere else. Even college campuses have their share of robbery, property destruction, drunkenness, violence, and sexual assault. It is also important to consider that the U.S. media coverage of the rest of the world focuses (often sensationally) on overseas political upheavals, violent strife, and natural disasters. One of the first reactions study abroad students have is how "normal" life seems abroad, in spite of cultural differences. However, although you may well be statistically safer abroad than at home, danger can occur anywhere, and ***you can play a big part in minimizing risks and hazards.***

Steps to help ensure that your study abroad experience is a safe one:

- Read and evaluate all materials provided by CIE and your Faculty Director that relate to safety, health, legal, environmental, political, cultural, and religious conditions in your host country.
- Pay attention to the local conditions. Stay informed about local and regional news, read newspapers with good international coverage and analysis of local issues.
- Avoid protests or potentially violent situations or places where Americans are known to congregate. In the event of disturbances, do not get involved. Keep a low profile and try not to identify yourself as an American by dress, behavior, or speech.
- Be street smart. Remember that adjusting to city life is part of the cultural adjustment process, since most cities where students study abroad are much larger than Fredericksburg, Virginia.
- Keep your residence locked and report any suspicious persons hanging around your building, host home, or campus.
- Make sure your program director knows how to contact you in case of emergency. Leave your itinerary if you are traveling independently.
- Be wary of impairing your judgment through the excessive use of alcohol, and do not use illegal drugs.
- Avoid walking alone at night.
- Do not display money, jewelry, cameras, or other valuable items.
- Never carry large amounts of cash.
- Familiarize yourself with your neighborhood, locate your nearest police station and hospital, and be sure you have any emergency phone numbers.
- Don't allow yourself to be vulnerable. Take the same precautions you would at home regarding giving out your name and address to unknown people.
- Regarding road travel, be aware that driving customs vary a great deal, and in most countries, pedestrians are not given the right of way. Find out which roads are safest and whether it is safe to travel on overnight trains and buses. You are advised not to drive at all while abroad, especially in countries where driving on the left-hand side of the road is the norm.
- Unfortunately, female travelers are more likely to encounter sexual harassment, but dressing conservatively, not walking alone at night or in questionable neighborhoods, and not agreeing to meet anyone in a secluded place can help prevent dangerous or uncomfortable situations. In addition, be aware that there are many unfortunate stereotypes about American women.
- If, during your stay abroad, there is a serious event involving casualties (whether or not it has put you personally at risk) that is likely to gain international media exposure, we urge you to contact your family by phone or email to reassure them that you are okay. Remember that what may seem like a relatively minor local event to you could cause alarm back home.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE LOST OR SEPARATED FROM THE GROUP

The best way to avoid being separated from the group is to remain alert. Don't wander off without telling someone where you are going and when you plan to return. Pay attention to the time – one minute before the train arrives is not the best time for a trip to the bathroom! Remaining vigilant and situationally aware can prevent separation from happening, but if it does: **SCATTER!** You will receive an Emergency Contact page with the emergency contact information for your specific program. General information is as follows:

“SCATTER” PROCEDURE

- **STOP** in a safe place. The group will look for you first at/near the place they last saw you.
- **CALL** someone in your group if you have cell phone access.
- **ASSESS** the situation—Remain calm.
- **TELEPHONE** your Faculty Director and/or host contact from a payphone or borrowed phone if you don't have cell access.
- **TRAVEL PLANS**—If separated while traveling, can you make arrangements to reach the group's destination?
- **EMERGENCY CONTACT** – Contact UMW Public Safety. Provide your location, plans, and how you can be contacted or when you will phone back for instructions. Group leader will also phone UMWPS to get information on your location and how you can be contacted. (See below.)
 - UMW Public Safety: +1 540-654-1025. This number is manned 24/7 and accepts international collect calls.
 - UMW Center for International Education Emergency Line: +1 540-654-1434 (office) or +1 540-419-9781 after hours.
- **RALLY POINT** - If you are still unable to make contact with the group and it becomes clear that they are not able to find you, make your way to a logical point. In order of preference: 1. Group's planned destination. 2. Your Lodgings. 3. Nearest Police Station. 4. In a true emergency situation only, contact the nearest American Embassy or Consulate.

MEDICAL EMERGENCY, POLITICAL UNREST EMERGENCY, NATURAL DISASTER, OR EMERGENCY EVACUATION

The first choice will always be for your program director to make arrangements in case of a crisis situation, but if for any reason your Director becomes separated from the group or incapacitated:

- Contact iNext Insurance (if covered by this policy). This number, found on your insurance card, is manned 24/7 and accepts international collect calls.
- After calling iNext, contact UMW Public Safety and CIE (above).

Please have the following information ready:

- Your current location. (If traveling, your intended destination, mode of transport and schedule.)
- How the person involved/group leader can be contacted.
- If you cannot be contacted, establish times to call in again to update information and communicate plans.

TERRORISM

Unfortunately terrorism is a reality today. Although it is unlikely that you will be the object of a terrorist act, there *are* precautions that you can take to minimize your exposure to risk:

- Keep a low profile.
- Do not draw attention to yourself through culturally inappropriate dress or behavior.
- Avoid traveling in groups of Americans and speaking English in public. Keep U.S. IDs hidden.
- Avoid areas with U.S. interests, such as the U.S. Embassy, McDonalds, Hard Rock Café, etc.
- Keep calm. Avoid crowds and protest situations.
- Keep abreast of news and stay in contact with your family.
- Vary your routes/daily routines.

- Report any suspicious activity – for example, someone asking a lot of personal questions (hotel info, itinerary, hometown info), someone very persistent in questioning, or if you find yourself being followed.
- Response to an incident: get to safe location and/or seek out authorities.

CIE recommends ALL travelers register with the US Department of State’s Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). You may receive consular emails or text alerts.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL SAFETY

State Department Travel Advisories provides information on travel safety and reports from the U.S. government monitoring political conditions in every country of the world. Visit www.travel.state.gov.

LEGAL ISSUES

When you are abroad you are subject to the laws of the country in which you are living and studying. The laws may be very different from those in the U.S. and in Fredericksburg, VA. You should know that the American principle of "innocent until proven guilty" does not apply in all legal systems abroad, so the best advice for you is to know the laws and obey them. Please remember that if you should get yourself into trouble with the law in your host country, there is nothing UMW can do for you, and there is little the U.S. Embassy or Consulate can do.

The only assistance the U.S. Embassy or Consulate can provide for you is to give you a list of local attorneys and physicians, contact your next of kin in case of emergency, contact friends or relatives on your behalf to request funds or guidance, provide assistance during civil unrest or natural disaster, and replace a lost or stolen passport. They cannot get you out of jail.

The experience of a foreign jail is not something with which you want to become familiar in your host country. In many cases the conditions are deplorable, and bail provisions as we know them in the U.S. are rare in many countries.

You should avoid all involvement with illegal drugs. In most cases, drug laws are extremely severe (more so than in the U.S.), regardless of whether the drug is in possession for personal use or for sale, and in many cases regardless of the amount. (There have been cases of Americans arrested and jailed for long periods abroad for possessing as little as 1/10 ounce of marijuana.)

CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES

Robert Kohls, a renowned author of intercultural literature, defines culture as "an integrated system of learned behavior patterns that are characteristic of the members of any given society ... the total way of life of particular groups of people. It includes everything that a group of people thinks, says, does, and makes, its customs, language, material artifacts and shared systems of attitudes and feelings. Culture is learned and transmitted from generation to generation." It is important to recognize your own "cultural baggage" when you go abroad.

Study, travel or work abroad is a whole-person experience. The parts of your identity that make you unique inevitably become part of your experience abroad. Time abroad often facilitates personal reflection and teaches people as much about themselves as it does about other people. Before you go, you will want to consider how your identity might affect, or be affected by, your experience abroad. Some factors to consider are:

GENDER

Gender is a characteristic that can affect your experience abroad. Both women and men are often particularly aware of gender-based treatment in a foreign culture that differs from their home culture. It's good to talk with someone who has spent time in your host country about these differences before you go.

For women who have concerns about sexual harassment, safety, or social expectations, there are a number of books and blogs devoted to these issues. Those who are non-binary or trans may also experience discrimination and should consider their host country's views and laws on this subject prior to traveling there.

RACE, ETHNICITY, MINORITY OR MAJORITY STATUS

Because of your race or ethnicity, you may be accorded different privileges or experience different barriers abroad than those you experience at home. Different cultures define "race" and "ethnicity" differently, create different categories, and expect different things of people within these categories.

CLASS

Overseas you may experience class issues differently than you do at home. In certain contexts, working class Americans may be considered rich. In other contexts, upper-middle class Americans may be considered poor. Certain cultures have more rigidly defined or more openly articulated ideas about class than those in the United States. Think about who you will be meeting as a student engaged in higher learning in your host country. Think about who you would like to meet during your semester or year abroad.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Depending on your sexual orientation you may be granted different privileges or encounter different challenges abroad than at home. At the same time, while overseas, people often examine, or reexamine, questions of sexual identity because of increased personal freedom or increased time for personal reflection. Since many ideas we have about sexual orientation and sexuality are culturally-based, students need to be aware of how this will affect their relationships with host nationals, cultural adjustment and reentry, and the overall study abroad experience.

RELIGION

People around the world have different ideas and expectations regarding religion. To be respectful of others, it is important to learn as much as possible about the religious beliefs, practices and norms of the area to which you are traveling. You may also want to research whether or not people of your faith meet and practice in the place you are going. Be aware that you may need to adopt certain standards of dress.

DIETARY CONCERNS

In the United States, we live in a society which offers a wide range of food choice. When traveling abroad, it is sometimes difficult to maintain a particular diet (for example, a vegetarian or medically-restricted diet). Vegetarianism can mean a variety of things to different people. Think carefully about how your food choices might affect your friends who invite you to dinner, your homestay family, or students with whom you cook in the residence halls. Prepare yourself for societies in which ingredients are rarely listed on packaging.

HEALTH

Because an experience abroad can be physically, mentally and emotionally demanding, think carefully about your health. A certain amount of stress due to culture shock and a change in living conditions is a normal part of an experience abroad. In some cases, such stress may aggravate an illness you have under control at home. You may also have concerns about health care facilities and insurance.

SMOKING AND VAPING

While there is currently a strong movement in the United States against smoking in public places, the situation in many other countries is quite different. While abroad, you may encounter more second-hand smoke than you are used to, with smokers showing little concern about whether or not it bothers you (for example, in restaurants or on trains). Vaping is also quite popular in many countries.

BEING AN AMERICAN ABROAD

As with any of the previously mentioned identity issues, many stereotypes exist, and Americans are not excluded from this. Frequently, the stereotype of the American is not at all flattering, and can include characteristics such as:

- Arrogant patriotism (the "ugly American" who expects everyone to speak English and thinks that every country should pattern itself after the United States)
- Loud and overly friendly behavior
- Drunkenness
- Immature behavior
- Obsessed with being hard working
- Wealthy
- Ignorant of other countries
- Promiscuous
- Always in a hurry
- Naïve (an easy target for swindlers)

It is up to you to behave in a way that will show the people in your host country that these are in many ways unjustified stereotypes that cannot be applied arbitrarily, at least to you. It is important, however, to recognize your "Americanness" and to think about what cultural baggage you will be carrying abroad.

DEALING WITH ANTI-AMERICAN SENTIMENT

There may be times when you feel as though you are being attacked personally for being an American. Sometimes you will be expected to answer questions about American foreign policy and to justify the actions of your government with which you may or may not agree. There is no right or wrong way to deal with anti-American slurs or suggestions, and you will certainly develop your own strategy for addressing these issues. However, some suggestions are not to reinforce the negative American stereotypes with your own behavior, and to try to understand the motives of the person criticizing you and your country. Ask more questions to try to understand why the person believes what s/he does. Most importantly, remain tolerant and avoid becoming defensive; keep an open mind and use the experience to learn about yourself and about cultural differences.

Students are encouraged to prepare themselves for conversations about U.S. foreign policies and the reasons behind them by brushing up on American political and cultural history as well as current events. It is also critical to understand the current U.S. foreign policy towards the country you will be studying in, as well as that country's current political climate. A well-informed student will be better able to engage himself/herself thoughtfully in conversations with host country nationals rather than taking criticism of U.S. policy as a personal attack or insult.

CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

Because of the cultural differences you will encounter, as well as the cultural baggage that you will inevitably take with you abroad, you will certainly encounter some adjustment issues. This is nothing to fear, and indeed it is a normal and common part of the process. It should help you to know a little bit about what you may experience.

Upon arrival in the host country, many students go through an initial phase of euphoria and excitement, sometimes known as the "honeymoon phase." You will probably be very excited by the newness of your surroundings and things that appear unusual will be interesting. Sometimes students in this first stage have a false sense of security, so it is especially important to keep safety precautions in mind. After this initial period wears off, it is common to feel that your usual ways of dealing with things and your habits and routines do not work in your host country. There are endless subtle cultural differences, and the most minor tasks may seem major. For example, you may encounter difficulties with language, housing, money, transportation, food, recreation, and health. You may begin to feel like an outsider, things may seem

confusing and frustrating, and you may even start to feel a little depressed. This psychological disorientation is what is often referred to as "culture shock" or "culture stress."

There is no right or wrong way to deal with culture stress, but the most important thing is to be aware that this is a very normal phenomenon, so recognizing and accepting its existence is an important first step. It is suggested that you avoid seeking out other disgruntled or unhappy people, and do not isolate yourself. Do not sit around criticizing the culture and being negative; this will just prolong your gloom. Keep busy, set goals for yourself, and try not to be judgmental. Be aware that the problems probably are not so much with your surroundings, but with your own adjustment to it. In time, the negative symptoms of culture stress will disappear, and you will certainly adjust. Kohls states that, "Culture shock is in some degree inevitable . . . and is the occupational hazard of overseas living through which one has to be willing to go in order to enjoy the pleasures of experiencing other countries and cultures in depth."

COPING WITH CULTURE STRESS

- Be aware that culture stress does exist, and it affects each of us differently.
- Don't think that you are "strange" or "abnormal", or that the people of your host nation are either.
- While sometimes difficult, remember that culture stress can ultimately leave you with broader perspectives, deeper insights, and broader tolerance.
- Look for the best, not the worst.
- Before you go abroad, learn as much as you can about your host country.
- Keep an open mind.
- Remember that other group members are experiencing culture stress too. Their stress responses may clash with yours – for example, if your response to stress is to turn inward and become quiet, another student who deals with stress by chattering constantly may seem irritating. Remain considerate.

RETURNING HOME AFTER STUDY ABROAD

CROSS-CULTURAL RE-ENTRY

When you return from studying abroad, it is very common to experience what is known as "re-entry." You may have heard it referred to as re-entry culture shock, or return culture shock. Regardless of the name, coming home from study abroad can be a challenging and difficult time, and it can also be the time when you learn the most from your cross-cultural experience. As you re-adjust to the culture of the United States, it may be helpful to know a little more about what you are going through and some positive ways of dealing with it.

What is re-entry? Re-entry can be defined as the often unexpected and sometimes difficult experience of re-adjusting to life in one's home culture after living abroad. Some study abroad returnees do not find re-entry to be difficult; however, most returnees experience some degree of stress upon returning home. In fact, for many students the process of re-adapting to home after study abroad is even more difficult than adjusting to your host culture!

Re-entry is different for everyone, just as your experience abroad was unique and special. However, there are some common re-adjustment issues that study abroad students report:

Personal Growth and Change--You may have experienced a challenge to your beliefs, convictions, values and worldview while you were immersed in a different culture. You may have also experienced more academic freedom and personal independence while abroad. You may feel that you have matured and become more self-confident. You have undoubtedly changed in many ways. One of the greatest challenges of re-entry is having to adjust your "new" self to your "old" home. It is very common for returnees to experience loss of identity during this time.

New Knowledge and Skills--Just as your attitudes changed while you were abroad, you probably developed new knowledge, skills, and behavior patterns. For example, you probably developed competencies that helped you survive in your everyday life overseas, such as learning to find your way around a new city, to act in a culturally appropriate manner, and to converse about new subjects, and of course, foreign language skills. Other new competencies may include new knowledge about your major, new research skills, and new problem-solving skills. Some returnees feel frustrated if they feel these skills are of little use once they return home.

Relationships with Family and Friends--Some study abroad returnees say the most difficult issue to deal with when they return home is relationships with family and friends. It is important to realize that other people did not stay the same while you were gone (or in some cases they did not change). Also, all of your changes will undoubtedly affect your family and friends. Many returnees describe feelings of alienation, and some say they feel pressure from family and friends to revert back to the person they were before study abroad. Perhaps the most difficult, and most common, aspect of this issue is telling others about the overseas experience. Many returnees find that beyond polite inquiries and general questions such as, "So how was Australia?" their friends and family do not seem to be very interested in hearing about their experiences.

HOW DOES ONE COPE WITH RE-ENTRY?

There are many positive ways of coping with re-entry. The process of re-adjustment can take weeks or months, and it is very important to give yourself time to cope with the experience. Perhaps the most vital coping strategy is to recognize that what you are going through is normal and very, very common. Expect a period of stress, and know that re-entry is a natural part of the re-adjustment process. The following are coping strategies suggested by study abroad returnees:

Talk with people who understand your situation. Share your stories and experiences with CIE! Also, reach out to other returnees. Keep in touch with people from your host country and from your program.

Tell others about your study abroad experience. Let CIE know if you would be interested in speaking with prospective study abroad students or helping with pre-departure meetings or other international events. Talking to others who really want to hear about your experience can be a wonderful way to keep your study abroad experience alive.

Write about your cross-cultural learning. Writing will help you interpret your experiences and will advance your thinking forward. Self-empowerment comes from writing in that the more you write, the more opportunity you will have to better understand your host culture, your own culture, and yourself.

Continue being a multi-cultural person. Seek out situations in which international experiences and perspectives are appreciated. CIE hosts events throughout the year you can participate in.

In conclusion, re-entry can be a time of stress, confusion, and tremendous personal growth. As you go through this experience, remember that re-entry is just another phase of cultural adjustment, and just as you adapted to your host culture, you will be able to re-adapt to the United States and to UMW. Remember to look positively on your re-entry experience, and allow it to help you look at your own culture as if you were discovering it for the first time.

CHECKLIST: TO DO UPON RETURN FROM STUDY ABROAD

- Share your photos and stories with other UMW students, whether they are planning to study abroad, already studied abroad, or just love to hear about the world. *Use #UMWABROAD in your social media posts or send messages or tag us @UMWCIE on Instagram*
- Ensure your Beyond the Classroom or Diverse and Global Perspectives reflective project/reflection is submitted on time (if applicable).

- Make sure your study abroad credits transferred correctly (if applicable). Allow sufficient time for credits to post to your transcript – it may take several weeks or until the end of the term.
- Reflect on your experience and consider how you can use the skills you learned abroad on your resume and cover letter. How will you articulate how your program benefitted you to a potential employer?