

Texas A&M University – Main Campus

Student Handbook for Study Abroad Programs

In the Fall of 1994, the Texas A&M University International Programs Enhancement and Coordination Committee (IPECC) appointed a Workgroup on Academic Programs Overseas to study issues of responsibility, liability, and process related to students and faculty on Study Abroad Programs.

As a result of the Workgroup's deliberations, this Student Handbook for Study Abroad Programs was compiled and was approved by the Workgroup in November of 1994. The Academic Operations Council reviewed and approved the Student Handbook at its February 1995 meeting. The final document was presented to IPECC in March 1995, where it was reviewed and approved.

The most recent review and approval of this document involved the Division of Student Affairs in Spring 1999 and the Study Abroad Program Policy Committee in Fall 1999.

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STUDENT HANDBOOK FOR STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

**Texas A&M University
November 2001**

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Student Handbook Guidelines For Studying Abroad

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Texas A&M University (TAMU) Policy on Student Conduct

The following information is taken directly from *Texas A&M University Student Rules* and states Texas A&M University's policy on student conduct while studying abroad.

STUDENTS' RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The following statement of students' rights and responsibilities is intended to reflect the philosophical base upon which University student rules are built. This philosophy acknowledges the existence of both rights and responsibilities, which is inherent to an individual not only as a student at Texas A&M University but also as a citizen of this country.

Students participating in Texas A&M University Study Abroad Programs are responsible for complying with all of the terms and conditions of student conduct as outlined in the *Texas A&M University Student Rules*. A copy of *Texas A&M University Student Rules* may be found with any Texas A&M study abroad faculty member or on the Internet at <http://student-rules.tamu.edu>.

It should be noted that study abroad programs are considered university-sponsored activities and, as such, participating students are responsible for observing the same rules as students attending classes on campus.

Students' Rights

Article I

A student shall have the right to participate in a free exchange of ideas, and there shall be no university rule or regulation or administrative policy that in any way abridges rights of freedom, speech, expression, petition and peaceful assembly as set forth in the U.S. Constitution.

Article II

Each student shall have the right to participate in all areas and activities of the university, free from any form of harassment and any form of illegal discrimination and without regard to any subgroup classification or stereotype.

Article III

A student has the right to personal privacy except as otherwise provided by law. Students and University authorities will observe this alike.

Article IV

Each student shall be free from disciplinary action by university officials for violations of civil and criminal law off campus, except when such a violation is determined also to be a violation of the provision regarding off-campus conduct in the Discipline Code of ***Texas A&M University Student Rules***.

Article V

Each student subject to disciplinary action arising from violations of university regulations shall be assured procedural due process. At all judicial hearings, an accused student shall be assumed innocent until proven guilty, and in initial judicial hearings, the burden of proof shall rest with those bringing the charges. In all proceedings, the student shall be guaranteed substantive and procedural due process.

Students' Responsibilities

Article I

A student has the responsibility to respect the rights and property of others, including other students, the faculty and administration.

Article II

A student has the responsibility to be fully acquainted with the published University regulations and to comply with them and the laws of the land.

Article III

A student has the responsibility to recognize that student actions reflect upon the individuals involved and upon the entire university community.

Article IV

A student has the responsibility to recognize the university's obligation to provide an environment for learning.

Article V

By accepting admission to a Texas A&M University Study Abroad Program, you agree to be responsible for your own health, safety and behavior while participating in the program. In addition, you are committed to observe and obey ***Texas A&M University Student Rules***, the laws of the State of Texas and the United States of America, as well as the laws of the host country and the host institution.

DUE PROCESS AND DISMISSAL FROM A PROGRAM

Violations of any of the conditions set forth by Texas A&M University Study Abroad Programs may result in expulsion from the program and forfeiture of program fees. If for just reason the faculty coordinators in-country and/or program coordinators consider you to be continually disruptive, you may be dismissed from the program.

Prior to taking action which adversely impacts a student's participation or status in a Study Abroad Program:

- The faculty member must provide notice to the student about the nature of the problem;
- Give the student an opportunity to respond (explain) and correct the problem;

- Communicate the consequences of failing to correct the problem, i.e. dismissal from the program.

DISMISSAL

If for any reason the faculty coordinators consider you to be continually disruptive, or in violation of university rules and regulations, as listed in *Texas A&M University Student Rules*, disciplinary action will be taken and you may be dismissed from the program. In accordance with *Texas A&M University Student Rules*, you will be afforded due process, which includes an opportunity to respond to charges against you. The Study Abroad Program Office will notify your parent or guardian in accordance with FERPA Guidelines (Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act), if you are dismissed from the program.

Arrests for violations of host country laws may result in your immediate dismissal from the program. Texas A&M will assume no responsibility for finding the student legal counsel. The faculty coordinator should contact Texas A&M University so the family may be contacted. They should also alert the U. S. Embassy and the student's family of the arrest in accordance with FERPA Guidelines.

ACADEMIC DOCUMENTATION

Once you have completed your TAMU Study Abroad Program, it will be entered on your official transcript by the Study Abroad Program Office as an International program abroad.

In addition, students participating in TAMU Study Abroad Programs are advised to contact their college or department's academic advisor regarding academic issues such as add/drop procedures, Q-drops and grade appeals. The process to manage these issues is the same as if you were attending classes on campus. Students will be provided with department head contact information before their departure on the program.

PROGRAM FEE REIMBURSEMENT

Funds collected for programs/field trips must be used for this purpose only. Therefore, should an adequate amount of money remain in either a study abroad program or a field trip account, this money may be divided equally and returned to the student. If a Study Abroad Program is cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances (i.e. natural disasters, war or civil unrest, posting of U.S. Travel Advisory warning against travel, etc.), all efforts will be made to retrieve any funds already expended to secure the study abroad program. All funds that are retrieved will be divided equally among and returned to the participating students. Students may want to consider purchase of travel insurance if they are concerned about the possibility of program cancellation. Such policies range in price from approximately \$100 to \$500. Additional information about these policies is available through the Study Abroad Program Office. Such policies should be read closely, as not all provide the same benefits or amounts of coverage.

HELPFUL INFORMATION SOURCES

The following web sites may be accessed through the Study Abroad Programs Web Page at <http://studyabroad.tamu.edu>:

- CDC – Center for Disease Control and Prevention
- U. S. State Dept. Travel Advisories
- Obtaining a Passport
- ISIC Card – International Student ID Card
- Texas A&M University Student Rules

HEALTH

Before you travel, you should check with your doctor for recommendations concerning inoculations that may be necessary or just suggested for any countries you may visit. If you are taking prescription medication, be sure you have an ample supply for your entire stay and make sure that all medication (including over the counter drugs) is clearly labeled and in its original container. It is also wise to carry a copy of the original prescription with you if you are on prescription medication.

If you have any chronic medical conditions such as *allergies, eating disorders, hypo-glycemia, asthma, motion or altitude sickness, migraines, diabetes, physical limitations such as visual or hearing impairments, etc.*, which require special medication or continuing medical treatment, you need to check with your doctor to ensure that your special needs can be met while you are away. You should submit to your program coordinator a letter from your doctor stating that your needs can be met, and how.

If you have any psychological or emotional concerns which might affect your or others well-being during the trip, it is your responsibility to inform the involved parties (roommates, faculty members, program coordinators) before you depart on the program to prevent any interference with the group's plans. You should also consult the Study Abroad Program Office regarding the feasibility of your needs being met while on the Study Abroad Program.

PERSONAL BEHAVIOR

Safety and Security Issues

The most important rule to remember is to ***USE YOUR COMMON SENSE***. If you wouldn't camp out in a park in inner city, USA, then be cautious about doing it elsewhere. In general, the best way for you to learn what is or isn't safe is to watch and learn what the "natives" of a particular area are doing. When you are uncertain, ask questions of resource persons at host institutions, travel agencies, tourist offices, etc.

Be watchful and careful of your personal belongings. Pickpockets can be extremely subtle—they even use dancing children to distract you. Some have been known to use chloroform on tourists sleeping in trains, so beware at all times. Don't ever carry large amounts of cash, and be careful where you put your passport and airline ticket. There are passport and travelers check holders available which you can wear on your body around your neck or waist; these are a good investment. It is a good idea to photocopy the important pages of your passport and airline/train tickets and keep them in a safe place (perhaps exchange with another traveler) in case you should need to replace these documents.

Generally, you want to avoid looking like an unaware tourist. Those people who are blatantly confused-looking or lost are likely candidates for pickpockets. It is a good idea to be familiar with the major streets of a city before you set out. Then you can keep your bearings in relation to those major thoroughfares.

Perhaps the best safeguard is not to have any valuables showing. If you wear expensive jewelry, it becomes a target for theft. Pickpockets will assume that you carry lots of cash if you can afford expensive jewelry. Even though robbery is not rampant abroad, the chances of your losing something to a pickpocket are increased overseas because you are the best target for

thieves—you are unfamiliar with the geography, customs, and people. So if you don't feel you want to have a personal item stolen, do not bring it along if at all possible.

In the U.S. we are used to dressing casually for many situations. However, this is inappropriate for many locations you will visit overseas, especially in churches and state buildings. Sundresses, halters, and shorts are not appropriate for these occasions. In general, dressing conservatively will help to protect you from unwanted attention and misunderstandings. Please note that wearing clothing with school emblems places you in a high profile for attention. We strongly suggest that you make the most of your study abroad experience by not over emphasizing these labels and dress.

The U.S. citizen's concept of "personal space" is very different from the norm for other countries. You may feel that citizens of your host country are being pushy or aggressive, when in fact their behavior is normal for them. Be gracious, but feel free to move away if you feel uncomfortable.

Remember that you will be "a stranger in a strange land," and no matter how hard you try to conceal it, your naivete will be obvious. Be cautious and keep your wits about you, just as you would in any large or unfamiliar city at home. Keep your doors locked, your luggage close to you and stay aware of your surroundings. Wear a hidden money belt or pouch, especially in large cities. Would you be extra-cautious in New York City? Then do the same in Rome, Tokyo, Mexico City, Paris and Amsterdam! Some common thefts are screened by the distraction of dancing of children or street musicians. This is when pickpockets go to work.

Alcohol

Students who choose to drink should be aware that laws about the possession and consumption of alcoholic beverages vary in different countries and in some, such as Muslim countries, alcoholic beverages are illegal. You should also be aware that public intoxication is not understood or tolerated in most cultures. Remember, if you are arrested, you may be subject to dismissal from the program. Furthermore, any alcohol-related disruptive behavior could result in dismissal from the Study Abroad Program. Please remember that you are an ambassador of the United States and Texas A&M University and the impressions you make will be lasting. Last, and most important, inebriation can seriously compromise your personal safety by making you seem open to unwanted intimate advance and an easy target for theft or personal assault.

Illegal Drugs

Never travel with marijuana or any other illegal drug. Texas A&M University can assume NO responsibility for any student apprehended for possession of drugs. Bear in mind that laws concerning drugs are much more severe in many other countries than in the United States, and even though you are a U.S. citizen, you are still subject to the laws of your host country. TAMU will not tolerate use or possession of illegal drugs. Any student in possession of illegal drugs, or obviously under their influence, may be subject to *immediate* dismissal from the study abroad program.

Drugs Used for Purposes of Victimization

For years sedating substances have been used for purposes of victimization which might include sexual assault, robbery and personal assault. Two of these drugs, Gamma Hydroxybutyrate (GHB), a central nervous system depressant that has been investigated as an

anesthetic and for treatment of narcolepsy and alcoholism, and Rohypnol (flunitrazepam), a prescription sleeping medication available outside the U.S., have received a lot of media attention because of their association with sexual assault. Rohypnol is commonly sold on the street in Mexico and South America and goes by the street names of Roofies, Roachies, LaRocha, the “forget pill” and the date rape drug.

There are several telltale signs that an individual has been drugged. If they appear disproportionately inebriated in relation to the amount of alcohol they have consumed, they may be unknowingly ingested one of any number of substances. Sedating substances can temporarily inhibit a person’s ability to remain awake and conscious. Someone who has been sedated may experience sudden and unexplained drowsiness and have trouble with motor coordination. Other possible effects include impaired judgement, disinhibition, dizziness, and confusion.

Brief periods of impaired memory also may result from the misuse of sedating substances. This means the person who has been assaulted may not remember the details of what happened while under the drug’s influence. Depending on the drug and the presence of other substances in the person’s system, more dangerous side effects may occur. These include slowed heart beat, decreased respiratory effort, unconsciousness, seizure-like activity, and coma. Such effects can appear within fifteen minutes of oral ingestion of the drug, and acute symptoms appear to decrease after three to four hours. As with most drugs, health risks increase sharply when these substances are mixed with alcohol and other drugs.

To reduce the risk of substance-related victimization, do not take any beverages, including alcohol, from someone you do not know well or from someone you don’t trust. At a bar or club, accept drinks only from the bartender or wait staff. Don’t leave your food or beverages unattended. Don’t allow differences in cultures to compel you to take unnecessary risks or act in ways you believe to be dangerous. And lastly, be alert to the behavior of friends. Anyone who believes they have consumed a sedative-like substance should get medical attention immediately.

Sexual Conduct

Be aware that some persons suddenly living in a new environment such as a study abroad experience may feel freer to experiment with their sexuality in a variety of avenues. Your morals and values are up to you to determine. However, remember that the program will eventually be over and you will need to cope with the consequences of your decisions and actions upon your return. You should also remember that you are responsible to the Student Conduct Code, section 24 of *Texas A&M University Student Rules*, which includes individual paragraphs on sexual misconduct (24.3.2)

Some host countries require medical testing, including an AIDS test, upon arrival in the country. By applying for this program and signing the terms of participation form you agree to comply with these requirements when necessary. The A.P. Beutel Health Center staff is happy to provide brochures, counseling, and informational services on AIDS, HIV and other STDs. You are strongly urged to take advantage of this resource.

As always, you must be aware of your risk of sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS. Complete abstinence from high-risk behaviors is of course your best protection and is

recommended. As an adult, it is your responsibility to protect yourself in whatever activities you choose. If you might for any reason need condoms or other products, purchase them before you leave the U.S. Quality and availability vary from country to country.

Unwanted Sexual Behavior/Conduct

Unwanted sexual behavior/conduct may include, but is not limited to, inappropriate touching or fondling against the person's will. Don't allow cultural differences to dictate what is acceptable to you. Regardless of the country or culture you are in, when you are not comfortable with an activity, you have the right to say so and end the activity.

Sexual Assault

Rape and other forms of sexual assault are non-consensual sexual acts involving force, manipulation or coercion. The use of alcohol or other drugs to sedate a victim are considered criminal offenses in many countries, including the U.S. Both men and women can be victims and perpetrators of sexual assault. Students should refer to *Texas A&M University Student Rules*, sections 24.3.2.1 and 24.3.2.2 for information on rules related to sexual assault and sexual abuse.

Discrimination and Harassment

It is inherent in almost any change of culture such as you are approaching that you will be noticed as different and foreign, and perhaps singled out and possibly derided by local persons. The color of your skin, hair, and the way you dress, or any variety of things will draw such attention. Harassment in the classroom or in any way related to your Texas A&M Study Abroad Program is prohibited. Harassment includes conduct (physical, verbal, graphic, written or electronic) that is sufficiently severe, pervasive or persistent so as to threaten an individual or limit the ability of an individual to work, study or participate in the activities of the university, which includes study abroad. Such conduct also includes but is not limited to sexual harassment, racial and ethnic harassment, stalking and retaliation. **It is important to remember that expectations for your behavior, and for the behavior of Study Abroad faculty, are based on *Texas A&M University Student Rules* and policies, not the practices of your host country.** In the event you are experiencing harassment, you may report it to the faculty or you can contact the Director of Student Life (409) 845-3111. For more information, refer to *Texas A&M University Student Rules*, section 24.3.4.

RECOMMENDED PROCEDURES IN CASE OF EMERGENCY, ILLNESS OR INJURY

Emergency Contact Information

Upon arrival, your faculty coordinator and/or in-country coordinator should give you instructions on whom to call in case of an emergency. The Study Abroad Programs Office receives 24-hour emergency assistance from the Texas A&M University campus in College Station. Your faculty coordinator and/or in-country program coordinator can access that assistance. Also, as noted on page 15, the International Student ID Card has a 24-hour emergency help service. In case of an emergency, the US State Department's Overseas Citizens Service can help a friend or family member with the process of wiring money to you. Your stateside friend can access this service by calling (202) 647-5225 (8:15am-10:00pm weekdays; 9:00am – 2:00pm Saturdays). Beyond that, the United States Embassy in your host country can provide you with advice and assistance in extreme situations.

Medical Emergencies

Most United States health insurance policies are not recognized in other countries; therefore, if you become ill while travelling abroad and you need to see a doctor, **you** will be responsible for payment at the time of service. When you arrive back in the United States simply fill out a claim form along with your original paid receipts, a letter from the foreign physician stating the reason for seeing him, and his method of treatment to you. Submit all of this to health insurance company for reimbursement. Make sure you know what the rate of exchange was during this time frame in order to receive full and correct credit when you return to the U.S.

Sexual Assault/Rape

Sexual assault/Rape is the oral, anal, or vaginal penetration by a sexual organ of another or anal/vaginal penetration by any means against the victim's will or without her/his consent. In the United States, an individual who is mentally incapacitated, unconscious, or unaware that the sexual assault is occurring is considered unable to give consent. This may also be the law in your host country. The type of force employed may involve physical force, coercion, intentional impairment of an individual's ability to appraise the situation through the administration of any substance, or threat of harm to the victim.

Sexual assault/Rape are violations of the *Texas A&M University Student Rules* Student Conduct Code (24.3.2) and should be reported to the faculty and/or in-country program coordinator. If the perpetrator of the assault is a Texas A&M student, the assault should be reported to your faculty coordinator. Your faculty coordinator can then assist the victim in accessing Texas A&M University's Student Life Judicial Programs to learn about options for pursuing student disciplinary action. In addition, Texas A&M students can access personal counseling through the Student Counseling Services and victim advocacy services through Student Life's Gender Issues Education Services by contacting the Department of Student Life at (979) 845-3111 or 24 hours a day, through your study abroad program faculty coordinator.

When students experience sexual assault, their sense of safety and trust are violated which can seriously interfere with their lives and educational goals. Survivors of sexual assault, which include both men and women, often have mixed feelings about the assault and are unsure how to deal with it – legally and emotionally. Following is a list of options that may help survivors seek the help they need to deal with the hurt they have suffered.

If a sexual assault has just occurred, the first thing to do is get to a safe place. If possible use the emergency numbers provided by the in-country coordinators at such sites as Santa Chiara. If you cannot do this, remember that in some countries, a police agency might also be of assistance. Don't assume that your host country's police agencies will be of the same service as police agencies in the U.S. Therefore, U.S. citizens should contact the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate for assistance.

Because laws vary by country, it will be important to allow yourself as many options as possible. Without first making a decision to report the assault, you can go ahead and preserve evidence. That means don't change clothes, shower, douche, comb hair, brush teeth, eat or drink, and if possible try not to urinate prior to receiving a medical evaluation.

Get a medical evaluation. Prior to the evaluation, find out if the laws of your host country require medical personnel to report suspected sexual assaults. Your study abroad faculty or in-

country coordinators can assist with obtaining a medical evaluation and understanding correct procedures. They will also contact the U. S. Embassy or Consulate, if necessary. In many countries the police are required to report and begin criminal proceedings, even if you change your mind later. Regardless of whether you intend to make a criminal report, a medical evaluation is needed. There may be hidden physical injuries you are not aware of yet. You should also request a test for sexually transmitted diseases (including AIDS) and, for women, pregnancy. Some countries routinely provide survivors of sexual assault the option of a “morning after pill” to end a pregnancy. Some countries do not offer this medication because of religious or cultural reasons. If the latter is the case and there is a chance you may be pregnant and you are interested in considering this medical option, you may want to contact a women’s’ clinic to learn about preventing or ending pregnancy.

Ask for support from a friend, member of the faculty or in-country program coordinator. Your support person may accompany you to your medical evaluation and through the legal procedures. If you are comfortable doing so, you may ask your support person to assist you in writing a preliminary account of the assault. Although this may be difficult, it will help to begin to recall the details in case you decide to report the assault. Don’t be alarmed if you don’t recall everything all at once; it is not uncommon to remember things weeks and months after a traumatic event.

Emergencies at Home

It is extremely important for you to leave a travel itinerary, including telephone numbers, with family and friends to use in case of an emergency at home. If you are participating in a Texas A&M Study Abroad Program coordinated through the Study Abroad Program Office, there are several ways Texas A&M can help to locate you. The Texas A&M Study Abroad Program Office maintains a listing of each group's itinerary along with phone and fax numbers of each location the groups will be staying.

The Study Abroad Program Office is open from 8-5 Monday-Friday and may be reached at (979) 845-0544. If you are doing an independent study abroad you should leave a travel itinerary including phone numbers with your Texas A&M faculty coordinator or your academic department AND the Study Abroad Program Office so that family and friends may contact these places for assistance in case of emergency.

For those who need to make emergency contact with the University, the campus police can be contacted every day, 24 hours a day. The telephone number to call is (979) 845-2345. The campus police can access an emergency response process and will contact the Study Abroad Program Office for situations involving a student studying outside the U.S. This is why it is important for you to leave a copy of your itinerary with the Study Abroad Program Office if you are doing an independent study.

New services just made available to International Student ID Card holders are web-based e-mail, voice mail and faxing services. Call 1-800-2-council or visit www.istc.org for more details.

AVOIDING UNNECESSARY RISKY BEHAVIORS AND SITUATIONS

Using Your Common Sense

Keep a low profile in demeanor and dress. Don't wear expensive jewelry. Be especially careful to be polite and observe signs and regulations in public areas. When you are traveling alone for a few days, always carry some cash--at least \$50--in case of an emergency.

In the great cities of the world pedestrians *do not* have the right-of-way (unlike at TAMU). *Look both ways* before you cross a street (for example, traffic will come from your right in the UK), and use crosswalks when available. Travel by the local means of transportation. *Never* hitchhike. Have a guidebook and map with you, and know where the local U.S. Embassy or Consulate is.

Travel with at least one other person when you are on your own. Before you leave you must give your itinerary (in writing) to the person in charge of your program (including destination, mode of travel, date and time of return, and travel companions). Your host institution, travel agents, and tourist centers have a vested interest in your well being, and will be able to help you in many cases.

In Case Any International Situations Arise While You Are Abroad

Stay away from street gatherings, demonstrations, picketers, rock concerts, and other public events characterized by crowd excitement, or areas known and frequented by Americans. Refrain from participating in controversial conversations and situations when in public places. If you are singled out of the group as being from the United States, calmly ignore any harassment and walk away into the crowd.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

Passports

A valid passport is required to leave and re-enter the United States and will be needed to prove your citizenship as you enter and exit other countries. It is your most important travel document. Applications are available at county courthouses or in post offices in some larger cities. They are also available on the US State Department's web site (<http://travel.state.gov>). To obtain a passport, follow the instructions below.

Applicants must bring the following:

1. Certified copy of birth certificate with a state or county seal, previous American passport, original certificate of naturalization (no photocopies), or military ID.
2. Two identical, recently made 2"x2" passport photos with white background only. These may be purchased at the Main Post Office in Bryan (address below), Kinko's, Eckerd's, the photo booth near Casa Ole in Post Oak Mall, Walgreens, or various other places. (Please note: No military insignia/uniform should be worn, i.e. Corps Uniform)
3. \$45.00 check or money order made payable to Passport Agency (\$25.00 for 15 & under).
4. \$15.00 cash for execution fee.
5. Valid driver's license (any state) and social security number.
6. Certified proof of name change required (only when applicable).
7. Completed application (except for signature). NOTE: Anyone 13-17 must have a parent also sign with them at the District Clerk's Office. If you are over 17, you must

appear & sign before a clerk. **DO NOT SIGN YOUR APPLICATION UNTIL YOU TURN IT IN.**

***There are two application forms.** If you have a previous U.S. passport issued within the past 12 years and after your 16th birthday, you are eligible to mail in the **Renewal** Passport Application (DSP-82) directly to the passport office listed on the back of the form, with your check in the amount of \$40.00 (the \$15.00 execution fee is waived for those eligible to apply by mail). Otherwise, please use the **Routine** Passport Application (DSP-11).

If you are applying locally, take the above numbered items to the District Clerk's Office (address given below). You will need to sign the application in front of the clerk. Your passport will be mailed to you within 4-6 weeks, longer if you apply in late spring or summer, when they are swamped with summer travelers. Expedited service is available for an additional \$35.00 fee to ensure processing of the passport within three business days from receipt at a passport agency.

If you are traveling within 14 calendar days or are pressed for time because of visas, you can take your application directly to the Houston Passport Agency. However, you **must** have an appointment! There is an additional fee of \$35.00 for this process. You will need proof of immediate travel (airline ticket, confirmed airline-generated itinerary, or letter from your faculty coordinator if you are going on a study abroad program), along with your completed application, fees, etc, as listed above.

Local Offices:

District Clerk's Office
Brazos County Courthouse
300 E. 26th Ste. 216
Bryan, TX 77801
Tel: (979) 361-4232

Bryan Main Post Office
2121 E. Wm. J. Bryan
Bryan, TX 77801-9998
M-F 9:00am – 12:00pm
Tel: (979) 774-2300

Houston Office:

Houston Passport Agency
Mickey Leeland Federal Bldg.
1919 Smith St., Suite 1400
M-F 8:30-3:30 **by appt. only**
Tel: (713) 751-0294
(automated appt. line 24 hrs.
daily)
(713) 209-3022 for status

Visas

A Visa is written proof that you have authorization to enter a country if you are not a citizen of that country. Various countries will require you to have a visa for entry and exit, particularly if you are not a U.S. citizen. If so, it is your responsibility to contact the regional consulate office for the country(s) you plan to visit to ensure that you have correct documentation. If you are not sure whether you need a visa to enter a country, you can access the State Department's web site (<http://travel.state.gov>) for more details if you are a U.S. citizen. If you are not a U.S. citizen contact the embassy or consulate of the country you want to visit. Contact information for the foreign embassies and consulates in the U.S. is available in the International Student Services Office, First Floor, Bizzell Hall East.

Customs Issues

Information about what may be taken into and out of specific countries is provided by the U.S. Customs Service National Distribution Center. For a brochure, write to P.O. Box 68912, Indianapolis, IN 46268.

International Student ID Cards

These cards prove your student status worldwide, and qualify you for discounts on airfares, museum entries, transportation, entertainment, etc. They also provide insurance and a 24-hour emergency assistance service. New services just made available to International Student ID Card holders are web-based e-mail, voice mail and faxing services. Call 1-800-2-council or visit www.istc.org for more details. ISIC Cards are available in the Study Abroad Program Office and are generally a good investment.

International Students—Visas and Immigration Matters

If you are an International Student (not a U.S. citizen or a U.S. permanent resident) attending TAMU, you must consider how to maintain your legal status while studying abroad. You will also need to be certain that you are in compliance with your visa requirements for your destination countries. Before you depart the U.S. *for any period of time* you must contact an Immigration Advisor at the International Student Services Office (979-845-1824). This office must be notified to assist you in preparing necessary paperwork for leaving and reentering the US. *If you neglect to contact the ISS Office and to prepare your documents appropriately, you may not be allowed to reenter the United States to continue your studies at TAMU.*

STAYING HEALTHY

Eating and Drinking

Be aware that other countries have different standards of food and water quality and storage than does the United States. You will want to familiarize yourself with these differences and prepare accordingly. If you need special meals or dietary supplements (vitamins, peanut butter, fruit roll, granola) take them with you, as they may not be available in your host country. Also, please be sure to notify your faculty coordinator of any such special needs; he or she will try to accommodate them as much as possible.

Medication and Prescriptions

Take an ample supply of any medication you may need, in its original packing. If you have a condition that may require special treatment, have your doctor prescribe his/her recommendations in writing and carry it with you. If you depend on glasses or contacts, take an extra pair with you, along with a copy of your prescription, as well as plenty of your contact lens cleaners and solution. You may also wish to ask your physician to prescribe some antibiotics to take with you, as colds, coughs, and upset stomachs are a common result of the temperature and climate changes inherent in travel.

Immunizations

Contact your personal physician and the A.P. Beutel Health Center to find out which immunizations are recommended for persons traveling to your destination. You are responsible for obtaining these immunizations. Again, these offices will be more than happy to advise you on safe behaviors while you are away from home.

International Health Insurance

The Study Abroad Program Office recommends that all students traveling overseas have specific life and health insurance coverage for their travels. This is very important to have, as most domestic policies do not cover medical evacuation or repatriation—two items that can be extraordinarily expensive in the event that they are called for. TAMU educational groups may purchase insurance through HTH Worldwide (for information, faculty coordinators should please contact the Study Abroad Program Office). Also, as noted above, the International Student ID Card (ISIC) provides international medical insurance, which complements HTH Worldwide's policy. Many countries, such as the EC countries, all require proof of insurance coverage.

Medical Consent Form

Your signature on this form gives the faculty coordinator and/or the in-country program director the right to authorize medical treatment on your behalf if you are unable to do so yourself. If your religious beliefs preclude certain medical procedures, be very specific on this form as to what may and may not be done for you.

MONEY

Foreign Currency

Travel guides will be invaluable to you on this matter. Exchange a small amount of money for each currency you will need at the airport before you leave so you will be prepared when you arrive in your new surroundings. When you arrive in the host country, take some time to familiarize yourself with the currency and its approximate U.S. dollar equivalent. This will help to keep you from over spending. In your host country, local banks or American Express offices will generally offer the best rates of exchange.

Spending Money

Most of your spending money should be in traveler's checks. You should not carry large amounts of cash with you. (However, debit cards, offered at many banks are becoming extremely popular overseas and eliminate commissions to exchange money. Check with your travel agent and travel books to see how easily this convenient service can be accessed in the countries to which you will travel). Your faculty coordinator and various travel books can advise you on budgeting for your travels. Also, Texas A&M University has approximately 2,700 international students who have "hometown clubs" and would be glad to advise you on what to expect and where to shop. For information on the International Student Association and their country-specific club, contact the International Student Services Office.

Credit cards

Generally, those most commonly accepted abroad are Visa, MasterCard and American Express. They are good for large purchases and for emergency situations. You can also get a cash advance on your credit card at most banks, provided that you have a sufficient credit line to cover the advance. There is a higher interest charge on these transactions, so use them sparingly. American Express offices, located in the larger cities, will allow you to cash personal checks on your U.S. bank account if you are an American Express cardholder.

PACKING TIPS

Clothing/Customs of Dress

Always pack much less than you think you need. Travel guides and faculty coordinators can provide more specific information regarding appropriate dress for the countries you will visit.

Luggage/packing tips

Take only what you can comfortably carry yourself, for a long distance! Roll clothing instead of folding it; this saves room. You may wish to pack an extra, collapsible bag for extra items you will want to bring home. Ziploc bags come in handy for wet or dirty items. Durable, inexpensive luggage is recommended.

Electrical Appliances/ Converters

Converter plugs for appliances are necessary in most foreign countries, and sets of plugs are available at department stores such as Target and Service Merchandise. Be warned that U.S. appliances do not always function properly overseas, even with converters; they may burn out or function improperly. A good tip is to minimize the number of such things you take with you. They are heavy and bulky; besides, the natural look is very “in” among the traveling set.

Cameras

Don't take expensive cameras if you can avoid it. If you do, be sure to register them with Customs officials each time you enter or exit a country.

DAILY LIVING IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY

Laundry

Availability and cost of Laundromats and dry cleaners vary widely from country to country to country. They are generally more expensive than in the US, and hotel laundry services are very expensive. Take 8 to 10 days worth of underwear, socks, and other basic clothing items that will dry rapidly after basin laundering. Pack some laundry detergent.

Telephone

For in-country calls, many countries use a phone card system similar to the Aggie Bucks system. These are available at newsstands, tobacconists and drugstores. For calling the U.S., a major calling card is important. Note that it is much more expensive to call the U.S. from overseas than to have friends and family call you. A good idea would be to set a weekly date when you can regularly expect calls. Never call from a hotel room; this can be up to three times as expensive as calling from a public phone.

Mail

The local post office will be able to give you postal rates, sell stamps, etc. Be aware that mail may take several weeks to traverse the countries. Make sure your families do not declare a value on packages sent to you; otherwise you are subject to customs charges.

Sizes, Weights, Distances

Be advised that other countries have different systems of measuring temperature, clothing, distances, etc. You will need to adjust to this.

Miscellaneous

As noted above, travel guides are indispensable. You may wish to read several and buy the ones you like the best, tearing out the pages you need to carry with you (this is easier than taking the whole book). Also, travel companions can double up on these types of items, as well as items like hairdryers, etc. Hotel mini-bars are convenient but are very expensive and not recommended.

TRAVEL TIPS

General Items

Just as regional customs in the U.S. differ, so will the unexpected and startling differences you will find in your host culture. It is your responsibility to prepare for these by consulting travel guides and international students from the country of your destination.

Primarily, you must remember to be flexible and sensitive! Cultural differences you should be aware of include manners, conversation styles, greetings, tipping practices and religious and political holidays. Furthermore, do realize that customs such as mealtimes and the family meal differ from area to area, as well as manners, religious practices and expectations for gift giving and receiving.

You will also want to learn some important phrases in the language of your host country. Topping the lists are “Excuse me,” “Thank you” and “Please.” Include these liberally in any other communications you attempt, such as, “Excuse me, do you speak English?” “I would like to buy one bus ticket, please,” and “Please help me! I am lost.”

In addition to the classes offered by the Department of Modern and Classical Languages, the Memorial Student Center’s University Plus Center and the College Station Community Education program offer practical conversational language courses each semester including summers. Materials such as Berlitz language-learning tapes and interactive video programs in the LRC at the Sterling C. Evans Library can also be very helpful.

Travel information

All students going on international programs should read several travel books about their destination countries! Recommended guides include *Michelin*, *Fodor’s*, and the *Let’s Go* series. These and others are available for in-house review in the reference section of the Sterling C. Evans Library and the Study Abroad Program Office Reference Library. They are also available from local bookstores. Another excellent source of information are students and others who have traveled to or lived in that country before. International students attending Texas A&M are a valuable resource. Both the Study Abroad Program Office and the International Student Services Office can provide information about meeting students from other countries.

Planes

For air travel, carry all of your valuables, travel documents and medications with you in your carry-on bag, plus a change of clothes should your luggage be temporarily separated from you. Also, cabin temperatures tend to change during long flights, so dress in layers. Familiarize yourself with the conditions of your ticket, in respect to changes.

Trains

You will want to familiarize yourself with operations and schedules of the local transportation in your destination country. If you plan to travel after your study abroad program, you may wish to buy a Eurail, BritRail, or similar pass. *These must be bought in the U.S. before you depart*, and are available through most travel agents. Such passes are only cost-effective for frequent travel; ask for a recommendation from your travel agent.

Automobiles

Driving in a foreign country is strongly discouraged due to differences in laws, traffic patterns, and automobiles. However, if you wish to drive while out of the country, you should contact the American Automobile Association (AAA) to see if you need to obtain an international driver's license. Their toll-free number is 1-800-222-4357.

Other Transportation

Local public transportation such as buses and underground railways are highly recommended. They are an excellent way to surround yourself with the "real people" of your host country. Obviously, you will want to be as cautious while using these systems overseas as you would in the U.S.

Rental of mopeds and motorcycles is emphatically discouraged. They can be very dangerous, particularly if you do not have a lot of previous experience riding them, in general and especially within the traffic patterns of your host country.

INFORMATION SPECIFIC TO YOUR DESTINATION COUNTRY

The following checklist contains information that you should be sure to research before you leave on your study abroad program. A well-prepared traveler should be familiar with at least the topics below, for the various countries to be visited.

- Customs and manners
- Business practices
- Conversational and nonverbal behavior
- Greetings
- Holidays and special occasions
- Legal matters
- Meals and mealtime
- Religious beliefs and practices
- Political systems
- Sports
- Shopping hints
- Gifts for hosts
- Essential words and phrases
- How to make contact locally
- Transit systems
- Climate
- What to pack
- Reading list
- Tipping practices

There are several resources for this information: travel guides, books in the library, embassies or consular offices in the U.S., and last but not least, the approximately 2,600 international students who attend Texas A&M University. These students have “hometown clubs” for their various countries and are very happy to talk with students about their homeland. The International Students Association (979) 845-1825 maintains a current list of country organizations and their officers.

Transferring Credit from Non-Texas A&M University Study Abroad Programs

This *Handbook* was written specifically for students who are going on Texas A&M University-sponsored Study Abroad Programs. However, students who are going on programs sponsored by other institutions should read this document carefully, being aware that the specific rules, rights and responsibilities of their program will be set by the sponsoring institution.

In order for students attending another institution's study abroad program to receive Texas A&M credit, they must complete, *in advance* of the study abroad program, a *Transfer Credit Agreement Form*, with all required signatures, and submit it to the Study Abroad Program Office, 1st Floor Bizzell Hall West.

By completing this form students will ensure that the courses they take abroad, through foreign institutions or other U.S. institutions, are able to be transferred for use in the student's Texas A&M degree program.

In order for this non-Texas A&M Study Abroad Program to be entered on the student's transcript, official paperwork documenting the program will need to be filled out and returned to the Study Abroad Program Office. This office will then enter the information on the student's official transcript.

For additional information and assistance about Study Abroad, contact the Study Abroad Program Office at (979) 845-0544 or refer to their web site: <http://studyabroad.tamu.edu>.

Additional Safety Tips For Students On Non-TAMU Study Abroad Programs

INSURANCE

First and foremost, make sure that you have sufficient health and accident insurance for the entire period you are out of the US. Research the travel provisions—especially Emergency Medical Evacuation (EME) and Repatriation of Remains (RR)—of your current insurance, and make sure you understand both the coverage and the procedures to follow if something should occur. If your existing insurance doesn't cover EME and RR, or if you want supplemental coverage, you should seek out insurance options.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Before you travel, you should check with your doctor for recommendations concerning inoculations that may be necessary or suggested for any countries you may visit. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel>) can also provide important information you will need to know before you travel. If you are taking prescription medication, be sure you have an ample supply for your entire stay and make sure that all medication (including over-the-counter drugs) is clearly labeled and in its original container. It is also wise to carry a copy of the original prescription with you if you are on prescription medication.

If you have any chronic medical conditions or allergies which require special medication or continuing medical treatment, you need to check with your doctor to ensure that your special needs can be met while you are away. If you have any psychological or emotional concerns which might affect your or others' well-being during the trip, it is your responsibility to inform the involved parties (program sponsors, roommates) of these before you depart on the program, and to make arrangements to prevent any interference with the group's plans.

Remember that you will be "a stranger in a strange land," and no matter how hard you try to conceal it, your naïveté will be obvious. Be cautious and keep your wits about you, just as you would in any large or unfamiliar city. Keep your doors locked, your luggage close to you, and stay aware of your surroundings.

Also, as always, you must be aware of your risk of sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS. Complete abstinence from high-risk behaviors is of course your best protection, but as an adult it is your responsibility to protect yourself in whatever activities you choose.

ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

If you choose to drink alcoholic beverages, be responsible in your drinking. You should be aware that while public intoxication may be common in the US, it is not understood or tolerated in other cultures. You are an ambassador of the United States and the University, and the impressions you make will be lasting. Most importantly, inebriation can seriously compromise your personal safety by making you seem open to unwanted intimate advances, and an easy target for theft or physical assault.

ILLEGAL DRUGS

NEVER travel with marijuana or any other illegal drug. Texas A&M University can assume NO responsibility for any student apprehended for possession of drugs. Bear in mind that laws concerning drugs are much more severe in many other countries than in the United States, and even though you are a US citizen, you are still subject to the laws of your host country. (Note that alcohol is considered an illegal drug in some countries, i.e., in the Middle East.) TAMU does not tolerate use or possession of illegal drugs.

DEMEANOR, DRESS, ETC.

In the US, we are accustomed to dressing casually for many situations. However, this is inappropriate for many locations you will visit overseas, especially churches and state buildings. Sundresses, halters, and shorts are not appropriate for these occasions. In general, dressing conservatively will help to protect you from unwanted attention and misunderstandings. A word

to the wise: What we'd consider mild flirtation is taken seriously in many cultures. Please be conscious of your body and verbal language.

ACADEMIC STATUS

If you wish to receive transfer credit for your program, you must complete your Transfer Credit Agreement Form. To gain any promised TAMU transfer credit, you are expected to remain in good standing with the University (at least a 2.0 GPR; no outstanding blocks or bills; all conditions of any probation met). If you are on probation during the semester before your program, you must notify your TAMU departmental advisor to the fact.

TRAVELING ON YOUR OWN

Keep a low profile in demeanor and dress. Don't wear expensive jewelry. Be especially careful to be polite and observe signs and regulations in public areas. When you are traveling, always carry some cash—at least \$50—in case of emergency. Before you plan any side trips on your spare time, you should check with someone knowledgeable to be sure that you take all necessary safety precautions. It is always best to travel with at least one companion. Be sure you let your program sponsor know where you plan to be and when you will return. It's not that everyone wants to keep tabs on you; it's a matter of common courtesy to keep those responsible for you up to date on your whereabouts.

In the great cities of the world, pedestrians **don't** have the right-of-way (unlike at TAMU!). LOOK before you cross a street, and use crosswalks when available. Travel by the local means of transportation—never hitchhike. Have a guidebook & map with you for information, and know where the local US Embassy or Consulate. In case of emergency, the US State Department's Overseas Citizens Service can help a friend or family member with the process of wiring money to you. Your stateside friend can access this service by calling (202) 647-5225 (8:15 AM - 10:00 PM weekdays & 9:00 AM - 2:00 PM Saturdays).

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT IDENTITY CARD (ISIC) & AMERICAN YOUTH HOSTEL (AYH) CARD

The ISIC is essential for students who want to save money while traveling, in addition to providing supplementary insurance. The American Youth Hostel Association is there to help for inexpensive lodging anywhere in the world. For more information about these cards, pick up a *Student Travels* magazine in the Study Abroad Program Office. *Student Travels* additionally highlights international travel, study, and work opportunities.

CUSTOMS

Before you leave, check to be sure that you are not violating any customs regulations. There are often limits to how much currency you can bring into and out of a country, and to the dollar value of undeclared goods you can bring home. Also, it's illegal to transport certain items (plants, food) across borders. It's your responsibility to be sure you are in keeping with customs rulings in each country you visit.

Above all, remember that YOU ARE A RESPONSIBLE ADULT and will be expected to behave as such.