



# Pre-Departure Guide

**A Resource for Shepherd Students  
Studying Abroad**

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***The Study Abroad Office wants to congratulate you on your decision to study abroad. We are pleased that you have chosen to take advantage of this life-changing experience!***

This guide has been created to be a resource to help prepare you for your study abroad experience. Be sure to take it with you as it contains useful information which you will need while abroad. We have included information on required pre-departure procedures at Shepherd as well as other considerations to help you make the most of your experience abroad.

If you have any questions or concerns as you prepare for your experience, or while you are abroad, please do not hesitate to contact Ann Henriksson, Study Abroad Director, at: 1 (304) 876-5412 or via e-mail at: [awhenrik@shepherd.edu](mailto:awhenrik@shepherd.edu).

From everyone at the Shepherd Study Abroad Office we want to wish you an exciting, rewarding and enriching study abroad experience!

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## **Required Documents**

### ***A. Study Abroad Forms:***

All students studying abroad must complete the following pre-departure forms and information. These are due by the end of the semester **PRIOR to your departure**. Failure to complete these items can result in the loss of your ability to participate in your program, transfer credits back to Shepherd or to use financial aid on your program.

#### **Available in the Study Abroad Office, Room 211 Scarborough Library:**

- ✓ Study Abroad Course Approval Form (s)

#### **Available online (<http://www.shepherd.edu/university/studyabroad/>):**

- ✓ Study Abroad account on the Study Abroad website
- ✓ Study Abroad Contract (non Shepherd programs only)
- ✓ Study Abroad Course Approval Form (s)
- ✓ Proof of Insurance
- ✓ Photocopy of Passport as a PDF uploaded to the Study Abroad website

### ***B. Passport***

U.S. citizens must have a passport to travel outside the United States. You should apply as soon as possible to avoid any delays. The Passport Agency normally takes *four to six weeks* to process your passport application. If you are under a time constraint, there is an ***Expedited Service*** available for an additional fee.

If you already have a passport, please check that it has not expired and that it is valid for at least six months beyond your planned return to the United States. If you applied for your passport at the age of 16 or older, it is valid for 10 years.

#### **Directions on How to Apply for a U.S. Passport**

- U.S. Passport Applications are available online at <http://travel.state.gov/>
- Carefully read the instructions on the passport application.
- Answer all questions, but **DO NOT SIGN IT**. Do not fold, staple or erase on the form.
- **Passport-size photos** can be purchased at almost any camera store, drugstore or AAA.

- **Proof of Identity:** the passport application requires an original or certified birth certificate and a valid state or federal photo I.D., such as your driver's license. Consult the instructions on the back of the passport application for special instructions regarding Naturalized citizens, U.S. citizens who were born abroad, and citizens who have no birth record.
- Take the completed Passport Application, two passport-size photos, proof of identity and the **Passport fee** to your local main **Post Office** to complete the application. **YOU MUST DO THIS IN PERSON.**

Remember that your passport is your most important legal document while you are outside the U.S.—treat it with special care. **Keep a photocopy of the identification page of your passport in a separate location from the passport itself. You should also leave a copy with your parent or guardian in case your passport is lost or stolen.**

If your U.S. passport is lost or stolen while you are overseas, report it immediately to the local police and to the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. A consul can issue a replacement passport, often within 24 hours. Links to contact information for U.S. Embassies and Consulates may be found at <http://usembassy.state.gov>.

If your U.S. passport is lost or stolen in the U.S., report it to the Department of State by following instructions found at [http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/lost/lost\\_848.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/lost/lost_848.html).

### C. Visa

Most countries require a student visa before allowing you to enter. Each country has its own regulations, so if your program sponsor does not provide the necessary information, check with the closest consulate regarding specific visa requirements.

Like the passport application, the visa application and process can take several weeks so don't wait until the last minute. Delays in obtaining a visa may cause you to miss your flight. Standard items usually required in the application are:

- Visa application form
- A current, valid passport
- One or more passport-type photographs
- The visa application fee
- Letter of acceptance from the host institution

In addition, you may be required to provide evidence of financial support during the period of time you will be studying abroad, proof of medical insurance and/or a medical exam. Initial information for each country is available at <http://embassy.org/embassies>.

***Please keep in mind that the Study Abroad Office is not responsible if your visa is delayed or rejected. We highly recommend that you contact the appropriate embassy or consulate if you have questions about the visa requirements.***

## **Optional Documents**

### ***A. Absentee Voting***

Americans who reside abroad are usually eligible to vote by absentee ballot in all federal elections and may also be eligible to vote in many state and local U.S. elections. Eligibility depends upon the laws and regulations of your state of residence in the United States. To vote absentee, you must meet state voter registration requirements and apply to the state of your last domicile for a ballot as early as permitted. If possible, register for absentee voting before you go abroad. Check with your local voting authority for requirements and procedures. After you have registered for an absentee ballot, and if your state ballot does not arrive in sufficient time, you may be eligible to use a Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (FWAB). You should contact the Voting Assistance Officer at the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate for additional information, or visit the Department of State website at [http://travel.state.gov/travel/living/overseas\\_voting/overseas\\_voting\\_4754.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/living/overseas_voting/overseas_voting_4754.html).

### ***B. Income Tax Information***

**Attention Year Abroad and Spring Semester Program Participants:** If you have earnings which require you to file federal, state and local income tax returns, remember that you will be out of the country between January 1 and April 15. Although people temporarily living abroad may request an extension on the deadline for filing federal income tax, the extension is usually only until June 15. The best advice is to contact the American Consulate or Embassy in your host country for information on your tax obligations. You can file from abroad if you make arrangements with your parents to send you the necessary state and federal forms and other documentation. **The Study Abroad Office cannot provide this service.**

### ***C. Power of Attorney***

If your signature is needed for any official or legal documents, such as financial aid monies, you should make arrangements for a “power of attorney” to be held by an appropriate person to act on your behalf. You can request a POA by visiting your local notary to fill out the correct documentation. Make sure to have the document notarized.

### ***D. Medical Power of Attorney***

You may also wish to complete a medical “power of attorney”. A Medical Power of Attorney is a document that designates a person to make health care decisions on your behalf should you be unable to make such decisions.

## ***E. Property Insurance***

Student travelers should consider travel insurance to cover the loss of money due to trip interruption or cancellation, as well as loss of baggage and personal items while traveling or living abroad. Note that many homeowners' insurance policies contain a clause about this coverage extending worldwide, so check with your insurance provider. Normally a copy of a police report filed at the time of loss or theft will be required by the insurer before any claim will be considered.

## ***F. The International Student Identification Card (ISIC)***

The International Student Identification Card, offered by STA Travel, is widely recognized and accepted throughout the world. Students enjoy discounts on travel, museum and cultural site entrance fees, as well as Travel Guard Assistance, which assists with the replacement of a lost passport and/or advancing funds for medical treatment, etc. The ISIC application and card is available online at <https://www.myisic.com/MyISIC/GetYourCard/GetYourCard1.aspx>.

To apply, you will need the following items:

- TWO passport size photos
- Photo I.D. such as a driver's license or passport
- \$22.00 for the ISIC card fee plus shipping fee (payable by major credit card)
- Verification of enrollment. Acceptable verification includes:
  - Photocopy of school ID showing validity for 2011-2012.
  - Photocopy of your transcript/report card/tuition bill receipt for the current academic year.

More information about the benefits of the ISIC card is available from the Council on International Education Exchange (CIEE.) CIEE can be reached at 1-800-2COUNCIL, or consult their Web site at <http://www.ciee.org>.

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## **Health Issues**

When studying abroad your health and nutrition is a primary concern, since health and disease conditions vary worldwide. Natives have natural immunities against the bacteria and viral infections common in their areas whereas many travelers do not. Bacteria foreign to the traveler can have a detrimental effect on his or her health abroad.

Everyone's body reacts differently to new environments. Some people gain weight, others lose it. Some are nauseated from trying new foods, while others can eat anything without getting sick. It may take a few weeks for your body to adjust to the new ingredients you will be eating. Nevertheless, don't let your fears get in the way of tasting new foods—that is half the fun of learning a new culture. You may want to take your favorite over-the-counter medicines (i.e., aspirin or upset stomach tablets) for the first few weeks until you are comfortable with the surroundings and language. **Make sure all medication is in its original sealed package when traveling overseas.**

Women, check with returnees concerning the availability and quality of feminine hygiene products in the country in which you will be living. You may find them difficult to purchase

and/or extremely expensive. Take a supply to hold you over until you are comfortable enough with your surroundings and language to prevent unnecessary discomfort.

**Going abroad is not a “geographic cure” for concerns and problems at home.** Both physical and emotional health issues will follow you wherever you go. In particular, if you are concerned about your use of alcohol and other controlled substances, or if you have an emotional health concern, you should address it honestly before making plans to travel. Contrary to many people’s expectations, traveling does not minimize these problems—in fact, it often exacerbates them to a crisis stage.

#### **Things to Take with You:**

- Health insurance identification
- Health records (i.e., surgical/illness history, drug-related or allergies, blood type, special medications, etc.)
- International certificates (i.e., vaccination record.) These are available through the public health department, your personal physician or a physician specializing in International Health Regulations adopted by the World Health Organization (WHO)
- Copies of your prescriptions (including eye glasses)
- Personal travel health kit (all medicines should be in their original, sealed Packaging)

#### ***A. Immunizations***

Different countries often require certain vaccinations before entry. The U.S. State Department (<http://www.travel.state.gov>) issues Consular Information Sheets regarding entry requirements and medical facilities. The U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also provides detailed information on their Web site ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) as well as a list of routine, required and recommended vaccinations for Americans traveling overseas. A foreign country’s regulations are usually more concerned with the health of their own citizenry rather than with your health — they primarily want to insure that you are not a carrier of a disease, not whether you will contract a disease while you are there.

**Make an appointment with the public health department, your personal physician or a physician specializing in International Health Regulations adopted by the World Health Organization (WHO) at least three months prior to your departure for vaccinations. Some vaccinations require six to eight weeks to take effect. A list of local physicians working with International Health Regulations is available in the Study Abroad Office.**

#### ***B. Health Certificate***

First, **your immunization record will not be valid if it is not recorded on the International Health Certificate** available from the CDC and approved by the World Health Organization (WHO.) It must be completed in detail. If incomplete or inaccurate, you risk being denied entry or revaccination at the border. Check with your physician to ensure he or she is aware of the International Health Regulations adopted by WHO. Your doctor needs to possess a “Uniform Stamp” to validate your International Health Certificate. The best resources are travel clinics, usually associated with university medical centers or public health departments. **A list of local physicians working with International Health Regulations is available in the Study Abroad Office.**

### ***C. Medication***

If you are currently taking medication, be sure to take enough for the duration of your stay. You may not be able to find the same medication overseas. Due to customs regulations, **leave all medications in their original labeled containers.** Also, keep an original copy of the doctor's prescription with your passport. These materials will assist you through customs and insure that you won't break any laws of the country you are entering. **If the medication contains narcotic substances, consult the consulate of the country where you will be studying to see if it's legal.**

- Take your own syringes if you require regular injections.
- If you have a special medical condition (including allergies to medications,) it is a good idea to buy a medical alert bracelet.
- Beware of buying prescription drugs over the counter in the country where you will be living. Always ask careful questions about what you are purchasing.

### ***D. Staying Healthy***

To help ensure that you have a healthy study abroad experience, please adhere to the following guidelines suggested by the CDC.

#### **Do:**

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water.
- Drink only bottled water or carbonated drinks. **Avoid tap water, fountain drinks and ice cubes.** Cholera, Hepatitis A and Typhoid Fever are some diseases carried by food and water.
- Only eat thoroughly cooked foods or fruits and vegetables you have peeled yourself. Avoid fruits and vegetables that do not have peels.
- If you are visiting an area where there is risk for malaria, take your malaria prevention medication before, during and after travel, as directed.
- Protect yourself from insects by remaining in well-screened areas, using repellents and by wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants from dusk to dawn. Many diseases, such as malaria, are transmitted by mosquito bites.
- To prevent fungal and parasitic infections, keep your feet clean and dry and do not go barefoot.
- Always use latex condoms to reduce the risk of HIV and other STDs.

#### **Don't:**

- Don't eat food purchased from street vendors.
- Don't eat dairy products unless you know they have been pasteurized.
- Don't share needles with anyone.
- Don't handle animals, especially monkeys, dogs, and cats. Avoid bites to prevent serious diseases such as rabies and plague.
- Don't swim in fresh water. Salt water is usually safer.



## ***E. Additional Medical Information***

### **HIV, AIDS and SEXUAL SAFETY:**

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is a severe, often life-threatening illness caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV.) The incubation period for AIDS ranges from a few months to years. Currently, there is no vaccine to protect against the HIV infection, nor is there a cure.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 47 million people are infected with HIV worldwide. Because the HIV and AIDS are globally distributed, the risk to international travelers is determined less by their geographic destination than by their sexual and drug using behaviors.

HIV is preventable because it is fragile, and can only be transferred through blood or other body fluids: sexual intercourse, needle or syringe sharing, medical use of blood or blood components and from an infected woman to her baby. **HIV infection is becoming increasingly heterosexual.** HIV is not transmitted through casual contact, air, food or water products, contact with inanimate objects, or through mosquitoes and other insects. **Specifically, students studying abroad should be aware of condom quality, HIV antibody testing, clean blood supplies, sterile needles, and medical facilities in the target country.**

Some countries deny entry to persons with AIDS and those whose test positive for HIV. Check with the embassy or the country you plan to visit for regulations or contact the State Department Office of Public Affairs at (202) 647-1488. Keep in mind, however, that U.S. test results are not always accepted by other countries. **Also, note that individuals in other countries may not be educated to the same degree regarding Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs.)**

**Condom Caution:** Condoms, when used consistently and correctly, can prevent transmission of HIV. Condoms may be difficult to acquire and of lesser quality, particularly in Eastern Europe and in parts of the developing world. Take responsibility for yourself. The best prevention is abstinence. However, you may want to bring condoms with you, even if you are not planning on being sexually active while abroad.

**Clean blood supplies:** In the USA, Australia, Canada, Japan and Western Europe, the risk of infection with HIV through a blood transfusion is greatly reduced because of mandatory testing of all donated blood for the presence of antibodies to HIV. Other countries may not have a formal program for testing blood and sterile single-use disposable needles may not be available.

If you do need a blood transfusion due to blood loss while abroad, the blood should be tested, if at all possible, for HIV antibodies by properly trained laboratory technicians using a reliable test. If this is not possible, you should ask for a **Colloid or Crystalloid Plasma Expander**, which increases blood volume without the use of possibly contaminated blood supplies. If you provide assistance to an injured person while abroad, vigorously wash your hands if exposed to HIV. Students should also use gloves for protection.

**Additional Resources for Information:**

- US Department of Health and Human Services: (800) 342-AIDS
- US State Department AIDS Hotline: (800) 367-2437
- Center for Disease Control National AIDS Information Clearinghouse: (404) 332-4559 or (800) 458-5231

**Malaria:**

Information on Malaria risk in specific countries can be obtained from the CDC Web site ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)). There are several different strains of malaria. Your doctor should advise you on the best anti-malaria drugs depending on the country in which you will be living. No vaccine is completely effective or safe, and some may cause adverse reactions from minor to major illness depending on the individual.

**Dengue:**

According to the CDC, Dengue fever is the newest traveler's disease and has spread rapidly in the last 20 years. The disease is usually benign and self-limiting. There is no vaccine or specific treatment available. It is transmitted by the Aedes mosquito, which prefers to feed on humans during the day. Travelers should use protective measures such as mosquito netting and insect repellent for exposed skin.

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## **Support Services**

### ***A. AA World Services***

AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) World Services is located in New York City. Contact a representative at (212) 870-3400. Members of AA, who are going overseas, may access International AA Directory information online at [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org). Also, any phonebook in any country will have AA services listed in the first few pages.

### ***B. Counseling Services***

If you are currently seeing a counselor for any reason, it is important to inform your Study Abroad Advisor and counselor prior to departure. This is to ensure that the proper services are available for you at the host institution.

### ***C. Disability***

If you have a disability, it is necessary to consult with a Study Abroad Advisor and the Shepherd University Multicultural Student Affairs and Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator at 1-800-344-5231 – x5453 or 304-876-545 to determine the most appropriate study abroad program for you. Mobility International (<http://www.miusa.org>) provides helpful information for students with disabilities. For more information on Mobility International, contact (304) 343-1284.

## **Health Insurance**

All Shepherd University study abroad students must have international health coverage while abroad.

### **Recommended coverage levels:**

- Medical: \$100,000
- Accidental Death/Dismemberment: \$10,000
- Repatriation: \$20,000
- Medical Evacuation: \$100,000
- Consider adding non-medical emergency evacuation

Refer to your program description to see if health insurance is included. Also, contact your current carrier to inquire if your US health insurance policy provides coverage overseas. If your current policy does not cover you abroad, purchase a temporary policy that does. Carry your insurance policy card and take several insurance claim forms with you. Should you choose to add additional coverage you may work with any insurance company that you select. Shepherd Study Abroad recommends the following providers:

- CMI/MEDEX [www.cmi-insurance.com](http://www.cmi-insurance.com) / [www.medexassist.com](http://www.medexassist.com)
  - HTH Worldwide [www.HTHtravelinsurance.com](http://www.HTHtravelinsurance.com)
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## **Safety Issues**

Keep copies of all vital information at home and with you (photocopies work well), including:

- **The identification pages of your passport**
- **Traveler's checks numbers**
- **Credit card numbers**
- **Medical prescriptions and records**
- **Any other essential documents**

### ***A. Common Sense = Security***

Although your first instinct is to trust the people you meet, you can never be too careful with your money and belongings. **Pick-pocketing**, often overlooked and dismissed as a potential threat here in the U.S., is an **EXTREMELY** common and popular form of crime in most countries across the globe. Complicated schemes used to distract you, such as fighting or theatrical displays, are frequently employed.

**Remember the saying ~ "When you least expect it - expect it."**

- Know the local equivalent of "911" and the contact number for your Resident Director or Faculty leader. Don't assume that you will remember in an emergency or rely on a stored number in your cell phone (batteries can go dead!). Carry these numbers with you at all times!
- Make sure your bags are touching some part of your body. Be aware of your surroundings since bags can be easily cut off you on crowded trains and buses—

- especially if you are asleep.
- When taking photographs, be sure to wrap the strap of your camera around your wrist and be careful if a stranger offers to take your photograph with your expensive camera.
  - Do not take valuables on your trip which you may have difficulty replacing.
  - Take a major credit card or traveler's checks, NOT large amounts of cash.
  - Find out which parts of town the locals consider "risky" and avoid those areas.
  - Avoid and/or stay alert in large crowds or areas frequented by tourists.
  - Carry your money and passport in a neck-purse, money belt or hidden pouch—**NOT IN YOUR BACK POCKET!**
  - **Whenever possible, speak the local language.**
  - Dress and behave inconspicuously in public. Try not to advertise that you are foreign by wearing your college sweatshirt, hanging out in typically American bars and pubs, wearing white socks or white tennis shoes. In many cultures, wearing a baseball-style cap is also a telltale sign you are foreign.
  - Do not be free with information about other students, and do not give your or anyone else's address or phone number to strangers.
  - Remember, you are not studying abroad in a bubble. If an action or behavior is considered dangerous in the United States, like walking alone at night, then it is also dangerous abroad. **USE COMMON SENSE!** If something doesn't feel safe, it probably isn't.

## ***B. ENROLL in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)***

Sponsored by the U.S. Department of State the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program provides assistance for U.S. citizens in the case of an emergency, such as if you lose your passport or it is stolen while you are abroad or in other emergencies, such as in natural disasters. The travel and contact information you enter into our Smart Traveler Enrollment Program will make it easier for consular officers in U.S. embassies and consulates around the world to contact you and your loved ones during an emergency—including situations where your family or friends in the U.S. are having problems trying to contact you with important news. To enroll visit:

[http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/tips/registration/registration\\_4789.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/tips/registration/registration_4789.html)

## ***C. The American Embassy Overseas***

**If your passport is lost or stolen**, report the loss immediately to the nearest Foreign Service post and to the local police. If you can provide the consular officer with the information contained in your passport, it will speed the issuance of a new passport.

American embassies overseas will assist you in times of national crisis or threatening circumstances. **However, embassies will not assist you if, by virtue of your own actions, you break the laws of the country in which you reside.** If you are arrested and taken to jail for a crime you have knowingly committed, the embassy is not responsible for your release. The US government has no funds for your legal fees or other related expenses.

If you are arrested, immediately notify the nearest US embassy. You have the right to contact the American Consulate. If you are unable to do this, try to have someone contact

the embassy for you. The Consulate should visit you, contact family and friends and assist in the transfer of money, clothing and food.

If you experience difficulties with the local authorities, remember that American officials are limited by foreign laws, US regulations and geography as to what they can do. Should you find yourself in need of legal counsel, contact the nearest consular office and they can provide you with a list of attorneys and other legal services. Consular offices will do whatever they can to protect your legitimate interests and ensure that you are not discriminated against under local law, **but they can not get you out of jail.**

Information concerning international legal assistance can be viewed at [http://travel.state.gov/law/judicial/judicial\\_702.html](http://travel.state.gov/law/judicial/judicial_702.html).

**D. Carefully READ “HOW TO HAVE A SAFE TRIP”** webpage on the U.S. Department of State Website - [http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/tips/tips\\_1232.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/tips/tips_1232.html)

**E. U.S. State Department’s Consular Information Sheets & Travel Warnings**

**Consular Information Sheets** are available for every country of the world. They include such information as location of the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in the subject country, unusual immigration practices, health conditions, minor political disturbances, unusual currency and entry regulations, crime and security information and drug penalties. If an unstable condition exists in a country that is not severe enough to warrant a Travel Warning, a description of the condition (s) may be included under an optional section entitled “Safety/Security.” On limited occasion, we also restate in this section any U.S. Embassy advice given to official employees. Consular Information Sheets generally do not include advice, but present information in a factual manner so the traveler can make his or her own decisions concerning travel to a particular country. You can access Consular Information Sheets from the U.S. State Department’s website at: [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_4965.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_4965.html)

**Public Announcements** are a means to disseminate information about terrorist threats and other relatively short-term and/or trans-national conditions posing significant risks to the security of American travelers. They are made any time there is a perceived threat and usually have Americans as a particular target group. In the past, Public Announcements have been issued to deal with short-term coups, bomb threats to airlines, violence by terrorists and anniversary dates of specific terrorist events. You can access the current Public Announcements from the U.S. State Department’s web site at: [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/pa/pa\\_1766.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/pa/pa_1766.html)

**Travel Warnings** are issued when the State Department decides based on all relevant information, to recommend that Americans avoid travel to a certain country. Countries where avoidance of travel is recommended will have Travel Warnings as well as Consular Information Sheets. You can access the current Travel Warnings from the U.S. State Department’s web site at: [http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/tw/tw\\_1764.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html)

## ***F. Office of Overseas Citizens Services***

**If you are concerned about safety issues abroad**, you may phone the Bureau of Consular Affairs, Office of Emergency Citizen Service in Washington D.C. to talk with a Department official.

Do not be alarmed when you hear travel advisories at first. Many of these advisories are nothing more than information the government has received and is obligated to make it publicly known. Listen to and read all travel advisories carefully and then make the best judgment on whether or not to be alarmed. Due to the relationship between the United States and some countries, advisories may be misleading. For example, you will always find an advisory for the Middle East; however, you will seldom find an advisory for France even though there have been regular incidents involving North African terrorists for decades.

Travel Advisories can be accessed online at the State Department (<http://travel.state.gov/>)

The Office of Overseas Citizens Services can transmit emergency messages from your family, provide protection in the event of an arrest or detention and transmit emergency funds to destitute nationals when commercial banking facilities are not available. Provide your family with at least a tentative itinerary so the State Department has an idea where to look for you.

### **CONTACT NUMBERS:**

From within the U.S. **1-888-407-4747**

From outside the U.S. **1-202-501-4444**

### **What the U.S. State Department CAN and CANNOT do in a crisis -**

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies\\_1212.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1212.html)

## ***G. Words of Wisdom for Men and Women***

Actions, which may seem perfectly normal and natural in the U.S., can be misconstrued in other countries. For example, other countries do not look lightly upon binge drinking; and in some cases, such as in Germany or Holland, alcohol and controlled substances are often stronger than in the U.S. You are ultimately responsible for your well-being.

There are also stereotypes about American women overseas, and they are not always glamorous. The common belief is that American women are “easy.”

- Be careful when talking about sex. It may equate to a come-on.
- Don't give your phone number to men. In some cultures women do not give their phone numbers to men unless they intend to date seriously.
- Do not go to clubs alone and be aware of how you dance. It may be interpreted as an “open invitation.”
- Do not respond to the catcalls you may receive—just keep walking.
- Kissing a male friend hello or goodbye may be misinterpreted.
- Be firm and assertive when you say no. Be clear and direct to be certain that your intention and words are understood.

- Be aware that things that may appear as normal to you, such as getting drunk or asking someone to walk you home, may be misconstrued as an indication of poor character.

Violence against women is a growing concern worldwide. Always be alert and use the same safety precautions as you would in the U.S. no matter where you travel. If something disconcerting or violent happens to you, go to a program director for assistance. **Unfortunately, in some countries the issue of female harassment is treated lightly.**

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## **Student Behavior**

### **A. Shepherd Code of Conduct**

The Shepherd University Student Handbook provides information to students on the policies and procedures of Shepherd University, including the Student Code of Conduct. The Student Handbook provides information on how the university works and who to contact to answer questions or if you need more information. If you would like a copy of the Student Handbook, please send your request to the following address:

Office of Admissions  
P.O. Box 5000  
Shepherdstown, WV |25443-5000  
Phone: 304-876-5212 or 800-344-5231  
Fax: 304-876-5165

### **B. Study Abroad Office - Study Abroad Contract**

When you complete your Acceptance Packet, you will sign a study abroad contract as part of the procedures involved with your study abroad program. Please be aware of the section regarding BEHAVIORAL RESPONSIBILITIES, which states:

*The undersigned is aware of the expected behavioral responsibility while participating in any study abroad program. As a guest of a foreign country, there are certain behaviors which are considered unacceptable and could lead to possible disruption of the program. The undersigned hereby assures the University that he/she shall conduct himself/herself in an appropriate manner which does not infringe upon the customs and mores of the country in which the program is being conducted, or upon the rights and safety of the undersigned and of other participants in the program. Behavioral responsibilities shall be applicable during the course of the program both when in the company of other program participants and when the undersigned is physically separated from other program participants. In addition to cultural disruptions, inappropriate behavior may compromise the health and safety of the undersigned. Inappropriate behavior is cause for dismissal from **Affiliate** and **non-Shepherd programs** without refund and return flight and other costs will be the sole responsibility of the student.*

### **C. Arrests Abroad**

When you are in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws, and American officials are limited as to how they can assist you. They cannot, for instance, represent you in legal proceedings or pay your legal fees or other expenses. They can, however, perform a variety of vital services, which include providing a list of attorneys, assisting in contacting your family in the U.S. if you wish it, helping you obtain money from family in the U.S. and monitoring your health and welfare and the conditions under which you are being held.



If you are arrested, immediately ask to speak to a consular officer at the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Under international agreements, the U.S. Government has a right to provide consular assistance to you upon your request. If your request to speak to your consul is turned down, keep asking—politely, but persistently. For information on how consuls assist American arrestees, see [http://travel.state.gov/law/judicial/judicial\\_702.html](http://travel.state.gov/law/judicial/judicial_702.html).

#### ***D. Special Warnings about Drug Offenses Abroad***

Every year, several hundred Americans are arrested abroad on drug charges. Persons caught with illegal drugs in a foreign country are subject to the drug laws of that country, not those of the U.S.; **as always, ignorance of the law is no excuse**. In many countries, the burden of proof is on the accused to show that he or she is innocent of the charges. Some Americans take advantage of an offer of an all-expenses-paid vacation abroad in exchange for carrying a small package in the luggage. When, to their surprise, they are caught, the fact that they did not know that there were drugs in that package will not reduce the charges against them.

Every aspect of a drug arrest abroad can be different from U.S. practice. For instance:

- few countries provide a jury trial
- many countries do not permit pre-trial release on bail
- pre-trial detention, often in solitary confinement, can last several months
- prisons may lack even minimal comforts, such as beds, toilets, and washbasins
- diets are often inadequate and require supplements from relatives and friends
- officials may not speak English
- physical abuse, confiscation of property, degrading treatment and extortion are possible
- persons convicted may face sentences ranging from fines and jail time, to years of hard labor, and even the death penalty
- penalties for drug possession and for drug trafficking are often the same abroad, so possession of one ounce of marijuana could result in years in a foreign jail

As with any arrest of a U.S. citizen abroad, consular officers perform a variety of services (see Arrests Abroad, above). For more information about arrests abroad, see [http://travel.state.gov/law/judicial/judicial\\_702.html](http://travel.state.gov/law/judicial/judicial_702.html).

### **Money**

#### ***A. Banking***

Although traveler's checks have been the standard means of safely carrying money overseas, the recent proliferation of ATMs allows safe and easy access to cash and/or one's personal finances for a minimal fee. Add one or both of your parent's names to your local bank account or complete a financial power of attorney form so that money may be deposited into the account while you are overseas. Using your check card for purchases will generally provide you with a better exchange rate on transactions and avoid the foreign ATM fees charged by your bank and possibly the financial institution that owns the ATM. **Notify your bank that you will be using your debit/credit card in another country prior to your departure to prevent your bank from blocking your transactions.** Be aware that many countries utilize a "chip and PIN" system for credit cards, rather than the magnetic strip that is common in the US. Ask your bank if they can issue you a "chip and PIN" card or get a PIN number for your current "magnetic strip" credit card. Also note that many credit card companies add a "foreign transaction fee"

every time you use your card outside the U.S. These fees general add 2-3% to each transaction. Check with your bank or credit card issuer to determine their policy.

When using traveler's checks, keep a list of the serial numbers and record when and where you spend each one. If they are lost or stolen, you can report which ones are missing in order to have them easily replaced. Most students find it helpful to open a bank in their foreign "home town" so they don't have to hide their money or traveler's checks. **You will need a passport to cash your traveler's checks.** It would also be very wise to carry at least one credit card with you in case of emergency. If you carry two, put them in two different places.

Some large banks and American Express provide foreign currency traveler's checks. Due the differences in exchange rates, you may want to watch the market for a good rate of exchange before buying your traveler's checks.

### ***B. Wiring Money***

Simply put, it's usually very fast and very expensive. You could receive money from home within several hours to several days, but most banks worldwide will charge you to receive the money. In addition, most banks charge to send money as well as to convert the money from U.S. dollars into the local currency. Charges at either end usually run between \$15—\$30 depending on the amount of money to be sent. For more information about wiring money, contact Western Union at (800) 235-6000 or your local bank.

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## **Travel Issues**

### ***A. International Driving Permit***

**Driving a vehicle in another country is never recommended.** The number one cause of injury and death to Americans abroad is vehicle accidents—whether by automobile, motorcycle or bike. Different driving laws and road conditions cause confusion that can lead to accidents. Not only should you avoid driving a vehicle, you should also be cautious about safety while riding in a bus, train or taxi. Don't travel in empty train cars and try to find a travel partner. Check arrival and departure times before traveling and reconfirm all trips. Avoid scheduling travel when you will arrive at your destination late at night. Even if there is a meter in a cab, agree to an amount or estimation before traveling. **It is NEVER recommended to hitchhike.**

If you expect to be driving while overseas, it is recommended that you have an International Driving Permit. While some countries recognize a U.S. Driver's License, others may have restriction such as age requirements or proof of insurance. Check with the nearest embassy or consulate to find out the specifics. To obtain an International Driving Permit, contact any AAA office.

### ***B. International Youth Hostels***

Staying in youth hostels is one of the most interesting and inexpensive ways to travel overseas. Hostels can range anywhere from a large dormitory-style setup to something reminiscent of a bed-and-breakfast. The difference between a hostel and a hotel is that

hostels generally have fewer amenities in the room, such as no towels, soap or shampoo. In most cases there will not be a bathroom, telephone or television in the room either.

Hostels are a great way to meet travelers and students from other countries and to gather travel information. Some hostels may require a membership to an international hosteling organization for you to stay there. You can obtain a membership through CIEE (check the [Student Travels Catalogue](#).) A one-year membership costs \$25. Non-members are subject to higher fees.

### **C. Alternatives to Hostels**

In different countries inexpensive accommodations have various names including:

Great Britain: Bed and Breakfast

Scandinavia: Hus Rom

Germany: Zimmer

France: Chambre d'Hotel

Italy: Camere Affitta

Yugoslavia: Sobe

Greece: Dhomatia

Spain: Casas Particulares

Portugal: Cuartos

Eastern Europe: Simmer or Rooms

Japan: Ryokan

### **D. Rail Passes**

If you are planning to travel throughout Europe, you may want to buy a Eurailpass which is good for unlimited travel throughout 17 countries. There are also "Britrail" and "Oz" passes for the UK and Australia. They can only be purchased at a discount price from STA prior to your departure. For more information, visit <http://www.statravel.com/>.

### **E. Travel Advice**

- Purchase a reliable guidebook that lists restaurants, hotels/hostels, area descriptions, train/bus schedules, consulate information, travel advice etc.
- Don't plan trips within or near a war zone.
- Do not agree to watch the belongings of a person whom you do not know.
- Do not borrow suitcases and ensure that nothing is inserted into yours.
- Eat where the locals eat, which is often at home.
- Stay away from "western" hostels and restaurants because they are typically expensive.

### **F. Home-stay Tips**

- Be natural and always keep an open mind.
- Spend time with your host family from the start—photographs are a great icebreaker and lead to great conversations.
- Bring a gift for your host family upon arrival.
- Ask questions and take an interest in your host city/country.
- Try to be as flexible as possible and your anxiety will decrease. Always remember that your host family is in the same position as you are.
- Remember that you are a guest in your host's home and treat them with respect.
- Don't be bothered by first reactions or tone of voice. Inflections in certain languages could seem stern or disapproving.

- Remember that other cultures have different facial and body expressions which may seem rude by American standards, but may be perfectly normal in their own culture.
- Talk openly with your host family if there is a problem.

At first living with a host family may be frustrating and difficult. Once your host family knows you're interested to really get to know them and the host country, they will help a lot. **Don't be afraid to speak another language.** It's very important to accept corrections and not care that you make mistakes. Try to speak with the family as often as possible.

### **Dormitory vs. Home-stay Family**

<b>Dormitory</b>	<b>Home-stay Family</b>
Close to campus	Commute to campus
Contact with a variety of different students from many different cities and countries.	Cultural immersion — provides an in-depth look of family life in your host country, and if they speak a different language, an excellent opportunity to increase your language skills.
More opportunity to communicate with friends and participate in group activities, but on the other hand, can be noisy and hard to concentrate on studying.	Less time for friends and social time due to commuting and family obligations. You may even have a curfew. However, you will have fewer distractions.
Open diet — but you have to find it and cook it!	Your diet will be the same as your host family.
On your own for sightseeing — you choose where you go, who you go with and how long you are there.	Your host family may recommend places to go see and could even offer to take you sightseeing.
You will do everything.	You might be assigned chores.

## **Research Your New Home**

One of the most common regrets students have about their study abroad experience is not preparing themselves in advance for what lies ahead. Learning about your host country will help you adjust to your new environment and will aid your intercultural understanding. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How many prominent people in the host country can you name (i.e., politicians, athletes, religious leaders or artists?)
- Do you know the national anthem and the country flag?
- Are other languages spoken besides the dominant language?
- What is the predominant religion?
- What are the most important holidays? How are they observed?
- What is the attitude toward alcohol consumption?
- Is the price asked for merchandise fixed or are customers expected to bargain? How is bargaining conducted?
- How do people organize their daily activities? Is there a daytime rest period? What is the customary time for friends to visit?
- What is the normal meal schedule? What foods are most popular?
- What are the cultural taboos?
- What is the usual dress for women and men? Do teenagers wear jeans?
- On what occasions would you present (or accept) gifts from people in the country?
- How do people greet one another? Do they shake hands, embrace or kiss? How do they depart one another?
- What are the favorite leisure and recreational activities? What sports are popular?
- How will your financial position and living conditions compare with those of the majority of people living in this country?
- What kinds of local transportation are available?
- Is military training compulsory?
- What is the historical relationship between the country and the USA?
- Are there many Americans living in the country?
- What kinds of health services are available? Where are they? Does everyone have equal access to health care?
- Where can medicines be purchased? Do you always need a prescription?
- What are the major industries? What is the minimum wage? Is there one?
- What groups of people are discriminated against? Why?
- How is the USA viewed for its political history and current practice?
- What common images of Americans does the host culture maintain?

There are many methods to finding the answers to these questions. Check your local library for books and periodicals about your host country, as well as the host country's embassy. Also, the Study Abroad Office may be able to put you in touch with past participants who are willing to answer questions about their experiences.

Web sites that may be useful:

- The International Education Site ([www.intstudy.com](http://www.intstudy.com))
- CIA Factbook (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook>)
- Travel Document Systems ([www.traveldocs.com](http://www.traveldocs.com))
- U.S. State Department (<http://travel.state.gov>)
- Go Abroad! ([www.goabroad.com](http://www.goabroad.com))
- Many places have Facebook pages and/or groups

Culture-grams are another good source of information and are available in Scarborough Library ~ call number GT150.C858 2004.

## **Packing**

Your first urge is to pack everything you own aside from the kitchen sink. Although this seems logical since you are going away to college for the semester, it is not feasible. Most airlines prohibit you from checking in more than two bags. Also airlines have weight limits. Both American and European airlines charge extra for baggage over a certain weight, which varies by airline and can be quite expensive. In some cases, if you pack too much, the airlines will not accept your baggage because of liability risks to their workers.

**The moral of the story is to check the airline regulations and PACK LIGHT.**

- Be sure to check with the **Transportation Security Administration (TSA)** <http://www.tsa.gov/> for guidelines for guidelines and restrictions on items in your carry-on and checked luggage and for information about clearing security check points. Be especially careful with your carry-on with regard to liquids and gels!

US students tend to wear something different every day of the week. You will find that in other countries, no one cares if you wear the same thing two or three days in a row. **Be aware of how people treat you according to your dress and then dress according to how you want to be treated.** A good supply of socks and underwear are the main things you will need. Bring necessities with you, but purchase the rest in your host country. Bring photographs or postcards from home to show your new friends. Take something familiar from home such as a pillowcase or poster.

Keep a travel journal even if it is your first time. Students who haven't report that they forgot events, people and places. Journals can also be used as a tool to help you through difficult times while overseas and when you return home. Don't just write about chronological events, keep updated with themes. **Keep in mind that re-entry shock is as real as the culture shock you experience overseas.**

Journals can easily be kept on the computer, compiling a photo-journal, writing a blog or e-mailing your experiences to friends and family. Your journal is an expression of you so simply choose a style and an approach that is most comfortable.

### ***A. What Should I Pack?***

- **A few semi-dressy outfits:** Europeans tend to “dress up” compared to Americans. Bring jeans, but complement them with nicer tops.
- **Personal hygiene items:** Unless there is a specific brand you cannot live without, overseas products are similar to American brands. You may even discover products you like better.
- **Trail size box of detergent**
- **Sweatpants:** Sweatpants are extremely expensive and difficult to find overseas. If you do not think you can survive a semester without them, be sure to bring a pair.
- **American Souvenirs:** You never know who you may encounter overseas. Bring a couple little gifts that you can give your friends or important people you meet. For example, maple syrup.
- **Electrical converter and/or adapter:** All electrical sockets are not created equal; if you are going to use appliances overseas, you need to know what type of voltage is used in the country you're traveling to and what type of adapter or plug is needed to plug your appliances into the outlet.  
<http://www.independenttraveler.com/travel-tips/passports-and-international-travel/electricity-overseas-converters-adapters-and-beyond>

### ***B. What Shouldn't I Pack?***

- **Keys**
  - **Valuables:** Anything that has or implies high financial value should be left at home. These items can easily be lost, stolen or damaged. iPods are especially popular for pick-pockets.
  - **Books and school supplies:** Aside from your travel guide, books consume a large amount of space and are extremely heavy. Buy them overseas.
  - **Cell Phone:** Other countries have different cellular systems than the U.S. Check with your carrier for an international plan or use phone cards that you buy abroad.
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## **Communicating With Home**

### ***A. Telephone***

**Phone Cards:** Locally-purchased phone cards are usually the most reasonably priced and convenient ways to make phone calls overseas. They are available at the local post office. Students, who have purchased the International Student Identification Card (ISIC,) can utilize the ISICConnect service. This service allows students world-wide to make inexpensive phone calls, send and receive E-mails and store digital copies of important documents online.

**Cell Phones:** Most students find that having a cell phone is very helpful. Be sure to check with your carrier about international rates and plans – especially if you have a Smartphone with a data plan – as international use requires a different SIM card and can be VERY EXPENSIVE if you aren't careful.

**Skype:** A popular form of communication among Europeans is Skype, a phone service

through your computer. Calls to other Skype members are free or students can purchase inexpensive plans to call friends and relatives. You will need a headset. For more information, visit [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com).

#### **B. Letters**

Be aware that international postage can be expensive and it may take several weeks for your letter to arrive.

#### **C. Electronic Mail**

E-mail is probably the easiest and least expensive way to communicate with your friends and family. Check with your host institution regarding e-mail access. Because the Shepherd server may be less effective abroad, you may want to establish a free e-mail account with other free Web-based e-mail providers.

Students can also access the Internet at local Internet cafes. Some restaurants, such as Dunkin' Doughnuts, offer Internet services to paying customers. To locate cybercafés, visit <http://cybercaptive.com> or <http://netcafes.com>.

#### **D. Blogs**

There are a number of websites where you can set up a travel blog which will allow you to share stories and pictures with friends and family and can serve as a travel journal to remember your trip. The Shepherd Study Abroad Office welcomes links to student blogs on the Study Abroad website. If you are interested in sharing your blog with the Shepherd community here are some tips and guidelines:

##### ***Things to think about when writing a blog for the Study Abroad Office website:***

<b>Do</b>	<b>Don't</b>
<b>-Write often and give lots of detail!</b> That said, don't go on for multiple paragraphs about something that can be said in one. You want to keep a reader's interest. ☺ Pictures are great too! Take an interesting photo and use it as writing prompt.	<b>-Update just for the sake of updating.</b> Pick a specific topic to focus on each entry and write on that. If you've already talked about your classes, you don't need to write another post about them unless there is something new to talk about.
<b>-Talk about things that are ordinary parts of life. Not everything has to be super exciting</b> (classroom set up, the dining system, etc.). Try and remember the questions that you had before departure - prospective students will be reading these and will want to know everything they can about the location.	<b>-Talk about going out to clubs or bars as the main focus.</b> You're representing Shepherd in these blogs and everyone will be able to read them. If an interesting topic comes up while out, it's okay to mention the setting, but don't make that be the main focus.
<b>-Be visual!</b> Add lots of pictures, videos, charts, etc. Have someone take pictures of you in unique places to show the differences between your location and the U.S. Try to include a variety of media. An example: if you take a road trip, Google map it and post a picture of the map to give your readers an idea of where you were.	<b>-Post irrelevant pictures.</b> Try to make sure the pictures match what your post talks about. If you have a great picture but it doesn't match the topic you're talking about, wait and post it on its own.



**IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT PUBLIC BLOGS:** If you wouldn't want your grandmother/professor/future employer to read or see it, don't post it! These blogs will be public for anyone to read. Remember, the internet never forgets.

**Topics to get you started:**

- First blog or two:
  - What do you already know about the location? About the people? The climate?
  - What surprised you? Initial impressions?
  - Why did you pick this location? What does studying abroad mean to you?
  - What are you hoping to see while there?
- While abroad:
  - What are the differences between classes, living arrangements, etc. compared to Shepherd?
  - What on campus has gotten your interest that is different from at Shepherd (i.e. a new sport, like Australian Rules Football; cultural practices; slang)?
  - How are you spending your time (lots of travel, staying on campus, etc)?
  - What's happening in your life that you need to "work through"? Use your blog and photos as a catalyst to reflect upon your experiences. What have you been surprised to learn about YOU? About the U.S.? About the world?
- Last blog or two:
  - Look back at your first blog(s). How has your view of the country changed now that you've lived there? How have you changed?
  - What was the best experience you had while abroad?
  - What was your most challenging experience? How did you cope?
  - Is there anything you wished you knew before going? What would you tell future participants? What does studying abroad mean to you now that you've done it?

***E. Provide the Study Abroad Office with your Contact Information***

**Upon arrival to your host institution**, please update your Shepherd Study Abroad account with the following information:

- Updated e-mail address
- Current mailing address
- Telephone number or mobile number

Use the "contact while abroad" on the left side navigation bar section for this information.

**We must have this information in case of emergency**

# CROSS - CULTURAL ISSUES

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*You must be the change you wish to see in the world. — GHANDI*

## Intercultural Communication

Communication is always a challenge when two cultures meet. Both language and mannerisms contribute to the complexities of intercultural communication; in many instances, language cannot be directly translated word for word. Therefore, it is essential to understand much more than just the grammatical structure of a host country's language. Cultural values must also be taken into account.

Upon your arrival in the host country, try to recognize the style of communication and the cultural meaning behind it. This will help you overcome some culture shock.

- **Masculine/Feminine Cultures:** Recognize whether a culture has a masculine or feminine approach toward communication. Masculine cultures (i.e., the United States) value achievement, assertiveness and material wealth. Feminine cultures (i.e., Sweden) value relationships and overall quality of life.
- **Tolerance of Uncertainty vs. Avoidance of Uncertainty:** There are some cultures in which people need certainty. These cultures will enforce strict rules for behavior and develop more elaborate codes of conduct, either formal or informal, during communication.
- **Concentrated vs. Decentralized Power:** Some cultures value equality and distribution of power more than other cultures. This is noticeable in the roles of communication that people play with each other.
- **Individual vs. Group Achievement:** Some cultures put more emphasis on individualism (e.g. the United States) while others place more emphasis on the good of the group (i.e., Japan.)

## **A. Types of Education**

Education is not delivered in a universal way. According to L.R. Kohls, there are two types of education: deductive and inductive. **Deductive education** occurs when the instructor has all the knowledge and provides a lecture for the class. Students do not interrupt or ask questions that challenge the instructor. **Inductive education**, however, occurs when the teacher initiates a discussion or encourages group activity. In this setting, the student is encouraged to actively think and treat education as a unique 'personal experience,' rather one lectured by a professor.

Inductive education is found in Anglo-Saxon or northern European cultures such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and the United States. **The ratio of educational styles in the world versus the US is 180 to 8.** Other countries focus on deductive education which may challenge your intercultural communication skills. --L.R. Kohls, *Carrying American-Designed Training Overseas*

### TIPS FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS:

- Make sure to check the number of assignments, often there are fewer graded assignments than in the US and they can be quite extensive
- Be sure to utilize library facilities abroad

- You may connect to full-text databases from Scarborough Library:  
<http://www.shepherd.edu/libweb/>

## ***B. Global Discoveries: Ways to Improve Your Intercultural Communication***

- **Seek information:** Prejudice stems from ignorance.
- **Lose Assumptions:** Do not rely on the assumptions of your own cultural heritage. Be aware of the richness of other cultures.
- **Ask questions!** Be prepared to share information about yourself, and be sensitive in the way you ask questions. Open communication helps to reduce uncertainty.
- **Develop Flexibility.** Not everything always goes as planned.
- **Tolerate Ambiguity.** Communicating with someone from another culture produces uncertainty, which can be uncomfortable. Learn to tolerate the discomfort because communication gets easier over time.
- **Avoid Negative Judgments.** Resist thinking that your culture has all the answers. It has its strengths and weaknesses just like any other culture.

## **Cultural Shock and Adjustment**

***Life is a progress, and not a station.***  
**--RALPH WALDO EMERSON**

### ***A. Culture Shock***

“Culture shock” is used to describe the more pronounced reactions and psychological disorientation most people experience while living in a culture different from their own for an extended period of time. Culture shock is one of the biggest personal challenges you will encounter overseas. It can cause intense discomfort, often accompanied by hyper-irritability, bitterness, resentment, homesickness and depression. In some cases distinct physical symptoms of psychosomatic illness occur.

### **SYMPTOMS OF CULTURE SHOCK**

<b>Homesickness</b>	<b>Compulsive eating</b>
<b>Withdrawal</b>	<b>Unexplainable crying</b>
<b>Boredom</b>	<b>Exaggerated cleanliness</b>
<b>Irritability</b>	<b>Family tension/conflict</b>
<b>Marital Stress</b>	<b>Chauvinistic behavior</b>
<b>Stereotyping</b>	<b>Hostility towards locals</b>
<b>Excessive sleep</b>	<b>Ineffective academic work</b>
<b>Physical ailments (Psychosomatic Illnesses)</b>	

### **SOME COMMON CAUSES:**

- The ambiguity of a particular situation or when the actual situation does not match preconceived notions.
- The results of your experience are not seen because of daily challenges. It may take 6—12 months before you understand the impact of your overseas experience.
- Academic expectations are thwarted because of a different educational system.

- Your cultural methods are inappropriate for “getting things done” in the new culture.

Although often grouped together, culture shock is different from frustration. Frustration is always traceable to a specific cause and alleviates when the situation is remedied. Culture shock is longer lived and derived from the experience of encountering ways of life that are different from your culture and familiar cultural routines. Different practices can be perceived as a threat to your basic, unconscious belief in your customs, assumptions and values. As a result, culture shock slowly develops over time from a series of events that are difficult to identify.

Often students feel ambivalent when they have only lived in another culture for a short period of time. For example, Americans abroad in Brazil might be asked to dinner or social events that never materialize. We experience the cultural difference of Brazilian social plans, which are never set in stone, compared to the American concept of when you make plans, keep them.

Sometimes culture shock results when your values are questioned. While riding on the trains in Italy, study abroad students have been surprised that they do not separate the smoking from non-smoking sections. Italian culture does not have the same view of space and clean air. Students must realize that one culture may perceive something as a freedom, whereas others perceive it as a rule. Flexibility is critical!

Because culture shock progresses slowly, your first reaction is to assume the way of life is quaint. However, when it becomes clear that the differences are not simply quaint, but a way of life, an effort is frequently made to dismiss them by pointing out the cultural similarities. Eventually, the focus shifts to the differences themselves, sometimes to such an extent that they may seem overwhelming. There may be times when small things are blown out of proportion. ***Do not to let the host culture become the scapegoat for the natural difficulties inherent with the study abroad experience.***

The symptoms of culture shock will not always be present in everyone. Many people experience cultural adjustments with ease. However, culture shock is a serious personal reaction to a new country. If culture shock happens to you, it is important to know adjustment is inevitable and emotional reactions are not easily subject to rational management.

## **B. Stages of Culture Shock**

There are four commonly held stages of personal adjustment people undergo overseas:

1. **Initial Euphoria:** People begin new adventures with expectations. Upon arrival you will want to absorb every ounce of the host culture, but don't be surprised if you feel disappointed. Preconceived notions are often hard for the host country to meet. Initial euphoria usually lasts 1-2 weeks, sometimes even a month.
2. **Irritation and Hostility:** This stage occurs when the differences of the host culture become too burdensome for your cultural norms. You may become irritable toward small and insignificant things, such as the times lunch and dinner are served. Some people actually rebel by refusing to “do things the way locals do things.”
3. **Gradual Adjustment:** Culture shock begins to subside once you pass through

the stages of euphoria and irritation. The host culture will seem more familiar and you will understand some of the subtle cultural nuances. Although you may not appreciate all aspects of the host culture, you are at least able to feel less isolated.

4. **Adaptation and Biculturalism:** Culture shock is no longer a problem when you are able to fully function in two cultures with confidence.

There is no determined length of time that culture shock lasts. The extent to which culture shock affects an individual is personal and relative to the duration of stay in the host country.

### ***C. Coping with Culture Shock***

How to minimize the impact of adjustment to your new host culture:

1. Get to know the host culture
2. Look for logical reasons behind all things that seem “foreign” to your rationale
3. Resist being arrogant and close-minded
4. Make friends in the host culture who can sympathize or empathize
5. Communicate with family and friends from home when you feel homesick
6. Exercise—it relieves tension and releases endorphins
7. Maintain a positive attitude about your experience. Remember this is supposed to be one of the best times of your life!

### ***D. Taboos***

When overseas it is essential that you are aware of what are appropriate and inappropriate actions within the host culture. It is easy to forget that some American customs may be perceived as rude or vulgar.

- Americans tend to like larger amounts of personal space than residents in other countries. Unconsciously you may be perceived as being “socially uncomfortable” because you keep a longer distance from the person with whom you converse.
- In Africa pointing the index and third fingers is considered as giving the “evil eye” to another person.
- In Malaysia it is considered rude to look directly into the person’s eyes during a conversation. Although Americans tend to think of eye contact as a way of showing attention during a conversation, Malaysians perceive it as a form of domination and control.
- Americans tend to cross legs during a conversation and it is not uncommon for Americans to touch their shoes. In Lebanon, however, people view this as a sign of poor hygiene.

Realistically, it is impossible to illustrate every single cultural taboo found on the planet. However, the point is to **research your host culture prior to your departure**. Contact some previous study abroad participants around Shepherd or country natives now living in the U.S. for advice.

## ***E. Responses to Cultural Adjustment***

### **Fight:**

When traveling overseas people often believe their way of life is the right way. They want to show natives of the host country a quicker and more efficient way to live. Be conscious of your responses and behaviors. Try not to unknowingly engage in “fight” responses.

### **Flight:**

You may notice U.S. students hanging out together a lot while studying abroad. These students are engaged in the flight response which is an avoidance of the host culture and things that make them feel uncomfortable.

### **Adaptation:**

As you adjust to the culture of your host country, you may find yourself compromising. There is nothing wrong with that. You must decide what actions are right for you. You may realize that for your acceptance into your new community, you may do things that you would not do at home.

For example: “In my host family the expectation was that the father was always served by a female member of the family during meals. On one occasion, all of the women, except for me, were out and I was to take care of dinner. I found it very difficult to be expected to wait on someone, particularly in a family setting. However, I served my host father out of respect for him. I could have made other decisions about this situation and held to my personal values, but that might have created an uncomfortable situation.”

## ***F. Homesickness/Coping***

Being homesick is completely normal. Dealing with it is important, however, so that it doesn't hinder your valuable time in your new home. Here are some tips:

- **Take a little bit of home:** Bring photographs of family and friends. Sometimes bringing a pillowcase helps if you are traveling to various countries.
- **Stay in touch:** E-mail family and friends to stay updated.
- **Remember that it is worth it:** Don't forget that you are in the middle of a wonderful opportunity. There is no excuse for being bored—get out and explore your new surroundings. There are people to meet and places to see.

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## **Customs Information**

### ***A. Pre-Departure***

Become familiar with the US CUSTOMS REGULATIONS. If you plan to take foreign-made personal articles overseas, consider getting a certificate of registration from the customs office nearest to you or at any port of exit from the United States. This certificate will expedite free entry of those items when you return by offering proof of purchase in America.

## ***B. Entering a Foreign Country***

Custom declaration forms are distributed on ships and planes and should be prepared in advance of your arrival for presentation to the immigration custom inspectors. Whether you have anything to declare, you have to fill out at least the identification section of the form.

Upon entering the foreign country, you must show your passport, turn in your customs declaration form and pass through the baggage check. Customs regulations and procedures vary from country to country. If you are traveling with any unusual items or large quantities of goods, check with the appropriate embassy prior to departure to ensure that such articles are not prohibited.

## ***C. Sending Items Home***

Any single item worth more than \$25 is subject to customs tax. Mark inexpensive gifts as "UNSOLICITED GIFT: VALUE UNDER \$25" and no duty will need to be paid by the recipient. When sending clothing home, you should declare them as "USED CLOTHING of an American abroad, which has no commercial value." This does not include items that were purchased abroad and then worn. You can also ship home personal goods of US origin duty free if you mark them as "AMERICAN GOODS RETURNED."

**Do not misrepresent what is contained in the packages.** US Customs opens packages regularly and randomly. False declaration is a serious matter.

## ***D. U.S. Customs Regulations***

- Everyone must complete at least the identification portion of the customs form.
- Duty regulations allow you to bring \$400 worth of goods duty free. You pay a flat rate on the next \$1000 worth. If you fail to declare or understate the value, penalties can be severe.
- The goods that you bring in duty-free must be for your personal or household use and cannot include more than 100 cigars, 200 cigarettes and one liter of alcohol. You must be at least 21 years old to bring alcohol into the United States.
- If you do not exceed the duty-free limitation, you need only declare the total value of the goods accompanying you. If you surpass the limitations of \$1400 then you must fill out a written declaration form listing everything acquired abroad that you are bring home and price paid.

Remember that "duty free" only means that you did not pay local taxes in the country of purchase. Also remember to watch the prices in the duty-free shops.

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## **Reverse Culture Shock**

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Returning to the United States is just as challenging as the initial move overseas. You may develop feelings of anxiety because you have to re-settle with your friends and family. This is known as reverse culture shock. **The general rule of thumb: Students who are ready to return home from their host country at the end of their experience have an easier time than students who are not ready to leave.**

Often feelings of disappointment emerge when family and friends are not interested in your overseas experience. They are unable to relate to and understand your experiences abroad. *Life in the United States has gone on without you and people there have changed too.* Although each individual has a different experience readjusting, reverse culture shock is a natural process of study abroad. You've broadened your horizons. Give the "new" you time to adjust to your old environment.

Here are some suggestions to alleviate feelings of disorientation, alienation, unhappiness, not-belonging and homesickness of your host country.

- Contact your Shepherd study abroad advisor, who is empathetic to your feelings, and can help you meet other students in similar situations.
- Talk to your family and friends about your feelings and concerns and say *why you feel that way*. This will not only help them relate to your feelings, but help them realize how real of a concern those feelings are.
- Get involved with international student organizations and/or clubs.
- Find ways of communicating your experiences with people who are interested.

Many returning study abroad students feel bored when they return home. They are used to having the expectation of something new and exciting on the horizon. The activities that may have interested before your experience will not necessarily be the same. Try to find different things that interest you around campus or explore the U.S.

Remember that there is no one solution for readjusting to your home environment. Find a technique that suits your personality and needs. A defining chapter in your life has just closed. Nevertheless, the impact of this chapter will influence many other future chapters of your life that have yet to be written.

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## **Remaining a Citizen of the World**

There are a number of things that you can do to help the transition of your experience:

- **Join a Student Organization** that deals with international issues.
- **Expand your academic interests** to encompass your experiences (i.e., a minor in Art History) or take classes in your area of interest.
- **Communicate with others** by sharing similar experiences in order to verbalize thoughts, feelings, reactions and difficulties encountered at home.
- **Rework your resume** to highlight your study abroad. Be specific and explain some of your experiences.
- **Start researching your next adventure abroad:** study, work, intern or volunteer overseas again.
- **Remember, you are a role model to students** who have not been out of the



- country. Share your experiences and inspire them to follow your example.
  - **Take advantage of the Career Services Center.** Lots of helpful information is available regarding international positions.
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## **Returning to Shepherd**

### **Registration:**

If you are abroad during the Fall or Spring semesters you will need to register for classes while you are still abroad. **Please be aware of when advisement and registration opens – this is your responsibility!** The Study Abroad Office cannot assist you if you register late and classes are closed. You have access to RAIL through your Shepherd account. You will need to:

- **Contact your advisor** via email to get your PIN number. If you do not remember your advisor's email address you can look it up here - <http://www.shepherd.edu/webinfo/people.html>
- **You will need your student ID (Rambler) number.** If you have forgotten it, you can look it up on RAIL - <https://oas4.shepherd.edu/PROD/bwxkidlu.idform>
- **Register for classes with RAIL --** <http://www.shepherd.edu/rail/>

### **Housing:**

**Think ahead!!** If you are abroad during the Fall or Spring semesters you should stop by the Resident Life office in **the semester PRIOR to your study abroad experience** to complete a housing contract and make the \$100 advance room deposit for the semester of your return. Example: if you will be abroad in the Fall semester, go into the Residence Life Office in the Spring semester before you leave campus to arrange your housing for your return. The Office of Residence Life is in the basement of Miller Hall.

If you do not register for Shepherd housing prior to leaving for your study abroad experience you have two options:

1. Contact Robin Hosby, Assistant Director of Residence Life ([rhosby@shepherd.edu](mailto:rhosby@shepherd.edu)). She will email the forms to you and you will need to mail or fax the forms back to the Residence Life Office at:

Office of Residence Life – Shepherd University  
Miller Hall  
P.O. Box 5000  
Shepherdstown, WV 25443  
304/ 876-5172  
304/ 876-5150 FAX

You will also need to mail a \$100 advance room deposit to either the Office of Residence Life or the Cashier's Office:

Cashier's Office – Shepherd University  
P.O. Box 5000  
Shepherdstown, WV 25443  
800/334-5231 ext. 5284 or 304/876-5284

2. You can also consider **designating a proxy** to go through the housing lottery process in your place. For information on the process of designating a proxy, contact Robin Hosby ([rhosby@shepherd.edu](mailto:rhosby@shepherd.edu)).

Check-list:

- Complete a housing contract
- Make a \$100 advance room deposit
- **THINK AHEAD** – you are responsible for making arrangements for your return housing in a timely manner.

**Sending Transcripts back to Shepherd:**

It is important that you have your transcripts sent back to Shepherd at the completion of your study abroad experience. Please have them mailed to:

Ms. Tracy Seffers  
Registrar, Shepherd University  
301 N. King St.  
P.O. Box 5000  
Shepherdstown, WV 25443

Please note: pre-approval for study abroad credit will be determined by the student's Academic Advisor, Departmental Chair (s), and the Registrar via the Study Abroad Course Request Form. A Study Abroad Course Request Form must be completed and turned into the Registrar **BEFORE** a student leaves for his/her study abroad experience. Transfer credits **are not guaranteed** for classes that are **taken without pre-approval** on a Study Abroad Course Request Form. If you find it necessary to register for classes abroad for which you do not have pre-approval, contact your advisor IMMEDIATELY to seek to arrange transfer approval. You will need to:

- (1) Send a copy of the new course description and syllabus by email to your advisor and the Chair of the department that the course is associated with so that they can review the course and give you an initial idea of whether they would approve the course.
- (2) Upon your return, you will need to complete a Study Abroad Course Request Form and turn it into the Registrar so that the credits (**if they are approved, which is not guaranteed**) will transfer back to your Shepherd transcript.

Grades awarded by the host institution will transfer back to Shepherd along with the associated credits and will be utilized when calculating grade point averages (GPA). Transfer credit will be awarded for classes completed with a grade equivalent of a "D" or better, as was pre-approved on the student's Study Abroad Course Request form, or as the student can demonstrate retroactively with a course description and the host institution transcript. Failed classes (a grade equivalent of an "F") will receive zero credit points, but will be reflected on the student's transcript and will be used in calculating GPA.