STUDY ABROAD GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

International Programs
WOFFORD COLLEGE
Dear Study Abroad Families,

With departure only a relatively short time off, many parents have probably wondered what their students should be doing to prepare for the trip: What will it be like studying abroad? What health preparations should be done before leaving? What financial arrangements should be made? How will students fare in new, unfamiliar surroundings? Such concerns often stem from unanswered questions. What are the housing conditions like? How much money is needed abroad? May I visit? What happens if there are physical or emotional challenges onsite? As study abroad advisors who have worked with many students and families throughout the years, we understand these uncertainties. We also want to assure you that we have thought through these questions and many more as we prepare students for their experiences overseas. In this handbook, and on our website, we answer these questions and provide various resources to help your student prepare for the experience of a lifetime. We are also happy to answer any other questions you may have directly via phone or email (see Important Resources).

Families play an important role in supporting students in this educational process and in helping students prepare for and fully participate in their experience abroad. As we tell our students, remember to expect the unexpected. Ultimately, no written materials or suggestions can fully prepare anyone for what lies ahead. Much of the responsibility for the experience rests on the students and their attitude and preparation for their program. The best approach is to use the resources provided, keep an open mind and remain flexible throughout the process. We provide students with plenty of advice during our ongoing orientation series, and the programs provide them with ample written guidance. Our office and program advisors also are available to answer individual questions. Families can support their students throughout the process by encouraging and showing interest in their experience as well as being patient and supportive during the inevitable ups and downs that will occur along the way.

We look forward to working with you to support these students before, during and after their experiences abroad.

Sincerely,

Amy Lancaster
Dean of International Programs

Sara Milani
International Programs Advisor

Bence Bays
Study Abroad Advisor
We have provided blank spaces for what we feel is important information for you to have all in one location. For these details, please speak with your student. This information will be provided to them in the materials sent directly by the program after their admission.
STUDENT PREPARATION AT WOFFORD

When a Wofford student decides to study abroad, the interest, help and support of family is essential to a successful experience! We thank you for your part in making this life-changing opportunity a reality.

Wofford College considers study abroad to be an integral part of the academic experience. Therefore, all courses taken abroad on an approved program will automatically count as electives toward graduation. If students wish to have a particular course count towards a requirement, they should consult their academic advisor for major/minor requirements and the Registrar for general education requirements.

The Wofford College Financial Aid Office makes every effort to work with students to apply all appropriate aid to the approved study abroad program for semester study abroad. Students should contact the Financial Aid Office regarding their individual financial aid package.

These two features of the Wofford Study Abroad program allow a student to continue their academic program without interruptions while keeping the expenses associated with overseas study reasonable. Our office will work with each student to find the most appropriate program for their academic, linguistic and cultural goals while considering any financial concerns.

Ongoing Orientation Series:

Students are asked to attend the following pre-departure and re-entry meetings as part of Ongoing Orientation:

• Visa and Forms Workshop: This session walks students through the required pre-departure forms and materials they will receive from their program. We also give an overview of the visa process, students’ responsibilities in the process and inform them of appropriate resources.

• Study Abroad Nuts and Bolts: This session covers the basic logistical pieces of studying abroad — managing finances while abroad, contacting family and friends while overseas, what to pack, tips on air travel, etc.

• Health and Safety Orientation: This session is devoted to personal health concerns as well as general safety and security issues. Staff from the Wellness Center, discusses medical issues including medical forms, medications and care overseas, general physical as well as mental health concerns and expectations during their transition. We also discuss insurance and general safety.

• Study Abroad: What to Expect: This session addresses some of the cultural issues of study abroad and the ups and downs of adjusting to a new culture. We talk with students about what to expect in a different academic environment, what cultural values students take with them abroad and the best ways to integrate into the local culture.

• Welcome Home Dinner: Shortly after students return to campus, we invite them to join us for a special dinner co-hosted by the Dean of Students. During this fun event, we ask participants to share key memories of their experiences abroad. Select faculty and staff are invited.

• Study Abroad Photo Contest (Fall) and Two to Tell (Spring): We invite students to participate in these creative competitions as a way for them to consider how studying abroad has transformed them and how it will continue to affect them personally, academically, linguistically and eventually professionally. These contests provide an outlet for reflection and a resource for future study abroad participants. For details see the Returning Home section under menu at wofford.edu/academics/international-programs/student-resources.

• Life After Study Abroad: The Office of International Programs and staff from the Career Center will discuss ways to highlight the skills gained from the study abroad experience in job interviews and graduate school applications. We also cover opportunities for working, interning or teaching abroad after graduation.

This programming helps ensure that Wofford students are prepared for the various fundamentals of studying abroad. Alumni regularly share that they felt very prepared and supported while abroad and the college’s Ongoing Orientation program is a critical piece of that preparation.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

Applying for a Passport:

Students should apply for a passport immediately. Initial passport applications normally take 6-8 weeks, but may take longer during times of heavy travel. For instructions, visit travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/how-apply.html, which provides processing locations (only renewals can be processed by mail), applications, photo requirements, fees, expedited service options and online status updates.

Passports must be valid for at least 6 months AFTER the end date of the program. Students whose passports do not meet this requirement should follow the process for “Passport Renewal” on the website (allowable by mail). We suggest that when mailing a passport or receiving it through the mail, students use an insured and trackable service such as FedEx, DHL, UPS, or USPS Express Mail.

Students must have a valid passport before they can apply for a visa because the passport must be submitted with a visa application. Students will receive visa information from their program and can check the Consular websites to see if a student visa is required for their host country. Keep the passport timetable in mind in the overall timetable for applying. For more information on expedited passport services, see the passport website.
Finding Local Authorized Passport Agencies (iafdb.travel.state.gov):
Spartanburg Post Office  Drayton Post Office
250 S Church St  1955 Drayton Road
Spartanburg, SC 29306  Drayton, SC 29333
(864) 585-0304  (864) 472-8401
Hours: 9 a.m.-12 p.m., 1-3 p.m.  Hours: 9 a.m.-1 p.m., 2 p.m. - 3 p.m.
(Appointments are required for both - please go to usps.com/scheduler to schedule an appointment.)

Special Notes:
• Non-U.S. citizens: If you do not hold a U.S. passport, contact our office IMMEDIATELY about possible additional visa requirements.
• Driver's License Address: Passport agencies require proof of permanent address on a driver's license. Please note that this address must be current on a student's license.

Applying for a Visa:
A visa is an official authorization stamped in a student's passport permitting entry into and travel within a particular country for a specific purpose. A student visa is proof that students have the permission of the government to enter their country and stay for the allotted time (generally longer than 90 days for U.S. passport holders). While study abroad organizations will provide students with Consular information, general instructions and appropriate support letters for visa applications, students are ultimately responsible for obtaining the specific application instructions and forms from the Consulate governing their jurisdiction and checking for any further updates on the Consular website.

Applying for a visa can be a very stressful process. It involves gathering paperwork that may or may not make sense to the student and may require a personal visit to the Consulate. Please note that many of these requirements are reciprocal (based upon U.S. student visa requirements, which require all visa applicants to make a personal visit). Ultimately this process is a good introduction to the bureaucracy of the country where students will be studying for the next term.

Other important things to keep in mind in the process are as follows:
• Timing: Students should not apply too early (no more than 90 days before departure) or too late; the Consulate or program will give you a recommended application window.
• Requirements: Applicants must follow all instructions as written. Student visa applications could be rejected for failure to follow instructions (such as providing copies or passport photos that don’t meet specified measurements).
• Mail: Students with the option to mail a visa application should use a mail service with continuous tracking. We recommend DHL, FedEx or UPS if the Consulate allows those carriers. Even those going to the Consulate must provide a pre-paid, trackable express mail envelope for the return of their passport and visa. Keep copies of all documents sent to the Consulate (including the passport) and keep tracking numbers in a secure place.

Questions about visas should be directed to our office or the program after having reviewed the program's visa materials.

MAKING TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

Making Flight Arrangements:
Most students are responsible for making their own international travel arrangements and should first confirm the arrival and end dates with the program before booking their flight. As a general rule, we recommend purchasing a round trip ticket with a set return date and flying into the airport that is closest to the final destination.

Thorough research is the key to securing good airfare. Different agencies have access to different fares, and these may vary by several hundred dollars, so it is best to compare options. “Student rates” are typically not available through regular travel agencies, so check with student travel agencies for more information:
• AESU Travel: 800-638-7640; www.aesu.com
• STA Travel: 800-781-4040; www.statravel.com
• Student Universe: 800-272-9676; www.studentuniverse.com

Angie's List also suggests the following, which you may find helpful:
1. Buy on Tuesdays and Wednesdays; fly on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays, if that works with your program arrival dates.
2. Buy the ticket at least 8 weeks in advance.
3. Don’t wait for the lowest fare imaginable as it’s likely a case of “too good to be true.” Look for below average.

Recommendations for air travel once you have your ticket:
• Confirm the flight 72 hours before departure.
• Identify luggage both inside and outside with name, program address and telephone number.
• Check with the individual airline regarding baggage dimensions, weight limitations and additional fees (including checked baggage fees).
• Arrive at the airport 90 minutes before departure for a domestic flight, 120 minutes for an international flight.
• Airlines are limiting passengers to one carry-on and a personal item. See TSA travel requirements at www.tsa.gov/traveler-information.
• Be prepared for additional screening for laptop computers, cell phones and other electronic devices.
• Pack carry-on item as if the airline might misplace checked luggage.
• Pack extra underwear, a shirt, important medication, etc., in carry-on luggage. Leave prescription drugs in original containers with a copy of the prescription.
• If luggage does get lost, report it immediately and do not leave the city of arrival until filing the appropriate paperwork. Retrieving it later will be practically impossible otherwise. Do NOT relinquish an airline ticket under any circumstances.
Students can have a variety of issues to handle from home. While studying abroad does not preclude them from taking care of some things at home, pre-departure planning is still needed for many.

**Registration for the following semester:**
While students are abroad, the Office of International Programs will offer a number of services. Registration will take place on myWofford as usual. Students who are unable to register due to scheduling conflicts or travel schedule, may request that the Office of International Programs staff register on their behalf, provided that there is no hold on the student’s account.

**Bills:**
Students studying abroad should make arrangements for any bills that need to be paid in their absence through a family member or trusted friend, online bill paying or canceling the service while abroad. We remind students to investigate processes for paying such bills abroad (logins and passwords, account numbers, etc.) and the costs of doing so (e.g. Internet access, fees for late payments, etc.) well before leaving, but they may ask for parental assistance in this process. This can help with banking, financial aid and any other issues that may arise while your student is abroad.

**Power of Attorney:**
Giving a family member or trusted friend some degree of power of attorney while abroad may be a good idea. Power of attorney empowers that person to act upon the student’s behalf in case a legal document requires a signature while away. Power of attorney forms are available at any office supply store and typically require notarization of signatures.

**Property Insurance:**
Since petty theft can occur abroad just as in Spartanburg (see Safety and Crime), we recommend including expensive personal items in property insurance coverage. Check with your Homeowner’s or Renter’s insurance policies or buy additional coverage.

**Copying Important Documents:**
Before students leave to go abroad, they should clear their wallet of superfluous cards (e.g. library cards, driver’s license, etc.) and make a photocopy of the front and back of all of the cards, passport face page, student visa (if applicable) and other important documents they will be taking abroad. We recommend students leave a copy of this document at home as well as bring a copy abroad to share with program staff. If anything is stolen or misplaced, there will be copies to help with the replacement process. If given permissions to the accounts, family members also may cancel cards quickly from home if necessary.

**Family Emergencies:**
We recommend discussing what your family will do in the event of a family emergency, illness or death while your student is abroad. While these are not pleasant topics, it is better to have these conversations now. Having both communication and emergency plans in place beforehand can help reduce anxiety in an already stressful situation.

Higher communications costs (see Keeping in Touch) and time differences should be considered ahead of time. We also recommend at least one family member having a valid passport in case of an on-site emergency. In case of an emergency at home, contact the abroad program directly:
- Arcadia: 267-218-1488; after hours 215-572-2999 or 267-218-1488
- Capitol Hill Internship Program: 410-262-1574
- CIEE: 800-407-8839 or 207-553-4000, follow prompts for after hours
- DIS: 800-247-3477; after hours – 612-301-7200
- IES: 800-995-2300; after hours - 800-953-0171 (for students already on-site); 800-766-7793 (prior to U.S. departure)
- Middlebury: 802-443-5745, follow prompts for after hours
- Moscow Art Theatre: 860-443-7139; after hours NTI On-Call - 860-514-1887
- SIT: 888-272-7881 or 802-258-3292, follow prompts for after hours

**WHAT TO EXPECT ON-SITE**

**Academics:**
Students will experience a variety of academic settings abroad. Most foreign university systems require a higher level of independent learning and less access to faculty and peer tutoring. While the study abroad programs will counterbalance such differences through their own courses, academic advising, etc., students should be prepared to keep up with their own reading lists and assignments as well as seek assistance when questions arise. Study abroad credits will transfer as Wofford general elective credit with grades figuring into the Wofford cumulative GPA. Students may also seek approval for courses to count towards their major coursework through individual departments.

**Housing:**
Students submit preferences for housing placements and should do so in a timely and thoughtful manner. Study abroad housing is typical of local student housing and is fully-vetted by our study abroad partners. It is important that students keep an open mind about their living situation without expecting it to replicate university housing in the U.S. Programs often offer a variety of housing options, but some may be on a first-come, first-served basis, so students should pay program deposits and submit housing preferences as soon as possible. Space can also be at a premium, particularly in urban areas, so rooms may be smaller than U.S. spaces. Buildings also tend to be older and may or may not have Internet connections (see Keeping in Touch). Please refer to program materials for specific housing details, but encourage your student to be open to the differences and embrace the experience.
Managing Student Finances

Budgeting for Your Student While Abroad

It is important that students budget appropriately to cover their personal expenses during their time abroad. They will need money for books, entertainment, toiletries, gifts, local transportation and travel. We provide program Budget Sheets at wofford.studioabroad.com/?go=simplesearch (search for a program by name or city). See Budget Sheets in the grid in the middle of the page. We encourage students to download these budgets into Excel and tailor them to their specific housing, travel and course plans because some programs have different fees in these categories. These budgets include the Wofford 15% administrative fee and are available to review with the Office of Financial Aid with regard to individual financial aid packages and estimated on-site, non-billable expenses.

Study Abroad program deposits are paid directly to the program sponsor. All other charges marked billable on the program Budget Sheets are billed through the Wofford Business Office. Once the Business Office receives a program bill from CIEE, DIS, IES, SIT, etc., a Wofford College bill is posted to the student’s MyWofford account during the regular billing cycle (see important dates). It is important to note that fees are not final until ALL charges have been received from the study abroad program. Final charges for a selected housing option or additional course fees may not be received until several weeks after the semester has begun, once schedules and housing are final. Any additional changes will result in a revised Wofford College bill. For further budget information, please visit wofford.edu/academics/international-programs/student-resources/preparing-for-departure/finances.

TuitionPay Payment Plan: Students who participate in the TuitionPay payment plan can continue making their regularly scheduled payments to TuitionPay. Once the bill has been received from Wofford, necessary adjustments can be made to the plan to accommodate the program costs whether by increasing or decreasing monthly payments.

Interim and additional tuition fees: Students whose semester programs overlap at all with Interim may use their Interim tuition fees and/or scholarships toward their study abroad costs. Students who study abroad during the semester but return for Interim at Wofford will have the costs for Interim added to their invoice. Some Interim projects may also have additional fees for course materials and all travel/study Interims have additional fees and deadlines, so students should plan accordingly.

Payment Requirements

- All payments must be received by the due date noted on the Wofford invoice.
- Payments are not remitted to the program until fees have been paid in full.
- Failure to submit payments by the deadline will result in no academic credit awarded for the program.

Financial Aid/Scholarships/Grants/Awards

- Aid packages are credited as usual toward billable fees for which Wofford invoices. The Office of Financial Aid uses the Budget Sheets to determine exact amounts, so students must alert financial aid to any deviations from the standard figures provided.
- Any aid that results in an overage will be refunded and mailed to the student’s home address upon finalization of financial aid and registration (around mid-semester).
- Scholarship awards directly from the program are reflected as a deduction in the program tuition amount and are not shown separately as a credit.
- Wofford aid packages are portable for a semester abroad. Only federal, state, and outside scholarships are portable for a second semester abroad.

Outside Scholarships

Many Wofford programs also offer merit-based financial aid to qualified students. Please consult the study abroad program’s website for details about eligibility, deadlines and requirements.

Pre-departure Financial Planning

Budgeting for On-Site Expenses:

Fluctuations in currency exchange rates and inflation must be considered in preparing a budget for on-site expenses (those not included in the billed fee). In general, the cost of living as a student abroad is comparable to the U.S. However, the exchange rate, independent travel and the impulse to splurge make careful budgeting imperative.

Planning Access to Funds Abroad:

Students should carefully review individual program materials for specific advice on managing their finances from abroad. Before leaving they should make sure that they understand how they will access money abroad for daily needs as well as in emergencies. As a general rule, we recommend students have more than one way of accessing money (see below).

Getting Local Currency Beforehand:

If possible students may wish to bring some host country currency with them in cash when leaving the U.S. This will avoid the need to exchange money upon arrival when they are exhausted from travel. Most major banks can obtain foreign currency, but this should be verified with individual banks well in advance because it sometimes takes a while to order foreign currency. Students should have enough to cover bus/taxi fare, snacks, a phone call, etc., during the first couple of days. We recommend about $50 U.S., but students should check with individual programs for further advice on this. Currency exchange rates are online at www.xe.com/. We recommend students obtain small denominations (the foreign equivalent of $20 or $10 bills).

Commuting and Local Transportation:

Students should be aware that some commuting between their housing and classes is inevitable. Students living in large cities may have commutes as long as an hour one way. Commuting can be part of urban living or securing a host that meet a student’s varied preferences, so students should think of it as part of their cultural experience. Students who have studied abroad in the past have learned to use that time to their advantage: to do homework, read for pleasure or just unwind from a busy day.

Budgeting for On-Site Expenses:

- Fluctuations in currency exchange rates and inflation must be considered in preparing a budget for on-site expenses.
- It is important to consider budgeting strategies to cover personal expenses.

Outside Scholarships:

- Many Wofford programs offer merit-based financial aid.
- Students should consult the study abroad program’s website for details.

Pre-departure Financial Planning:

- Students should prepare a budget for on-site expenses.
- Fluctuations in currency exchange rates and inflation must be considered.

Getting Local Currency Beforehand:

- Students may consider bringing host country currency.
- Currency exchange rates are available online.
Accessing Money While Abroad

Students will most likely find themselves using cash while abroad more than they are used to here in the U.S. Many small stores, restaurants and markets do not accept debit or credit cards. A good way to manage this is to withdraw a lump sum of cash from an ATM every few days or once a week to avoid incurring fees for multiple transactions, storing some funds in a safe place and then only carrying what is needed for each day in your wallet.

Automated Teller Machines (ATMs):
Throughout the world ATMs are the standard for American travelers who wish to access money. An ATM withdrawal takes U.S. dollars directly from a bank account at home and dispenses that country's cash. ATMs tend to get the best exchange rate, charge no exchange commission and are available 24/7. However, most charge a withdrawal fee in addition to a percentage for foreign currency. Before leaving the U.S. students should:

- Let the bank know you will be abroad with general dates and destinations.
- Check with the local bank regarding any fees or withdrawal restrictions (e.g. only 5 free withdrawals per month) for withdrawing money abroad. Most banks have charges, so it is important to figure this into financial planning. Also check to see if the bank has any partner banks abroad where such fees are waived.
- Most foreign ATMs require a four-digit Personal Identification Number (PIN) that does not begin with a zero. Also, know the personal identification number (PIN) numerically. Since keypads abroad may have only numbers, it may not be an option to remember a PIN number by letters.
- Make sure the ATM card is attached to a checking account, not a savings account. ATM machines overseas rarely give the choice of accessing savings and typically pull directly from a checking account.
- Make sure the card won’t expire before the program ends.
- Ask the local bank how much can be withdrawn in a 24-hour period. Note that many foreign ATMs won’t allow withdrawing as much as the home bank’s daily limit, forcing students to make further withdrawals and incurring further fees.
- Consider giving a family member access to their account to deposit money.

ATMs versus Debit Cards:
Remember there is a difference between an ATM card and a debit card. We recommend using an ATM card instead of a debit card abroad because an ATM card requires a PIN number for all transactions and cannot be used for store purchases, protecting students if the card is lost or stolen. Students may use a debit card to make purchases directly. Credit cards also have limits on customer liability in the case of a stolen card. Debit cards often do not.

Credit Cards:
Credit cards are generally accepted in most countries (specifically at hotels, shops, travel agencies, and so on), although more and more merchants are establishing a minimum purchase and some require cards have a microchip for security reasons. We strongly recommend students take both a credit card and an ATM or debit card abroad (keeping them in separate places or in a money belt). Students don’t have to carry them at all times, but it is important to have various ways to access funds while abroad. Visa and MasterCard are the most widely accepted credit cards. American Express is less commonly accepted, but can be popular with travelers for its extra services. When using a credit card abroad, students should:

- Notify the credit card company of travel plans, including general dates and the countries of destination. Credit card companies are even more avid about tracking “abnormal use” activity than banks and may deny payment or freeze the account if they can’t reach the cardholder to confirm the charges abroad are legitimate.
- Check with the credit card company regarding fees for international purchases. Most companies charge fees (around 3%) for overseas transactions. While it is true that plastic transactions are processed at a great exchange rate, these fees can add up. Often these fees don’t appear until the end of the billing cycle, so cardholders should generally track them themselves.
- Keep in mind that while they can use credit cards at a bank abroad to withdraw cash advances, we strongly recommend doing so only in emergencies. Transaction fees can be high and interest charges start from the day the transaction is made (not the bill date).

Travelers Checks:
Travelers checks are the only form of money that is replaceable if it is lost or stolen. Students may wish to purchase $100-$200 in travelers checks in case of emergencies. Since such checks often incur a purchase fee, an exchange fee, and are not accepted at all banks or stores, we recommend them only for emergencies. To purchase travelers checks, use a major company (American Express, AAA or Visa) and shop around for rates. American Express doesn’t charge an exchange fee at their offices abroad and will cash personal checks for members. We recommend purchasing checks in U.S. dollars to avoid exchange fees if checks are not used abroad.

Keep Copies of your Documents:
Don’t forget to have your student make copies of the front and backs of all bank cards and leave a copy at home in case of emergencies!

Budgeting Your Money

Beyond the program fee and what it includes, how much money students spend on-site is largely a matter of personal preferences. Our office creates budget sheets for each program, including estimated on-site expenses (see Budgeting for Your Student While Abroad). Most students who have studied abroad recommend the following:
• Create a preliminary budget for personal expenditures: Starting with the Wofford budget sheet, students should make sure they understand exactly what is included and is not included in the program fee and estimate on-site expenses. We recommend that students download the budget to Microsoft Excel and tailor it to their housing, travel and immunization requirements, etc. as well as check with past participants on how to best avoid or plan for major on-site costs.

• Plan for communication: Students should research costs involved for phone, Internet and email access.

• Consider discretionary expenses: Students should plan discretionary expenses such as travel, entertainment, laundry, etc. Most programs provide an estimate of “personal expenses,” but students should clarify with the program and/or past participants what this really covers. As a general rule it does not typically include the costs of extensive travel (or shopping), so students should plan accordingly based on plans and current habits.

• Consider personal travel expenses: Students should purchase a guidebook for the host country to help figure out the costs of traveling on weekends and for longer breaks. It will list costs for accommodations; train, plane and bus tickets; entrance fees and other figures to help students come up with rough travel estimates.

• Some things are more expensive! Expect some items to be much more expensive than in the U.S.—don’t assume cheaper local alternatives will always be available. Items that tend to be heavily taxed (and thus more expensive) are consumer items imported from the U.S. (food, books in English, jeans, etc.), “luxury” items, such as electronics, and clothing. Specifics will vary greatly from country to country. Students should check with the program or past participants for further specifics.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Telephone Access Abroad

Telephone calls abroad can be considerably more expensive than in the U.S. Most students use cell phones abroad for local calls and texts and online VOIP programs for calls home (see below). We recommend a diverse communication plan for all study abroad students. Such a plan should include instant messaging, text messaging, blog pages, social media, Skype or FaceTime, as well as phone options. Students should defer to program information on phone and Internet access as well as talk with past participants for recommendations.

Cell Phones:

Some programs provide/encourage/require cell phones (check with your student), while others do not. Most cell phone rates abroad are higher than plans in the U.S., especially for roaming charges and data access. Research is critical in finding what best works for you and your student. There are various options for getting cell service abroad:

• Purchase a cheap phone abroad: Many students find buying a cheap pay-as-you-go cell phone the easiest and cheapest option abroad. These phones cannot be used back in the U.S., but are budget friendly and help manage costs along the way. Incoming calls and texts do not subtract from plan minutes.

• Purchase an international SIM card: There are websites where students are able to buy prepaid SIM cards for foreign countries. These are for use with unlocked smartphones. This is a good option for students who would like to use a smart phone or other SIM card compatible phones while abroad instead of a prepaid throw away phone. Such phones often need to be unlocked, so thorough research with your current phone provider is necessary before going abroad.

In addition to cell phone service, there are free mobile apps such as Viber, GroupMe or WhatsApp, etc. which allow users to send free text messages and place free phone calls via Wi-Fi. It is best to download and test these apps before going abroad. Students and families also can make international calls through the Internet via Skype, FaceTime or similar Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) apps. Calls are typically free between computers or comparable phones, but can be set up for calls to a landline as well (for a fee). Remember these require a high-speed Internet connection, do not work with all phone systems (e.g. public phones) and may involve fees (call charges, web cameras, etc.). Students should also keep in mind the privacy of their Internet access abroad (e.g. a student computer lab or Internet café) and any potential cost involved, as explained in their program materials.

Time Differences

Please keep in mind the time differences abroad, which can be quite significant! We have provided a few samples below, but for specific times see www.worldtimeserver.com:

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<tr>
<th>Time Zone</th>
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<tr>
<td>U.S. - Eastern Std. Time</td>
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<td>U.S. - Eastern Std. Time</td>
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<td>9 -10 p.m. Monday</td>
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<td>U.S. - Eastern Std. Time</td>
<td>China</td>
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<td>5 p.m. Monday</td>
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Remember some countries do not follow daylight savings time on the same schedule or at all, so check program information for more specifics.

Mail and Email

Check with your student as to where mail should be sent – i.e. homestay, apartment or school. Remember that not all addresses can receive packages, and there are often additional customs charges for the person accepting the package, sometimes costing more than the contents...
of the package. Check with the carrier regarding any tax or customs charges, since those will be passed on to the student. Also note that any mail received after the program ends will not be forwarded or returned to the sender, so clarify the timing of arrival.

Most programs provide students with Internet access, but access may vary. Check with your student as to their specific Internet access and any potential costs involved. Those taking laptops abroad should also consider:

- **Limited technical services**: Because of the distance and different systems, Wofford IT is not able to troubleshoot off-site technical problems. Students should seek such help with on-site staff or computer centers.
- **Get it insured!** Make sure laptops are insured under property insurance. If students do not have such insurance, we recommend purchasing it and taking a safety lock.

**Communicating Too Much**

We ask students and families to consider how much time they spend on the phone or email with friends and family at home. While keeping in touch and sharing all of their exciting adventures is important, we find that students who spend all of their time on their cell phone, social media, email, etc., miss out on many of the important opportunities offered through study abroad. Keeping their attentions focused back home hinders integration into another culture. Students may wish to create blogs or online journals to keep family and friends informed about their experience abroad. Research shows students who interact more with the local culture get more out of their experience, so encourage your student to engage in their new environment! Our office also facilitates a blog every semester – follow current students’ adventures at blogs.wofford.edu/international-programs/.

**When to Visit**

Family and friends are advised to visit students according to the program guidelines. While most programs do allow visitors during the academic term (please note SIT does not), visits should coincide with school breaks or holidays. Students should not be expected to miss class and will be penalized academically for doing so. We recommend visiting later in the semester, when the student is well adjusted to the local environment and can be an adept tour guide. It is a good idea that at least one family member secure a passport in case of an emergency. Other family members should remember to apply for passports well ahead of any visits. Passport processing typically takes 6-8 weeks (see Travel Documents).

**FAMILY SUPPORT AND INVOLVEMENT**

We encourage families to support their students as they prepare for the experience overseas and especially when they return. While technology is making it easier for families to stay in touch, this contact also makes it more difficult for the student to focus on adapting to their new environment. We encourage students to explore the local culture, and constant contact with family and friends may interfere with this process.

From the beginning, the Office of International Programs encourages students to take responsibility for their study abroad experience. From selecting a program to planning coursework, from applying for a passport to completing the visa application, students should start developing the necessary skills to cope with exactly the kinds of situations that will arise while they are overseas. It is wonderful to have families who encourage and support students, but the ultimate responsibility for fulfilling these requirements must rest with each student.

**PREPARING FOR HEALTH & SAFETY ISSUES**

The health and safety of our students abroad is our priority. We work with programs that are leaders in the field of health, safety and incident management and have reliable, experienced on-site staff who are available 24/7. Wofford also requires that all students be covered by a comprehensive health and emergency insurance policy. Programs require students to complete a medical form, addressing medical and accessibility needs in both pre-departure and on-site advising. Lastly, we dedicate one of our pre-departure orientations to health and safety to discuss potential issues students could face abroad.

**Wofford International Health Insurance**

Wofford requires that all students be covered under international health insurance. Participants in CIEE, IES and SIT. All other students will be automatically enrolled in the CISI World Class Coverage Plan. CISI has an established reputation and an excellent track record in handling claims in every language. Wofford coverage highlights are below. For the full plan visit wofford.edu/Wofford.edu/Documents/Academics/OIP/CISI-Brochure-2019-2020.pdf.

Wofford coverage provides for:

- Accident medical/sickness
- Prescription drugs
- Mental and nervous benefit
- Emergency medical reunion for family members
- Emergency medical and security evacuation
- Repatriation of mortal remains
- Accidental death & dismemberment
- Some coverage for pre-existing conditions
Wofford coverage DOES NOT provide for:
• Preventative medicines and routine physicals or immunizations
• Injuries resulting from covered person under the influence of alcohol
• Dental work, unless necessitated by an injury
• Expenses incurred within the covered person’s home country
• Self-inflicted injuries, suicide or attempted suicide
• Injuries from participation in professional sports, scuba diving, hang gliding, parachuting, parasailing or bungee jumping
• Elective or cosmetic surgery (unless necessitated by a covered injury)
• Loss due to war, rebellion, military uprising, etc.

CISI Travel and Emergency Services
Under the CISI plan Wofford students have access to the Team Assist Plan. Their multi-lingual, 24/7 call center offers access to the following services:
• 24-Hour emergency and medical assistance and evacuation assistance
• Coordination of hospital payment guarantees and emergency travel
• Emergency message referrals and assistance with emergency cash
• Lost/delayed luggage tracing and official document replacement
• Referrals to legal assistance and assistance with securing bail

Should you have additional questions or need a letter for your current insurance company, please contact the Office of International Programs.

Students on CIEE, IES and SIT Programs:
Students on CIEE, IES and SIT programs are covered through the program insurance plans, not the Wofford plan. These programs have specifically chosen a health and accident plan required for all students on their programs, and our office has deemed those plans equivalent to Wofford coverage. Please contact the Office of International Programs for more information.

Medications and Immunizations

Prescription Drugs:
Students taking any type of medicine or prescription drug while abroad should consult their program as well as their physician prior to departure regarding any additional requirements or restrictions on taking medication abroad. Students should consult their doctor about the possibility of taking their full regimen and extra medication with them abroad (if possible). If they cannot take their full regimen with them, students must see a local physician to get further refills while abroad. U.S. prescriptions cannot be filled abroad. Students also need to make certain that their medications are both available and legal in their host country. Students should talk with their health care provider about this and be sure to leave plenty of time for such research.

Students taking prescription medication abroad should bring a letter from their doctor explaining the specific medication (in generic terms) and why it is prescribed. This documentation will help them through any questions they may get in customs, as well as obtaining any further prescriptions from local doctors abroad. Do not mail medicine. It can be held up in customs and a prescription from a local doctor must be shown to pick it up. Always carry prescription drugs in the original container with a label showing your name, the generic name and dosage and instructions for the drug.

Students prone to colds, strep, sinus problems, etc. also are encouraged to come prepared with medications (prescription and over-the-counter) that work well for them. It saves time and money to be prepared. Also, students who wear glasses or contact lenses should take their prescription abroad and carry a spare pair with them. We encourage contact lens wearers to bring contact solution with them if needed as it can be quite expensive overseas.

Vaccinations:
We strongly recommend that students speak directly with a health care professional – either their own doctor or someone at a travel center – about vaccinations and immunizations. The Center for Disease Control (http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/) provides regional overviews, but healthcare professionals can provide guidance regarding what is required vs. recommended for specific destinations. For local travel immunization specialists, contact a local travel clinic or Passport Health (www.passporthealthusa.com).

Please note that travel clinic services are rarely reimbursed under insurance plans. Be prepared to pay for services at the time they are rendered and file a claim with health insurance afterwards, if possible. Please note that students also need to plan ahead and allow enough time for immunizations which may require a series of 2 to 3 shots.

State Department Warnings & Onsite Safety

Overseas study programs recognize their responsibility to do their utmost to provide a secure and unthreatening environment in which your student can safely live and learn. Responsible institutions like Wofford work only with programs with track records of responsible monitoring of health, safety, and security issues. Our partners are regularly in contact with our staff to keep us informed of any concerns, as well as to update us on their emergency procedures. If you have any questions or concerns about safety procedures, please review the following websites, which include emergency contacts for the organizations:

• Arcadia: http://studyabroad.arcadia.edu/before-after-you-go/health-safety/
• Capitol Hill Internship Program: chipdc.org/contact
• CIEE: www.ciee.org/study-abroad/parents/emergencies
• DIS: http://disabroad.org/parents/dis-support-and-resources-for-your-student/
• IES: www.iesabroad.org/study-abroad/parents/safety
• Middlebury: www.middlebury.edu/study-abroad/health/emergencies
• SIT: https://studyabroad.sit.edu/health-safety-and-well-being/
Program staff work with local police and U.S. consular personnel and local university officials in establishing practical and prudent security measures. Students are briefed about such places during orientation and reminded at times of heightened political tension to be security conscious in their daily activities.

The U.S. government monitors the political conditions in every country around the world. The State Department's most recent “Worldwide Caution” update is available at https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html. To provide some context, within the past 10 years similar worldwide cautions were issued every 3-6 months, depending on current events. Note the term "Caution" should not be confused with a “Warning,” the State Department's strongest category. Travel advisories, country fact sheets, packing advice, etc., can be found under “Learn about your destination” on the State Department’s website for U.S. travelers at https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html.

Crime and Theft Abroad

 Petty crime, such as pick-pocketing, can be common abroad. Students will receive pre-departure information and on-site advising on safety issues through the program and should pay close attention to both. We also will discuss this in our Health & Safety orientation. On-site orientations and materials will include site-specific recommendations on safe modes of transport, when students may or may not travel to certain areas, advice on where to store cash and how/when to carry valuables (e.g. never in a back pocket!). Students will be reminded to pay attention to their surroundings and to make efforts to blend in with the local population. Those who appear to be distracted and who may be flaunting iPhones, expensive jewelry or cameras are presumed to be wealthy tourists and local population. Those who appear to be distracted and who may be flaunting iPhones, expensive jewelry or cameras are presumed to be wealthy tourists and may be targeted. Awareness in crowded areas and on public transportation, not necessarily realistic, and students focus more on visible culture (e.g. food, scenery, music) and not the more complex and deeper aspects of the host culture.

“The people here are so wonderful. I’m having a great time!”

“There are so many exciting things to do, and the nightlife is amazing!”

PREPARING FOR TRANSITION

 Though all the clichés associated with the study abroad experience usually end up being true — “amazing,” “exhilarating” even “life-changing” — the experience can also be difficult, jarring students from the norms to which they are accustomed. Intercultural expert Janet M. Bennett points out that culture shock is actually a subcategory of transition shock. She defines transition shock as “a state of loss and disorientation precipitated by a change in one’s familiar environment that requires adjustment” (Source: Bennett, Milton. Basic Concepts in Intercultural Communications). Such transitions to a loss of predictability require adjustment. Seeing culture shock as another transition helps understand it in the larger context. Understanding it as a known experience can help in its recognition as well as adaptation to it. It is also important to note that transitions manifest differently in each individual and depend upon an individual’s personality and coping skills. A student’s prior experience with transition and/or living abroad, host language ability, difference from the host culture, degree of cultural immersion and pre-arrival expectations also affect their reaction to culture shock. Research has shown general patterns of emotional highs and lows experienced by those living abroad. These phases often vary in duration and severity, but we provide them to give parents some context of what students may go through abroad as well as what you might hear in each stage.

• Euphoria – The first days or weeks abroad are often characterized by the excitement of sensory overload. Often called the “honeymoon stage,” everything seems new and intriguing, and students are eager to explore it all. While it can be a pleasant phase, interpretations aren’t necessarily realistic, and students focus more on visible culture (e.g. food, scenery, music) and not the more complex and deeper aspects of the host culture.

“Everyone here always takes so long to complete something that could be accomplished much quicker. They are really inefficient.”

“I am so tired of people always breaking in front of me in line. Why can’t they just respect that I was here first and wait their turn like at home?”

• Irritability & Hostility – Once the novelty of the “new” wears off and differences between native and host cultures seem more pronounced, a sense of alienation can set in. Curiosity and enthusiasm turn into frustration, negativity toward local culture, glorification of home culture, exaggerated responses to minor problems, withdrawal and/or depression can occur. This phase typically occurs twice — as students first contend with more surface differences (different words, different food, commuting, etc.) — and later as students are challenged with deeper differences in values and beliefs. Luckily, this means the adjustment phase also occurs twice, and students learn a lot about themselves in the process.

“Some days I’m frustrated with my language skills, but then I’ll have a conversation where I understand everything and see how far I’ve come.”

“I can’t believe I’m eating raw fish. I couldn’t stomach it when I first came.”

• Gradual Adjustment – With time, students begin to orient themselves to a different set of cultural practices and feel increasingly comfortable and competent in their new surroundings. These feelings occur more often than the times students feel frustrated or out of place. Homesickness can still be an issue, but students are interacting with locals more effectively and are increasingly more self-confident in doing so. Their sense of humor — which may have been lying dormant — will reemerge.

“Some days I’m frustrated with my language skills, but then I’ll have a conversation where I understand everything and see how far I’ve come.”

“I can’t believe I’m eating raw fish. I couldn’t stomach it when I first came.”
• **Cultural Adaptation** – At this stage students are much more confident in their ability to communicate and navigate the host culture. They have a deeper understanding of the influence culture plays in daily interactions and have acquired considerable cultural knowledge – both about their host culture and their own. They are integrating new cultural norms and customs into their own cultural background.

“It doesn’t bother me anymore when people stare at me. I, too, would be curious.”

“I feel like when I return home a part of me will remain here.”

• **Re-entry or Reverse Culture Shock** – Upon returning home, students face integrating their abroad experience with life in the United States, where they might feel disoriented, out of place, or changed by their experience in a way that makes relating to family and friends difficult. “Home” can also have a difficult time competing with the thrill of the continuous adventure and discovery of study abroad. This is often an unexpected phase and can be more difficult than initial culture shock abroad. See the 12 Tips for Welcoming Home Returnees for help with this stage.

“My culture shock in England passed quickly. The same was not true when I returned to the U.S. There were so many things I had to get used to again.”

“Some of my friends asked the customary, ‘How was Spain?’ and didn’t ask anything else. They really didn’t care… or at least that’s how I felt. I dropped some relationships because I feel like I can’t relate to them and vice versa.”


We ask that parents keep these stages in mind when getting a worrisome email or phone call. While we cannot prevent these emotions, it is helpful to know what to expect as well as to recognize that some issues abroad may be exaggerated by culture shock. The Emotional Rollercoaster diagram helps show these stages in the larger continuum.

It is also important to remember our role in this process: to offer support, encouragement and a sympathetic ear. As tempting as it may be to “fix” such situations, we also need to remind ourselves that these stages are part of the process of adaptation and moving towards more intercultural awareness. There is a positive side to culture shock: Students examine their own flexibility and adaptability and try out new coping skills. They are forced to learn more about their host culture as well as their own values and cultural beliefs. The good news and bad news is that there is always another stage after this one, each bringing new challenges and skills along with it.

The following Emotional Rollercoaster diagram shows how this transition process does not end when the student returns home. Students further process their experiences abroad and bring them into their home environment. It takes returning home to realize how much students have changed, and this takes some time to process.

While some degree of culture shock is inevitable, we recommend students do the following to help prepare for such issues before departure:

• **Research the host country.** Read up on the host country’s history, politics, religion, art and natural resources. Read novels and watch movies from the host country for insights into nuances of humor and social norms, which can be very different from in the U.S.

• **Talk to students who studied in the same region.** Study abroad alumni are a great resource on social norms, unspoken rules and idiosyncrasies of the host culture.

• **Read the materials provided by the program.** It can be tempting to skip these, but experience has shown the importance of paying close attention to them. They are based on the input of students and insights of on-site staff.

• **Keep an open mind.** While pre-departure “research” is essential, students should still be ready for surprises. No matter how much they think they know about the host country, not everything is going to match up to their expectations. Keeping preconceptions flexible is key to adjusting well to new cultures and ideas!

Encouraging students to follow this advice and even joining in the process (sit down with them to watch a movie or dig up any old contacts with experience in their host country) is a good way to offer support as they prepare to go abroad. Parents, too, may learn more about the host culture in the process. Parents, try to remember these stages during a worrying call or email home. Many such issues are simply a cultural “bump” along the way, which students will soon move past and onto the next adventure. Encourage them to talk to on-site staff, professors or host parents who can offer ways to learn from such incidents.
RETURNING HOME

12 tips for Welcoming Your Student Home

Below are some additional tips to help your student readjust to their home environment.

1. Understand that “reverse culture shock” is a real possibility and recognize its symptoms so you can offer appropriate support.

2. Realize that returning home is often not a predictable process and can be more stressful than anyone anticipates. Be prepared to offer support as your student anticipates coming home and especially after his or her return.

3. Understand that most returnees are, in some ways, different than they were before they left home. They may initially seem to be “strangers.” It is hard to know what their experiences have meant to them and how they have changed. It may be necessary to “renegotiate” your relationship with returnees. Your history together will provide a basis for this process.

4. Be aware of your own expectations of the returnee. You may wish that they would just “fit back in,” but it is more helpful if you avoid forcing them into old roles. Allow them space and time to readjust and reconnect.

5. Be conscious of all those things that have changed at home. Help returnees to understand what has taken place both in the society and among friends and family. Even if they have heard about these events, the impact at home may not have been obvious. They can even tell you how events at home looked from their overseas location.

6. Avoid criticism, sarcasm or mockery for seemingly odd patterns of behavior, speech or new attitudes.

7. Create opportunities for returnees to express their opinions, tell their stories and show their pictures. Listen carefully and try to understand the significance of their experiences. Seek to know what is important to them.

8. Acknowledge that all returnees experience some sense of loss. As strange as it may seem to others, returnees often grieve for what they have left behind. They may be missing overseas friends, a stimulating environment, the feeling of being special, experiencing greater freedoms or responsibilities or special privileges.

9. Encourage the returnee to maintain personal and professional contacts with friends in the former host country. They will regret it if they do not.

10. Offer to mark and celebrate the reentry for the returnees and those who stayed at home. Discuss their preferences and be careful of “surprises.”

11. Expect some critical comparisons of culture and lifestyle. Keeping your responses neutral will increase your chances of learning something important about the returnee and how their worldview has changed. Don’t take their comments personally.

12. Contact someone who has successfully gone through the experience of returning home. Talking with them may help everyone through the re-adaptation process.

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