

## **BEING THERE**

- Traveling Safely and Settling In**
- Establishing and Maintaining International Communications**
- Money & Banking**
- Maintaining Health & Nutrition**
- Obeying the Law, Staying Safe, and Coping with Emergencies Abroad**
- Exploring Cultural Differences**

### Tips for Securing Valuables During Travel

**Packing:** Don't carry everything in one place! Never pack essential documents, medicine--anything you could not do without--in your checked luggage. Put them in your carry-on bag.

**Cash:** Never carry large amounts of cash. American Express travelers checks are a good idea. Have three lists of checks. Leave one at home. Carry one list with your checks and carry one list separately from your checks. Keep two lists up-to-date as you cash checks. Keep the receipts for your checks separate from your travelers checks. For the small amount of cash you need, try using a necklace pouch or a money belt.

**Credit/ATM Cards:** Take only the cards you will use on the trip. Keep separate a list of, cards, numbers, and emergency replacement procedures. Some cards are less likely to be accepted abroad, so try to find this out in advance from your bank, so that you know that the card you plan to use will be accepted.

**Insurance:** Since it may be necessary to contact your insurance agent(s) while abroad, keep all names and phone numbers, as well as your policy number(s), with you in a safe place.

**Luggage:** Mark all luggage, inside and out, with your name and address. If you have an itinerary, put a copy inside each bag. Keep a list of what is in each bag and carry the list with your other documents. Mark your bags in some distinctive way, so they are easily found. Count your pieces of luggage each time you move! Try to travel light, it's safer and less cumbersome!

**Medicines:** Take all you need for the trip. Take copies of your prescriptions, with the generic names of the drugs. Keep medicines in original drugstore containers. Take extra glasses and your lenses prescription with you. Check the country's regulations on prescription drugs (use, purchase, refills, etc) before you leave.

**Passport:** Carry with you--separate from your passport--two extra passport pictures, passport number, date and place issued, and a certified-not photocopied-copy (not the

original) of your birth certificate or an expired passport. If your passport is lost, report to local police, get written confirmation of the police report and take the above documents to the nearest United States Consulate to apply for a new passport.

**Ticket:** Make a copy of your ticket or list your ticket number, including all flights, and the name and address of the issuing agency, and keep this list separate from your ticket.

### Immigration and Customs Inspections

As you enter any country from another country via a long-distance international flight (or other means) you will almost always have to show your passport and any required visas and proof of immunizations. This usually occurs just after you have left the plane and entered the airport but before you have your luggage. Remember that admission to the country is entirely at the discretion of the immigration officer. It is wise to be polite and to dress neatly. The immigration officer, who determines the length of stay to be authorized and stamped into your passport, will normally ask you about the purpose of your visit and how long you plan to remain in the country. All of this can be unnerving at times, but it is nevertheless generally routine and always required.

After your passport has been stamped and you have collected your luggage, you must pass through a customs inspection. You will probably receive a customs declaration form to be filled out on your plane (or train). This will be examined by customs officials when they look at your luggage. Your bags may be very carefully examined, and you may be detained or asked to pay duties if there are any irregularities or violations of customs regulations. You may also be waved through with no special attention whatsoever. Note: Do not 'joke' about 'bombs' or smuggled items!

Most major airports and train stations offer banking services. If you have not brought with you any local currency, it is possible to purchase some with U.S. dollars, other foreign currency, or travelers checks. This is often a good idea to get you through the first week. Do not change too much, as exchange rates at airports and train stations are usually much higher than at local banks. Change only enough to cover local transportation and meals.

### Duties and Tariffs

Thinking ahead to your return to the U.S., you will want to register any electronic items you plan to take with you. These include, but are not limited to, cameras, CD or MP3 players, radios, personal computers, and electronic dictionaries. Be particularly aware of new and foreign-made items you might take with you. By registering these items with U.S. Customs before you leave, you avoid being questioned about whether or not they are subject to duties when you return. Contact the U.S. Customs Office in advance of your departure for further information and obtain a copy of their publication, "Know Before You Go" (also available by at P.O. Box 7404, Washington, DC 20044). You should also obtain and save sales slips for any major purchases you make overseas and intend to take home.

**Returning to the U.S.:** According to the Customs Procedural Reform and Simplification Act of 1984, United States residents are permitted to bring into the US \$400 worth of

foreign souvenirs and gifts duty free: You will be assessed on import duty based on 10% of the fair market value for anything in the \$400 to \$1400 range. Import duty varies according to the nature of the articles when you go over \$1400. All articles acquired abroad and in your possession at the time of your return to the United States must be declared to Customs officials, either orally (if you do not exceed the \$400 limit) or in writing. Declaration forms will be distributed during your flight back into the U.S.

Personal belongings of U.S. origin taken abroad may be sent back by mail duty-free if, on the outside wrapper, it is stated that the articles were taken out of the US as personal effects and are being returned without having been repaired or altered while abroad ("American Goods Returned"). Should you need assistance on matters relating to U.S. Customs while abroad, customs representatives are available in the American Embassies.

### Jet Lag

Try to relax and save energy during your long flights. You have probably heard of jet lag, which is as much a physical as a psychological phenomenon. Your body, through long years of habit, has become acclimatized to functioning in accordance with its own physiological clock based on a particular daily cycle. When you arrive at your study abroad location, that clock is going to be automatically out of sync with the local cycle because of the time difference. If you are arriving in Luxembourg at noon, for example, your body, which is still functioning in accordance with the cycle to which it was accustomed in the eastern standard time zone, will be telling you that it is just about time to be waking up, while the sun outside your aircraft window will be telling you that the day is half over.

It will take your body a few days to adjust, depending on the length of your flight and time-zones crossed (some bodies take longer than others), during which time you can expect to feel quite tired and run down. This fatigue in conjunction with the strange surroundings, customs, and language may produce a temporary sense of depression and "homesickness." Be prepared for that during the first couple of days: it is a perfectly normal reaction.

### Orientation

After clearing customs arrival, the next step is getting to your program site. This may have to be done on your own, according to directions and modes of transport suggested by your program sponsor, or together with your program group, depending on pre-arrangements. Following this transit you are likely to be given at least a short general orientation to living and learning in this new environment by your host institution or program sponsor. Some orientation programs are very elaborate, involving such things as language testing, local excursions and sight-seeing, lectures and talks on history and customs, counsel on culture shock, host family introductions, and the like. Others are pretty minimal, assuming you have done your homework in advance of arrival, and will be able to learn what you need to know on your own. Pay attention and be sure to ask questions about anything you do not understand or matters not covered. Shortly thereafter, the academic part of your stay will begin.

### Confirmation of Arrival

- ▶ Send your family a postcard immediately after your arrival (or telephone or e-mail them, if possible) to confirm your safe arrival and inform them of your temporary local address, telephone number, etc., if you will be there long.
- ▶ As soon as you have a permanent residence or program mailing address abroad, be sure to send this information both to your parents and to Mr. Hoffa at Amherst College so contact can be made, if necessary.

### **ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS**

One thing you, your parents, and your friends must accept when you leave to study abroad for a short or long period of time is that routine communications which you have probably always taken for granted will become impossible (and impossibly expensive) to continue as they have been. Barriers of time and space cannot be speedily and economically transgressed, and thus have simply to be accepted. Past participants recommend:

- ▶ Keeping a diary, journal or scrapbook. Take and keep pictures of people and places special to you, e.g. a favorite restaurant, café, city walk, and especially new friends.
- ▶ Keeping up with the news at home and at Amherst. Have Family and friends send you newspaper clippings or other Information so that you will not return to find everything unexpectedly changed.
- ▶ Writing home regularly. You will enjoy receiving mail, and friends and family will be able to share your experiences abroad.

However, communicating via letter can be slow and via phone can be expensive (and presents time-zone problems). Using e-mail eliminates much of the cost and the time differential, but requires that sender and receiver both have access to the Internet and use systems which are compatible with each other. The following overview is intended for both you and those you are leaving behind, and should be digested prior to departure, so that effective and known systems of communications can be set-up, at least in part in advance.

#### **Maintaining contact with Amherst and Home**

If you have confirmed your arrival, a three-way communications link should be in place between you, your parents, and the College. Amherst contact information is as follows:

- ▶ By mail: The Career Center, AC# 2210, Amherst College, Amherst, MA 01002
- ▶ By telephone: (413) 542-2265
- ▶ By fax: (413) 542-5790
- ▶ By e-mail: <wwhoffa@amherst.edu>

Should it be necessary to reach Amherst when the office is closed (e.g. in the evenings or on weekends), call: (413) 542-2291.

If you take any courses different from those listed in your program application, please inform the Amherst Registrar, Mr. Mager, as soon as possible. If this affects credit

toward you major, you should contact your departmental advisor as well. Amherst will confirm approval of the changes and contact you immediately if there are questions about substitute courses. Snail mail and email addresses for the Office of the Registrar are: 101 Converse Hall, Amherst College, Amherst, MA 01002 and [gmmager@amherst.edu](mailto:gmmager@amherst.edu).

### Post

Depending on where you are and the quality of the postal service, surface mail can take weeks (even, at times, months) to arrive, and air-mail can take up to a week just to arrive in the country; getting it to your local address of course adds additional days. If you are traveling, you will not get your mail until you return. You will also learn, as will your parents, that long-distance postage costs can be quite high by U.S. domestic standards, especially if the weight of your correspondence goes beyond the minimum. Shipping packages by air can be very expensive, while surface mail (sent by boat) can take a very long time to arrive. In certain countries, there are also complicated customs regulations and pay.

Still, an old-fashioned letter or a small care package from family and friends back home can be a godsend. Mail from home lifts your spirits while you are away, making you feel as though you are still connected after all. Likewise, those you leave behind will treasure your written cards and letters. Telephoning is more immediate, to be sure, but overseas long-distance calling is very expensive and often has a rushed quality that frustrates everyone involved. E-mail is the quickest and cheapest option by far, but it might start to seem more impersonal than old-fashioned correspondence.

If you want to get and receive mail--and you do!--remember to take a full address book with you, with the names and addresses of everyone you might want to hear from or write to. Make sure your family, friends, and Amherst contacts know that the time between your departure and actually taking up residence in permanent quarters abroad might be delayed by travel and orientation in another location. Remind them that the turnaround time for foreign correspondence will be longer than domestic mail, but encourage them to write to you, either at your temporary or permanent address

### Telephoning, Faxing and Emailing

Telephoning: Many areas in the U.S. are now able to dial international calls directly. Should you or your parents wish to make a direct-dial international call from the US, the usual procedure is:

1. Dial the International Access Code: 011
2. Dial the country code (normally a 2- or 3-digit number)
3. Dial the city code (normally a 1- to 5-digit number)
4. Dial the local number abroad

For an operator-assisted call (i.e. person-to-person, collect, credit card, or billed to a third number), follow the foregoing instructions but use "01" instead of "011" for the International Access Code. The operator will then come on the line to ask for the information needed (e.g. the name of the person you are calling or your credit card number).

Direct-dial calls made with the "011" International Access Code are the equivalent of station-to-station calls. Unless you expect your party to be immediately available, this can be a bit risky. No matter who answers at the other end, you will be billed the minimum charge based on the first three minutes of conversation.

You should get the country and city codes you need in advance, but this information is also available from any overseas long-distance operator.

It is also possible to dial direct from most locations abroad to the U.S. Should you wish to make a direct-dial call to the US from your study abroad location, simply dial the Access Code for the country from which you are calling plus the U.S. Country Code (always "1") followed by the appropriate U.S. Area Code and local number.

Direct-dial calls are always less expensive than operator-assisted station-to-station calls, which are in turn less expensive than person-to-person calls. There are reduced rates for overseas calls; you can contact the international operator for the current rates and discount time periods. There are no minimum charges for calls placed from Europe: you are charged only for the exact amount of time that you speak. For calls of three minutes or longer, however, the charge will usually be more than for a call placed from the U.S. for a comparable time period.

Most major U.S. telephone companies (AT&T, Sprint, MCI, etc.) have in place direct dial arrangements for calling the U.S. from overseas. The rates for such calls are usually comparable to U.S. rates, rather than the usually more expensive rates charged within other countries.

Another increasingly convenient and economical option is to use a phone card. Such cards are beginning to be used in the U.S., but have been in circulation for many years in other countries. They can be purchased, in varying amounts, in a variety of commercial locations (shops, stores, newspaper stands, etc.) They work in most phones, and save you having to have pockets of change. For further information on phone cards, ask the tourist office or your overseas host for advice.

Mobile phones have become popular among students going abroad. In some countries cell-phone use is even more pronounced than in the U.S., while in others it is substantially less developed. You should try to find out about this in advance. Some programs encourage or require cell-phones; others discourage having one. If you decide to purchase one, make sure you understand the obligations of your service plan, especially policies for international calls and any penalties for exceeding your minutes. Also, make sure to take care of all bills before returning to the U.S.

Faxing: International faxing is possible for many, but certainly not all the overseas sites. While faxing is cheaper than phoning-- since one pays only for transmission time -- it is more unwieldy than e-mail. But when exact documents need to be sent, faxing them is the only viable option. Faxing, like e-mail, allows messages to be sent at the sender's convenience and to be received at the receiver's convenience.

E-mailing: Not all program sites or foreign institutions have open and readily available e-mail access for students, though many do. What is available depends often on the level of technology available where the program is located (including the host institution) but more often depends on what is possible in the country, generally. Many program offices do have e-mail capabilities for routine communications with the Amherst campus and for use in emergencies. Other programs may or may not have similar access. You will learn during the orientation meetings or via correspondence what the situation is where you are going. But, in any and all cases, it is important not to overdo e-mail communications with friend and family at home. Overuse can indeed interfere with cultural adjustment overseas.

### Time Zones

When making phone calls to or from the U.S., keep in mind that there is a time difference between here and abroad. Be sure to remind friends and relatives; should your boyfriend or girlfriend, for example, call you in France at 9:00 p.m., he or she should be aware of the fact that you have probably long since gone to bed since it is 3:00 a.m. in Lyon and Strasbourg. Most people know this sort of thing, but some don't!

The time zone of every country in the world can be found at:  
<http://www.hilink.com.au/times/>

### Setting-Up an Emergency Contact Network

Should your family wish to reach you in a personal emergency, they have the option of contacting you directly by using the contact information you furnished before or immediately after arrival or by contacting Amherst. The College may be able to get in touch with you more quickly, either directly or via your on-site coordinator (who in turn would contact you personally). Should you need to reach your family in a genuine emergency, it is best to contact them in the most expeditious way available to you. Two cautions:

- ▶ For routine questions or concerns it is usually best to check with your on-site coordinator first, before calling home with a problem that may be best handled locally.
- ▶ When traveling on weekends or over holiday periods during the course of your program abroad, be sure to keep your local coordinator, and your room mates or host family (if applicable) informed of your intended itinerary.

In short, make sure that all systems are set-up and all contact means and information is known to all parties needing to be in communication during a crisis.

## **MONEY AND BANKING**

### Budgeting

The overall cost of living abroad can sometimes be higher than at home because you are in an unfamiliar environment with local costs stated in a currency you may not be able to translate immediately into dollars--which, believe it or not, is not the only "real money"! Depending on your program site, you may also be confronted with an almost endless array of entertainment possibilities and attractions. A go-slow approach to buying makes

sense. It also makes sense to make and try to live within a prudent budget which will take care of all necessities and allow you to live on the means available to you for the duration of your stay. There is little more dismaying than to run out of funds overseas, with no easy or quick means of replenishment. The following suggestions may be helpful. As with setting up routine and emergency communications between “here” and “there”, this information should be shared in advance with your parents or guardian, so most systems can be set up in advance. Pertinent general principles include the following:

- ▶ Make both weekly and daily budgets and stick to them.
- ▶ Learn the “value” of the money (i.e. in relation to the currency you know, the US\$) wherever you are and as quickly as possible).
- ▶ Be consistently alert for special student rates and discounts, wherever you go, and know what is available through the use of your International Student Identification Card (e.g. travel, accommodations, entrance fees, some entertainment, etc).
- ▶ Take advantage of less expensive alternatives whenever possible. Cook for yourself (especially breakfasts) if possible, or use refectory or student cafeteria meals rather than restaurants--saving even moderately priced restaurants for special occasions. Note: many native students eat their main meal at lunch time, using the usually subsidized collegiate refectories, having lighter fare at dinner time. You can easily get used to this pattern and it will save you money.
- ▶ Plan your entertainment and recreation around the availability of free, inexpensive, and discounted events--on campus or in the surrounding community.
- ▶ Shop when possible in street markets or major chain supermarkets and avoid specialty shops and convenience stores (that add a 20-30% mark-up). Put off making major purchases as long as you can, until you have learned the range of available selections and prices--or learned that you don't really need that expensive item, after all.
- ▶ When you travel, stay in Youth or Student Hostels, or in modest bed-and-breakfast accommodations, as opposed to hotels that cater to tourists and business travelers and charge accordingly.
- ▶ Take care of your belongings and safeguard your traveler's checks and cash. Losses from carelessness are difficult enough at any time, and even more problematic abroad. Pick-pocketing is universally common.
- ▶ Sales taxes, as Americans know them, generally do not exist in other countries. But many now impose a Value-Added-Tax (VAT) on certain goods (not services), especially more expensive ones. As a visitor, you can reclaim the amount you have spent on the VAT at the international airport when you leave the country. But you will need all your receipts and your purchases to show in order to claim this refund.
- ▶ Join organizations that have subsidized travel, like choirs and sports teams.

### Currency Exchange

It is not recommended that you ever carry large amounts of cash with you. Traveler's checks are the safest and most convenient way for carrying your money. Lost or stolen cash cannot be replaced; traveler's checks can be refunded. Be sure to keep a separate record of the serial numbers of your traveler's checks. It is best to have three copies of

these. Should the checks be lost or stolen, you will need to have these numbers available in order to obtain a refund.

**Traveler's Checks:** Traveler's checks are available in various denominations of various currencies (e.g. American dollars, British pounds, French francs, etc.) and can be obtained at most banks. The major companies dealing in traveler's checks are Citicorp (First National City Bank), American Express, Thomas Cook, Bank of America, and Visa. There will almost always be a commission charge for purchasing and for cashing traveler's checks. It might be to your benefit to contact the AAA since they do not charge members a fee for the purchase of American Express or Thomas Cook traveler's checks. While purchasing traveler's checks in small denominations means carrying a bulkier package of checks with you, it also means that you have greater control over the amount of currency you receive each time you cash one or more of these checks.

American currency can be exchanged for foreign currency at most international airports prior to your departure, at the international airport of your destination, and at most major banks and railroad stations abroad. It might be wise to exchange a small amount of money prior to your departure in order to have some cash-on-hand upon your arrival abroad. Should you choose to do this, be sure to exchange your money at one of the various bank branches at the airport. Do not exchange currency at hotels, restaurants, or retail shops: the exchange rate will generally be outrageous.

Bank windows can often be found in both airports and railroad stations abroad. Banks abroad afford you the fairest exchange rate available. You can expect to pay a commission (which varies from one country to another) every time you exchange currency. In some countries the commission is based on a percentage of the amount you exchange, while in others there is a flat fee regardless of the amount of the transaction. The flat fee rate makes it to your advantage to exchange larger amounts to avoid repeat visits to the bank window. Although this necessarily means that you might be carrying more cash than advisable. You will need to find a happy medium between carrying large amounts of cash and paying repeat bank commissions for exchange transactions.

Current currency exchange rates between 164 different countries can be found at:  
<http://www.oanda.com/>

### Banking

If you are going abroad for an academic year, you may wish to set up a foreign banking account. Most such students wait until arrival in the country to do this--the program orientation is likely to tell you how to do this. The reason for the delay is not only to let you become acquainted with the various banks and the services and incentives they offer to new customers, but also to allow you to familiarize yourself with the different types of bank accounts and to find the branch office closest to where you will be during banking hours. If you already know a particular bank and have the exact address of a convenient branch location, then you may want to write in advance to see if you can open an account before your arrive, so that funds will be waiting for you, you will need to send a reference from your current bankers.

Transferring Money Overseas from the U.S.

Should you run short of cash while abroad, money can be sent from home in a variety of ways:

1. The quickest way, although the most expensive, is by cable transfer from your American bank to a bank abroad. You might want to visit your hometown bank before your departure to obtain a list of the overseas correspondent banks to which money can be transferred by cable and to let them know who is authorized to initiate cable transfers on your behalf. To pick the money up at the overseas bank, you will, of course, need identification (e.g. your passport). For your information, it may be necessary for your hometown bank to process cable transfers through a major, internationally recognized American bank, which will in turn probably have to deal with a comparable internationally recognized bank overseas. The correspondent bank abroad (e.g. in Paris, Madrid, etc.) can then complete the transfer to a local bank at your study abroad location.
2. American Express money orders are also relatively fast. Transactions must be initiated at an American Express office in the United States and completed at one of their branch offices abroad, either of which could prove inconvenient depending on their location. American Express can also cable money from some of their American offices to one of their overseas offices, where it can be picked up, again with appropriate identification. Since not all American Express offices can prepare money orders or cable money, it is wise to call your local American Express office for a list of offices abroad that can provide these services.
3. It is also possible to obtain from an American bank a foreign currency draft drawn against a recognized bank in the foreign country (e.g. a check in Spanish pesetas drawn against the Banco Hispano-Americano in Madrid for a student in Salamanca). This draft can then be sent to you (by registered or certified mail) for cashing abroad.
4. Should you prefer receiving a bank draft in American currency, a cashier's check drawn against a major American Bank (e.g. Chase Manhattan) can probably be obtained from your hometown bank and forwarded to you abroad (again by registered or certified mail). However this may prove to be a relatively slow way of obtaining the money you need, for once the check has been received you still have to wait for the foreign bank to confirm the check's validity before they can cash it.

Needless to say, personal checks drawn against your local hometown bank will be virtually worthless because of the long amount of time it takes each bank to clear the check.

#### Credit Cards/Bank Cards

Credit cards make foreign currency transactions easy and they are invaluable in a financial emergency. Do take a credit card along, but use it wisely; plastic can be dangerous because overspending is so easy to do. Service fees and interest charges can be costly, and the loss or theft of a card abroad can be a huge inconvenience when you are traveling.

Possession of a Visa, MasterCard, or American Express card will be helpful should you need to acquire emergency funds while awaiting money from home. You can go to an American Express office and cash a personal check for up to \$1000 (only the first \$50

will be provided in cash, the balance in traveler's checks). If you have no personal check with you, American Express can provide you with a blank check if you can provide some pertinent information such as your personal checking account number and your banking institution's name and address.

With a Visa card you can usually obtain a cash advance against your account from a foreign bank. This is an easy procedure used by many students. The bank will take your passport number and your credit card number and phone them both into a central computer to prevent you from exceeding the established limit. MasterCard is even more flexible because it is automatically an international credit instrument. It is readily accepted by almost all major banks across Western Europe and in tourist areas in adjacent countries. In addition, it is widely accepted by local merchants in Western Europe and you are provided with an International Directory outlining (by country) the scope of merchant acceptance, number of cash advance locations and lists of banks which provide cash advance services.

Credit cards can also come in handy when you wish to charge a purchase to your account rather than pay cash. The amount charged to your credit card bill is based on the exchange rate on the day your credit card company processes the transaction; if the merchant with whom you charge your purchase is slow in submitting your charge slip, the bill could be a bit different from what you expected. Be aware that different countries favor different credit card companies, and yours may or may not be widely accepted. Some merchants abroad do not accept credit cards regardless of the brand. For example, many of your gifts and/ or souvenirs purchased at small shops and bazaars will have to be paid for in cash.

In the case of all financial transactions abroad, be sure to have adequate identification with you (e.g. your passport), as this is always asked for of foreigners.

Note: This information may not be true for every country; in fact, it is probably more accurate for major Western European countries than for the rest of the world. However, banking IS a worldwide phenomenon these days, so you can feel comfortable relying on the above advice for a general understanding of banking abroad. To be safe, review your banking and credit card standing before you leave the U.S., and familiarize yourself with common banking practices in your host country.

**Bank Cards:** In the last few years, with the spread of new and more efficient global communications systems, many experienced travelers have found it much more convenient to use their American bank cards in overseas ATM machines to obtain the cash they need, rather than use traveler's checks. This approach is generally faster than waiting in lines at banks and filling out the required forms, the exchange rate is usually good, and one can largely avoid the often fees charged by banks and commercial currency exchange bureaus. Check with your local bank for a listing of countries (and locations within countries) that have large numbers of ATM machines available.

To be safe, it is best to have two cards, one which works with CIRRUS, another with PLUS. ATM access may be higher in Western Europe, but exists to some extent in most countries which have a tourist industry. Transferring money via the use of bank cards

means that parents can deposit money in the U.S. in dollars—perhaps in sync with your budget—and you can withdraw it almost immediately in local currency. Do be aware of any maximum or time limits on withdrawals; for example, some banks limit withdrawals to \$500.00 over a 24 hour period.

## **MAINTAINING HEALTH AND NUTRITION**

### General

The risk of becoming ill while traveling abroad may depend on three important factors:

- ▶ Making adequate pre-departure preparations [see Immunizations, above]
- ▶ Knowing what health and safety risks are involved where you are
- ▶ Following sound U. S. and local medical counsel

In addition, you should know that living away from the cultural environment you are used to can sometimes cause a degree of mental and emotional stress--which, in turn, can trigger physiological consequences. The impact of studying abroad on personal relationships, on counseling sessions (if you are in therapy), and on your general health (if you are on medication of any kind) is something you need to consider as you prepare for your sojourn abroad. If you have a pre-existing medical condition or simply are concerned about health facilities while you are overseas, you must take steps as soon as possible to find out about health care in each of the countries in which you expect to spend any time.

Travel itself can increase stress and risk to your body. That said, in most developed countries and regions—Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Western Europe, for example—physical health risks may be no greater than comparable risks while traveling in the United States. On the other hand, living conditions and standards of sanitation and hygiene vary greatly in other areas of the world, particularly among African, Asian, South and Central American, South Pacific, Middle and Far Eastern countries. It is also a fact that some cities in these areas provide safer and healthier environments than outlying rural areas, while other cities are potentially more dangerous. The key to survival and good health, beyond everything else, depends largely on knowing your own health needs before you go and knowing what to expect every place you go.

If your travel itinerary is limited primarily to tourist areas, there is generally less risk of contracting a disease due to questionable food or water. As a student, you may travel to cities off the usual tourist routes or live in small villages or rural areas for extended periods of time. In doing so, you of course enrich your education, but you may also run a greater risk of acquiring infectious diseases through exposure to water and food of uncertain quality, or of facing other health hazards.

### Prescriptions

Should you currently be under the care of a physician or require regular medication or injections (e.g. insulin or allergy shots), be sure to check with your personal physician for any advice or recommendations concerning your welfare while abroad. It is a good idea to notify the on-site coordinator of any special needs of this sort you may have.

If you need medications regularly, take an adequate supply with you. Do not buy medications "over the counter" while you are overseas unless you are familiar with the product. "Over the counter" drugs abroad are not regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. If you will need refills while abroad, work out a plan for obtaining them, either through your parents at home or in a pharmacy in your host country. Be sure to check specific regulations on your prescriptions: Can you easily get a refill abroad? Is it legal for your parents to send you medicines obtained in the States?

If you have diabetes, are allergic to penicillin, or have any physical condition that may require emergency care, carry some kind of identification--a tag, bracelet, or card--on your person at all times indicating the specific nature of the problem and spelling out clearly what must or must not be done should you be unable to communicate this information yourself (e.g. in case of unconsciousness).

Prescription medicines should be accompanied by a letter from your physician. This letter should include a description of the problem, the dosage of prescribed medications to assist medical authorities during an emergency, and the generic name(s) of medicine listed.

Any and all special health needs or medical conditions should be noted on medical history forms you are advised to travel with. If you are required to take a medicine containing habit-forming or narcotic drugs you should carry a doctor's certificate attesting to that fact. It is also advisable to keep all medicines in their original and labeled containers. To avoid potential problems and because laws may vary from country to country, if you need to carry such medicines you should consult the embassies of the countries you will visit before departing the U.S.

#### Food and Water

In areas where chlorinated tap water is not available, or where hygiene and sanitation are poor, the following considerations are advised:

- ▶ General: Where water may be contaminated, ice (or containers for drinking) can also be considered contaminated, and it is generally safer to drink directly from the can or bottle of a beverage than from a questionable container. Wet cans or bottles should be dried before being opened, and surfaces that come into direct contact with the mouth should first be wiped clean. If no source of safe drinking water is available (e.g., verifiably safe bottled-water) tap water that is uncomfortably hot to touch may be safe, once it has cooled and put in a thoroughly cleaned container; it can also be used for brushing teeth as well as for drinking.
- ▶ Hot beverages, such as tea and coffee, are OK because they are made with boiled water.
- ▶ Canned or bottled carbonated beverages, are OK, including carbonated bottled water and soft drinks.
- ▶ Beer and wine: Usually OK, but don't use it to slake your thirst when full sobriety is important.

- ▶ Fresh fruit and vegetables: In areas of the world where hygiene and sanitation are known to be poor, to avoid illness, fresh food should always be selected with care. You should avoid un-pasteurized milk and milk products, such as cheese, and eat only fruit that you have peeled yourself. Since the sources of the organisms causing travelers' diarrhea are usually contaminated food or water, precautionary measures are particularly helpful in preventing most serious intestinal infections. However, even when persons follow these general guidelines for prevention, they may still develop diarrhea. You may prepare your own fruit juice from fresh fruit. Iced drinks and non-carbonated bottled fluids made from water of uncertain quality should be avoided.
- ▶ Street-food: Many developing (and developed) countries offer an abundance of food sold from stands, along the road. It is advisable to avoid such food unless and until you have ample evidence from reliable local sources that it is safe for visitors to eat. Note: many locals may have no trouble with such food or drink, but this is often because they have developed over time bodily immunities against its possible impurities, which is not the case for visitors. You will be tempted, but be careful.

Restaurants: It is difficult to generalize about the quality of restaurant food in the U.S., and even more so to do this about all the varieties of restaurant food you are likely to encounter overseas. General principles obviously apply: establishments which cater to outsiders and/or are in the expensive price ranges, are almost always going to offer safe and nutritious food, while those at the other end of the economic spectrum and serve locals may or may not. Assuming that there are no such restaurants or you are on a limited budget, and also that you would like to sample local foods and eating styles, the best advice is to seek sound advice from reputable travel guides or, even better, from your program director or on-site hosts.

#### Some Not-Too-Uncommon Diseases

Diarrhea is a common affliction that usually strikes a couple of days after arrival in a new area of the world and seldom lasts longer than about five days. Diarrhea is nature's way of ridding the body of noxious agents; intestinal motility serves as the normal cleansing mechanism of the intestine. The most important way of coping with this disorder is to maintain adequate fluid intake to prevent dehydration. Most cases of diarrhea are self-limited and require only simple replacement of fluids and salts lost in diarrhea stools. Fluids that are readily available, such as canned fruit juices, hot tea, or carbonated drinks, may be used. Your physician may be able to prescribe medication to take along for relief of the symptoms. However, it is strongly recommended that you consult a physician rather than attempt self-medication if your diarrhea condition is severe or does not resolve itself within several days, if there is blood and/or mucus in the stool, if fever occurs with shaking chills, or if there is persistent diarrhea with dehydration.

Tetanus, commonly known as "lockjaw," is an infection of the nervous tissue produced by a contaminated wound or injury. Severe muscle spasms are produced, and if left untreated, tetanus can be fatal. Cleanliness (lots of soap and water to remove contamination of a wound or injury) is one of the most effective weapons to prevent this

kind of infection. Tetanus immunization is available, often in combination with the diphtheria vaccine. Tetanus boosters are recommended every ten years after the initial series of three injections administered one month apart.

Hepatitis A (Infectious Hepatitis) is most prevalent in North Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean. However, it is possible to contract the disease anywhere (including in the United States) that living conditions are crowded and unsanitary. Hepatitis A is transmitted orally through the ingestion of contaminated food or water; clams, oysters, and other shellfish, especially if eaten raw, are common sources of the disease in contaminated areas. A variety of symptoms are associated with the disease, including fever, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal pain, and yellowing of the eyes.

Malaria, which is transmitted by the female Anopheline mosquito, is common to parts of the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Anti-malaria medication is available and is required for those who will be participating in a program in Africa (check for Latin America, Middle East, and Asia). Instructions on taking the medication must be followed carefully to insure adequate protection. You must usually begin taking the medication prior to your departure, during the entirety of your visit, and for two or three weeks after return to the United States. (The organisms that cause the disease do not invade the red blood cells until about a week or so after the bite of the mosquito.)

Other Infectious Diseases: Certain viral, bacterial, and parasitic infections acquired abroad may not result in any immediately illness. Some diseases (such as malaria) may not produce symptoms for as long as six months to a year after a traveler returns. Should you become ill even well after returning to the United States, you should not hesitate to inform your physician of your travel outside the United States within the 12 months preceding onset of the illness. Knowledge of the possibility of exposure to certain diseases abroad will help the physician arrive at a correct diagnosis.

#### Sexually-Transmitted Diseases, especially AIDS

There are many diseases (e.g., gonorrhea, herpes, etc.) which are primarily contracted though unwise and unsafe sexual activity. AIDS is simply the best known and the deadliest. On the other hand, the same wise precautions apply to all sexually-transmitted diseases. The following is excerpted from a brochure prepared by C.I.E.E. on AIDS and International Travel:

*Everything you already know about what AIDS is and how it is contracted, is as deadly true overseas as it is at home. Knowing this and taking all advised precautions is the only way to protect yourself. AIDS is considerably less an epidemic in some countries than in the U.S., and considerably more in others. Whatever the situation in the country you are going to, you are not more likely to contract AIDS there than here--IF you act sensibly and refrain from unprotected sex and other behaviors and habits with carry the risk of infection. As The World Health Organization states: "AIDS is not spread by daily and routine activities such as sitting next to someone or shaking hands, or working with people. Nor is it spread by insects or insect bites. AIDS is not spread by swimming pools, public transportation, food, cups, glasses, plates, toilets, water, air, touching or hugging, coughing or sneezing."*

These biological facts apply in Paris the same way they do in the Pioneer Valley. However, since you will not know your social and cultural environment overseas as well as you do at home -- or might not be able to control it to the same degree -- there are some things you should be concerned about in advance, to prepare yourself for all eventualities.

**Knowing Your HIV Status:** When traveling abroad, be aware that some countries may require HIV antibody tests, a test for antibodies to the human immune-deficiency virus (HIV) that causes AIDS. You should also know that some countries may not have the resources to adequately screen blood or provide sterile needles. Living overseas in certain areas MAY present greater risks to those who test positive for the HIV virus. Some overseas locations have limited medical facilities that cannot monitor the progress of such infections. Therefore, if you believe you may be infected, knowing your HIV status will help when planning your trip.

**If the Country You are Going to Requires an HIV Antibody Test:** Some countries now require incoming foreigners, including students, to take the HIV antibody test. Usually this is required for long term stays. Check to see if the country you are going to requires HIV-testing. You may need a "doctor's certificate" showing the results of an HIV antibody test. Consulates in Washington, DC and/or New York City carry information on HIV testing as well. If you decide you want to be tested, do so only at a center that offers pre- and post-test counseling. There are many institutions whose primary focus is AIDS counseling. Allow yourself two weeks for the testing process. Finally, consider getting tested twice -- first anonymously (which allows you the privacy to decide what you want to do if the result is positive), then again for a doctor's certificate, if needed.

**Overseas Blood Transfusions, Blood Products and HIV Screening:** While many countries such as the United States, Australia, Canada, Japan, and the western European countries have mandatory screening of donated blood for the AIDS virus, not all do. Before you depart you should find out from your local Red Cross, the Center for Disease Control, or your local hospital, information about safe sources of blood overseas. In some locales, ascertaining the availability of HIV-screened blood and blood products may be difficult. Because of obvious uncertainties, consider these precautions: If you are injured or ill while abroad, avoid or postpone any blood transfusion unless it is absolutely necessary. If you do need blood, try to ensure that screened blood is used.

Regardless of the blood screening practices abroad, always try to reduce the risk of serious injury which may require blood transfusions by taking everyday precautions. If you are sexually active, always use a latex condom or dental dam. Take a supply with you as conditions, manufacturing and storage of condoms, etc. in other countries may be questionable. Take good care of yourself while traveling! Don't wear yourself down, watch out for excessive exposure to heat, drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration, and get plenty of sleep!

**Overseas Injections and AIDS:** Here in the United States, we may take for granted disposable equipment such as needles and syringes. Be advised that some foreign countries will reuse even disposable equipment. In some countries, if injection is required, you can buy needles and syringes and bring them to the hospital for your own

use. Avoid injections unless absolutely necessary. If injections are required, make sure the needles and syringes come straight from a package or have been sterilized with chemicals or by boiling for twenty minutes. When in doubt, ask to see how the equipment has been sterilized.

Caution regarding instrument sterilization applies to all instruments that pierce the skin, including tattooing, acupuncture, ear piercing and dental work.

The Center for Disease Control recommends that "Diabetics or other persons who require routine or frequent injections should carry a supply of syringes and needles sufficient to last their stay abroad." It is not uncommon to bring needles for your own use. However, be aware that carrying needles and syringes without a prescription may be illegal in some countries. Take a note from your doctor if you do need to carry needles and syringes. Some countries have needles and syringes for sale. Do not use or allow the use of contaminated, un-sterilized syringes or needles for any injections, e.g., illicit drugs, tattooing, acupuncture, or for medical/dental procedures.

### Medical Care Abroad

Your on-site coordinator should indicate during the orientation period what arrangements exist locally for routine and emergency health care. Often, there will be a physician on-call, or a clinic which can be visited by international students. When medical attention is required, you should know what to do and your coordinator should be able to help you contact the appropriate physician or other medical authority. In order to provide such persons and local medical authorities abroad with sufficient information to respond promptly and effectively to situations which require medical attention, many programs, at the time of acceptance, ask you to complete a medical history form. Not being fully honest can lead to severe complications and problems later.

During weekend or post-program travel, however, you may find yourself in a variety of unfamiliar and possibly remote locations. If you are not fluent in the language of the host country, of course, try to seek out an English-speaking doctor if you need medical attention. When it comes to health matters, you will not want to take any chances on a breakdown in communications. American embassies and consulates, many large travel agencies (e.g. Thomas Cook) and a number of the larger hotels abroad will have lists of English-speaking physicians. Some agencies have also been established to assure travelers needing medical care (e.g. with a pre-existing medical problem) a reasonable, preset fee with reputable physicians fluent in English.

### Insurance

Make sure that you understand your policy. Know what procedures are included in your coverage plan—as well as what procedures are excluded. Know how your payment plan works—particularly how to pay bills for both medical emergencies and routine treatment, as well as how to obtain coverage or reimbursement for treatment abroad. If you find yourself requiring medical attention abroad, will you have sufficient cash or credit card balance to make a payment at the time of treatment? Many foreign physicians and/or hospitals may not be able to process medical bills with your insurance company directly. Be sure to obtain a receipt to submit with your insurance claim for reimbursement upon

return to the U.S. It might be helpful to carry a few blank claim forms with you in case you should need them while abroad.

You need also to understand any other family policies you may have, especially what is and isn't covered outside the U.S.A., including personal liability insurance against injury or damage caused by or resulting from your acts or omissions. Finally, make sure you understand the International Student Identity Card (ISIC) basic coverage and its emergency medical evacuation and repatriation provisions.

#### For Further Health & Safety Information

1) For information on worldwide health conditions, call the Center for Disease Control and Prevention call (404) 332 4559. To receive information by fax call (404) 332 4565 to obtain an information sheet for ordering documents, then call again with the requested information number. The CDC Web site is: <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/index.htm>

2) The U.S. State Department Overseas Citizen's Emergency Center number is (202) 746 5225, which is handy for information on medical, financial, or legal problems while abroad.

3) The International Association for Medical Assistance for Travelers offers information on English-speaking doctors abroad and other helpful items. Call (716) 754 4883.

4) International SOS Assistance, a Philadelphia-based emergency worldwide medical and travel assistance service, provides insurance for travelers to cover emergency medical needs and other services, including 24-hour multilingual assistance in centers around the world. Call (800) 523-8930 or (215) 244- 1500.

### **OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW, STAYING SAFE, AND COPING WITH EMERGENCIES ABROAD**

#### Obedience to Local and National Laws

While you are visiting another country you are subject to the laws of that country. Legal protection taken for granted in the United States is left behind when you leave the U.S. Bail provisions as we know them in the United States are rare in many other countries and pre-trial detention without bail is not uncommon. Prison conditions in developing (and especially "fundamentalist") countries may often be deplorable, in comparison to conditions in the United States. The principle of "innocent until proven guilty" is not necessarily a tenet of all legal systems abroad. The best advice is of course to know the laws and obey them scrupulously. If you get in trouble, contact your program director and seek local legal assistance as quickly as possible.

**Drugs:** Avoid any possible involvement with drugs and all other illegal substances. Drug laws of course vary from country to country, but in many cases they are extremely severe, regardless of whether the drug in your possession is for personal use or for sale to others. Bail is not granted for drug-trafficking cases in most countries. Pre-trial detention, often in solitary confinement, can last for months. Many countries do not provide a jury trial, and in many cases you need not even be present at your trial.

Law enforcement and prison officials abroad may not speak English, the significance of which you may not fully appreciate until you are confined and feeling helpless, in very hard conditions. The average jail sentence in drug cases worldwide is about seven years. In at least four countries (Iran, Algeria, Malaysia, and Turkey) the death penalty can be imposed for conviction on some drug charges. Do not wrongly assume that buying or carrying small amounts of drugs cannot result in your arrest. In reality, Americans have been jailed abroad for possessing as little as three grams (about one-tenth of an ounce) of marijuana. No amount of short-term pleasure is worth a jail sentence.

### Working Abroad Legally

In other countries, as in the U.S., holding a wage-earning job while you are on a student visa is considered illegal and can be grounds for expulsion. Your student visa authorizes only living and learning in the country, usually only for the period of your formal enrollment, plus perhaps some additional time for tourism. Besides, you are likely to be busy enough with your studies and the other demands and pleasures of being in a new place that you will not have time to do much else. More to the point, if you are caught working illegally, it is likely that you will be asked to leave the country.

If you wish to add a legal work experience to your time away, this must almost always be arranged in the U.S. beforehand and take place either before your program begins or after it ends. It can be done legally only if you have a national Work Permit. Such legal certification is available only for work in certain countries, and is very difficult to obtain in most others. Employers are usually forced to demonstrate that a potential employee from another country has skills and experience which are not possessed by the citizens of that country. This is usually a very hard case to make on behalf of American undergraduates.

Information about how to acquire, in advance of departure from the United States, an overseas Work Permit to supplement your study abroad program experience is available in the Career Center. The primary organizations which issue such permits are C.I.E.E., BUNAC, and Inter-Exchange. If your primary motivation for going abroad is to gain experience in the workplace or community (and academic credit is not essential) perhaps you should consider other purely work abroad opportunities which Amherst offers.

### Crime, Violence, and Terrorism

Most countries in the world have less street crime and personal violence than is potentially present in urban and suburban American. Indeed, in many countries U.S. students report when they return that they had never felt safer in their lives. This does not mean that there is no crime and that your safety is assured--because of, or in spite of, the fact that you carry a U.S. passport in a perhaps statistically more peaceful local environment. But, the simple fact of your being a foreigner and not knowing quite what is and isn't safe behavior--not being certain where and where not to go or how to act--increases, at least somewhat, the possibility that you can be victimized by petty crime, such as fraud, robbery, theft, or even physical attack. Further, in certain places and at certain times, it is very possible to get caught in the midst of forms of political strife which may not be directed at you personally or even at you as an American, but nevertheless can be very dangerous.

With regard to the admittedly remote threat of terrorism, in those few sites where even possible danger might occasionally exist, program directors work with local police, U.S. consular personnel, and local university or program officials in setting up whatever practical security measures are deemed prudent. In such places, you will be briefed during orientation programs and reminded at any time of heightened political tension about being security conscious in your daily activities. Terrorism is a twentieth-century reality and is not likely to diminish (or increase) significantly. To succumb to the threat by reacting in fear may well be the objective that terrorists seek to achieve. Travel Advisories for every country in the world, from the perspective of the U.S. Department of State, can be found at:

<http://travel.state.gov/>

#### Following Program Safeguards and Counsel

Overseas study programs recognize their responsibility to do their utmost to provide a secure and unthreatening environment in which students can safely live and learn. Responsible campuses and programs consult regularly with colleagues around the country who are involved in the administration of study abroad programs; with resident program directors of programs; with responsible officials of foreign host universities; with contacts in the U.S. Department of State and other governmental and non-governmental agencies and with other experts, including faculty who are well-informed on issues and events. It is in no one's interest to risk your safety and well-being. Almost all programs receiving students will provide an orientation program during which program and personal security will be discussed along with much else.

The ability to communicate almost instantaneously worldwide via fax machines and electronic mail enables campuses (and parents) to obtain and share information quickly and accurately, in the event of an overseas emergency that may have repercussions for study abroad programs and students. In short, most campuses and programs have in place an effective system of consultation and consensus-building in order to make proactive and reactive decisions concerning the safe operation of their programs.

#### Taking Personal Responsibility

Minimizing risk and maximizing safety and security is the aim of all program sponsors and overseas hosts. But safety and security also depends to a great degree upon you, as a program participant and foreign visitor doing your part, listening and heeding the counsel you are given, and remaining vigilant. Here are some essential Do's and Don'ts which come from experienced travelers:

- ▶ Keep a low profile and try not to make yourself conspicuous by dress, speech, or behavior, in ways that might identify you as a targetable individual. Do not draw attention to yourself either through expensive dress, personal accessories (cameras, radios, sunglasses, etc.) or careless behavior.
- ▶ Avoid crowds, protest groups, or other potentially volatile situations, as well as restaurants and entertainment places where Americans are known to congregate. Keep abreast of local news. Read local newspapers, magazines, etc. and speak with

local officials to learn about any potential civil unrest. If there should be any political unrest, do not get involved.

- ▶ Be wary of unexpected packages and stay clear of unattended luggage or parcels in airports, train stations, or other areas of uncontrolled public access.
- ▶ Report to the responsible authority any suspicious persons loitering around residence or instructional facilities, or following you; keep your residence area locked; use common sense in divulging information to strangers about your study program and your fellow students.
- ▶ If you travel to countries beyond your program site and expect to be there for more than a week, register upon arrival at the U.S. consulate or embassy having jurisdiction over the location.
- ▶ Make sure the resident director, host family, or foreign university official who is assigned the responsibility for your welfare always knows where and how to contact you in an emergency -- and your schedule and itinerary if you are traveling, even if only overnight.
- ▶ Develop a plan with your family for regular telephone or e-mail contact, so that in times of heightened political tension, you will be able to communicate with your parents directly about your safety and well-being.
- ▶ The US government monitors the political conditions in every country around the world. For current information, advisories, or warnings contact the State Department in Washington DC (202-647-4000) or the local US embassy or consulate where you are (see the section on US embassies or consulates abroad in this handbook).
- ▶ Be aware of local health conditions abroad: especially if you are traveling to remote areas, you should be aware of any public health service recommendations or advisories. For current health conditions abroad contact local officials, or have your parents contact the country desk at the State Department (202-647-4000), or the Centers for Disease Control (404-639-3311). [See Health]
- ▶ Know local laws: laws and systems of justice are not universal. Do not assume that just because it is legal in the United States, that it is legal abroad.
- ▶ Use banks to exchange your money: do not exchange your money on the black market on the street. Do not carry on your person more money than you need for the day. Carry your credit cards, etc. in a very safe place.
- ▶ Do not impair your judgment due to excessive consumption of alcohol, and do not fall under the influence of drugs.
- ▶ Female travelers are sometimes more likely to encounter harassment, but uncomfortable situations can usually be avoided by taking the following precautions: Dress conservatively. While short skirts and tank tops may be comfortable, they may also encourage unwanted attention. Avoid walking alone late at night or in questionable neighborhoods. Do not agree to meet a person whom you do not know in a non-public place. Be aware that some men from other countries tend to mistake the friendliness of American women for romantic interest.

### Help from American Embassies and Consulates

Should you encounter serious social, political, health, or economic problems which cannot be taken care of within your program, the American embassies and/or consulates can offer some, but limited, assistance. They can, for example, provide you with a list of local attorneys and physicians; they can contact next of kin in the event of emergency or serious illness; they can contact friends or relatives on your behalf to request funds or guidance; they can provide assistance during civil unrest or natural disaster; they can replace a lost or stolen passport.

They cannot, however, provide the services of a travel agency, give or lend money, cash personal checks, arrange free medical service or legal advice, provide bail or get you out of jail, act as couriers or interpreters, search for missing luggage, or settle disputes with local authorities. American embassies and consulates, moreover, are very limited in the assistance they can provide. Remember that their primary occupation abroad is to help fulfill the diplomatic mission of the United States government; they are not there to shepherd American travelers who violate local laws. Nor can diplomatic personnel intervene on your behalf in the administration of justice, as seen from the point of view of the host country though they will monitor legal proceedings to insure that you are treated fairly in accordance with local laws and procedures.

There are several useful pamphlets about travel and residence abroad, prepared by the Bureau of Consular Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. Two are of particular interest: "A Safe Trip Abroad" and "Your Trip Abroad." You can usually pick them up free in any U.S. Passport Office. Otherwise, you can order them for \$1 each from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.

It is recommended that U.S. citizens residing abroad for any extended period of time register with the local U.S. Embassy or Consulate. If you are on a study abroad program, this will usually be done on your behalf by program staff, but this is not always true. Check to be sure.

### Office of Overseas Citizen's Services

Should your family need to contact you while you are traveling (e.g. after the program is over), emergency assistance is available through the Citizens' Emergency Center of the Office of Overseas Citizens Services (OCS), operated by the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs. The office is open from 8:15 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and can be reached at (202) 647-5225. For emergency communication between 10:00 p.m. and 8:15 a.m. or over weekends, contact can be made through the Overseas Citizens' Services duty officer at (202) 634-3600 or at (202) 647-5225 on Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

This office can transmit emergency messages from your family, provide protection in the event of arrest or detention while abroad, transmit emergency funds to destitute nationals when commercial banking facilities are not available, etc. It would be wise for you to provide your family with at least a tentative itinerary so that in an emergency, they can give the State Department some idea where to begin looking for you.

## EXPLORING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

It is very hard to know what life is really like in a country or region whose culture one has never experienced directly. But it is very easy to have the illusion of knowing what it will be like--from images furnished by popular communications media, from reading, or perhaps having met a few people from "there," here on one's home ground. Simply "knowing about" another culture, however, is not the same thing as knowing what it will feel like to be learning and living there, on its terms.

Every culture has distinct characteristics that make it different from every other culture. Some differences are quite evident, even to the unsophisticated, e.g. language, dress, physical appearance, religion, political organization, etc. Others can be so subtle that while foreign visitors may be vaguely aware of them, making adjustments is a complex process and one may remain uncomfortable and off balance for quite some time. It is very easy, for instance, to spend a short time in England and assume that the British and Americans are very alike after all. This opinion will change after a longer time in England, when one begins to realize subtle but important differences.

One of the difficulties students and other travelers have in adjusting to foreign life comes about because they take abroad with them too much of their own "cultural baggage": misleading stereotypes and preconceptions about others, coupled with a lack of awareness of that part of themselves which was formed by U.S. culture alone. As a result, suddenly feeling like a fish out of water is a not uncommon experience. It is in fact something which should be anticipated as normal and likely, at least for a while.

According to Robert Kohls, Director of Training and Development for the International Communication Agency: "Culture is an integrated system of learned behavior patterns that are characteristic of the members of any given society... the total way of life of particular groups of people. It includes everything that a group of people thinks, says, does, and makes--its customs, language, material artifacts and shared systems of attitudes and feelings. Culture is learned and transmitted from generation to generation." It is not identical with the genetic heritage that may differentiate one group of people from another. These differences in shared systems of attitudes and feelings represent one of those more subtle and disorienting areas of difference that foreigners experience when they leave 'home.' "

### Cultural Stereotypes

Numerous studies have been done to identify specific characteristics that distinguish one culture from another. This anthropological approach to cultural differences and similarities of course can and should be studied. Most overseas visitors and those who receive them, however, often unfortunately are captured by misleading and often dangerous stereotyping. Most Germans, Japanese, Italians, etc., have stereotyped perceptions of "the American," just as most Americans have stereotyped images of "Germans," "Japanese," "Italians," etc. In short, misperception may exist on all sides. For that matter, most nations maintain stereotypes of themselves, as well.

Following are a few examples of the qualities (some positive, some negative) that others frequently associate with 'the typical American':

- ▶ outgoing and friendly
- ▶ informal
- ▶ loud
- ▶ rude, boastful, immature
- ▶ hard working
- ▶ extravagant and wasteful
- ▶ lacking in class consciousness

- ▶ disrespectful of authority
- ▶ racially prejudiced
- ▶ ignorant of other countries
- ▶ wealthy
- ▶ generous
- ▶ promiscuous
- ▶ always in a hurry

It is up to you (though not you alone) to behave in a manner that will convince your hosts that these generalizations are indeed stereotypical and should not be applied arbitrarily—at least not to you!

It may seem a bit contradictory to suggest that because of the unique social and cultural milieu in the United States, most Americans indeed tend to be less reserved, less inhibited, and less restrained in efforts to communicate friendliness and sociability. But in some regions abroad, this outgoing manner, especially on the part of young women, can be grossly misinterpreted: a friendly smile and a warm "hello" on the streets of Rome could easily be interpreted by an Italian Lothario as something more than mere friendliness. This is to say that until you develop a feel for the social customs characteristics of the area where you are living and studying, it is wise to be more formal and restrained in your social contacts. By the same token, do not expect the local populace to welcome you immediately, with open arms; their formality and restraint are not necessarily an expression of unfriendliness but may simply be characteristic of their social manner with strangers.

Unfortunately, attempts to categorize cultural characteristics often end up in cultural stereotypes that are unfair and misleading. In adjusting to your study abroad environment, you will therefore have to deal not only with real cultural differences, and also with perceived cultural differences. As noted, people of other cultures are just as adept at stereotyping the American as we are at stereotyping them--and the results are not always complimentary

While such a composite stereotype might possess some grain of truth, it is obvious when we consider individual differences that few Americans demonstrate all, or even most, of these characteristics. If you bristle at being thought to be anything like the above, the same is true about your hosts vis-à-vis your own preconceptions, for example, about The Germans, The British, The Japanese, The Italians, The Spaniards, The Russians, and so forth.

### Culture Shock

For a short while after arrival, many travelers go through an initial period of euphoria and excitement, overwhelmed by the thrill of being in a totally new and unusual environment. As this initial sense of novelty and adventure wears off, some such visitors gradually become aware of the fact that their old habits and routine ways of doing things no longer suffice. They gradually (or suddenly) no longer feel, comfortably, themselves.

If this happens to you, as it is likely to, you will feel like the outsider you in fact are. Minor problems may quickly assume the proportions of major crises, and you may find

yourself growing somewhat depressed. You may feel a predictable anxiety that results from losing all your familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse, a kind of psychological disorientation. If so, you will indeed be experiencing what has come to be referred to as culture shock. Such feelings are perfectly normal. Knowing this and with a bit of conscious effort, you will soon find yourself making adjustments (some quite subtle and perhaps not even noticeable at the conscious level) that will enable you to adapt to your new cultural environment.

There is no clear-cut way of dealing with the phenomenon of culture shock. Even experienced travelers experience it, in some measure. Simply recognizing its existence (as experienced travelers do) and your accepting vulnerability to it is an important first step. As long as you know in advance that you will probably fall victim to culture shock at a certain level, you can prepare yourself psychologically to accept the temporary discomfort and turn it into an advantage by learning from it. Remember that you are not the only one experiencing occasional frustration, irritability, and depression, etc. Falling victim to culture shock, in other words, does not imply the existence of any psychological or emotional shortcomings on your part. As Robert Kohls says, "Culture shock is in some degree inevitable... and is the occupational hazard of overseas living through which one has to be willing to go through in order to enjoy the pleasures of experiencing other countries and cultures in depth."

Undergoing culture shock is in itself a learning experience that you should take advantage of. It is a way of sensitizing you to another culture at a level that goes beyond the intellectual and the rational. Just as an athlete cannot get in shape without going through the uncomfortable conditioning stage, so you cannot fully appreciate the cultural differences that exist without first going through the uncomfortable stages of psychological adjustment. Though you probably won't exactly enjoy this temporary disequilibrium, at least note it and profit from what it represents. It will soon pass, and you can become yourself again, though some now almost at home in your new environment. And note: There is also such a phenomenon as reverse culture shock, which sometimes hit upon return home. [See next chapter.]

### Fitting In

Social customs differ greatly from one country to another. It is therefore impossible to give guidelines that will be applicable in every culture. Generally speaking, you can be yourself as long as you remain friendly, courteous, and dignified. Always keep in mind that you are the guest in someone else's country. Therefore, you would be safe to assume that your behavior should be regulated pretty much in the same manner as if you were the guest in someone else's home. On the other hand, as an outsider, especially if you err on the side of being respectful, some allowances are likely to exist for the things you do not immediately understand or feel comfortable with.

**Politeness:** In keeping with the relatively formal manner of social customs abroad, you should place much more emphasis on the simple niceties of polite social intercourse than you might at home. Be prepared to offer a formal word of greeting to whomever you meet in your day-to-day activities. For example, should you approach a clerk in the local market in Strasbourg always be courteous enough to begin your conversation with, "Bonjour, Madame (Monsieur, Mademoiselle)" before you launch into your inquiries

about the products, and become familiar with the appropriate expressions of gratitude in response to your hosts' hospitality.

**Humor:** Physical humor is nearly universal, but most humor is highly culture-bound. While each country has its own particular brand of wit and humor, very few cultures appreciate the kind of "kidding" to which Americans are accustomed. Comments, even when intended to be humorous, can often be taken quite literally. Be careful.

**Speaking the language:** Most people will be extremely flattered rather than amused by your efforts to communicate in their native language. Do not be intimidated or inhibited when practicing your own limited command of the language. A couple of words of caution might be in order: do your best to avoid slang expressions, which are usually unique to the particular culture, and which may therefore be totally meaningless or inappropriate in the context of another culture. Be aware of the differences between the familiar and the polite forms of address and be sure to use them properly.

Do not try to translate American idiomatic expressions and slang directly into the native language. Both may be complete nonsense when translated into another language. Also, while it is not true that all people speak English, it is true enough for you to be wary of making impolite or tactless comments on the presumption that those within hearing distance will not understand what you are saying. They may.

**Physical contact:** When establishing social relationships, "play it by ear" when determining the level of familiarity that you should adopt at the various stages of your relationship. Physical contact, for example, may not be especially appreciated or understood by someone unfamiliar with the American idea of camaraderie; a cheerful pat on the back or a warm hug may be quite embarrassing and uncomfortable in certain cultures.

All cultures have different notions about social space, for instance how far away to stand or sit when conversing, or how to shake hands or wave farewell. Restraint is advisable until you learn how the locals do it and what they expect of you.

**Too personal questions:** Let your hosts point the way when engaging in small talk. While Americans may find it easy and quite appropriate to talk about themselves, in some countries, your hosts may view this as being as impolite as asking personal questions of them.

**Drinking and drunkenness:** Be extremely sensitive of others' attitudes and feelings when it comes to drinking. You will probably find that your hosts enjoy social drinking as much as any American, but they might not look upon drunkenness as either amusing or indeed tolerable.

**Price bargaining:** Haggling over prices can be another sensitive and vague subject. Haggling is not only appropriate but even expected in some circumstances. The trick is to know under which circumstances haggling is appropriate. Unless you clearly understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate circumstances for this sort of social bargaining, you may very well find yourself insulting the merchant and further reinforcing a negative stereotype of Americans. You can always test the waters

by politely indicating that you like the product very much but that it is a bit more than you had anticipated spending: if the merchant wishes to bargain further, this will give him the opening he needs to offer you the product at a lower price; if it is not that kind of an establishment, you can simply (and politely) terminate the conversation.

Talking politics: Expect people abroad to be very articulate and well-informed when it comes to matters of politics and international relations. Do not be at all surprised if your counterparts try to engage you in political debate. There is certainly no reason for you to modify your own convictions, but you should be discreet and rational in your defense of those convictions. Here again you may very well find yourself butting heads with another of those unfortunate stereotypes, such as the arrogant American who thinks everyone must fall in line with the United States.

Photograph etiquette: You may want to record many of your memories on film, and it is often convenient to include some of the local populace in your photographs. However, remember that the people you 'shoot' are human beings and not curiosity objects. Be tactful and discreet in how you approach photographing strangers; it is always courteous and wise to ask permission before taking someone's picture.

#### A Special Note to Women

Some women students from relatively progressive campus environments such as Amherst=s, have a hard time adjusting to attitudes they encounter abroad, in both public and private interactions between men and women, especially in certain overseas (e.g. South America, the Middle East, and parts of Europe). Some (but not all) men in such countries openly demonstrate their appraisal of women in ways that many American women find offensive. It is not uncommon to be honked at, stared at, verbally and loudly appraised, and to be actively noticed simply for being a woman. The attention can be flattering, especially if seen in local terms. However, it may become very annoying, and potentially even angering. Indigenous women, who often get the same sort of treatment, have been taught how to ignore the attention. Many American women students find this hard to do. Eye contact between strangers or a smile at someone passing in the street, actions not uncommon in the States, may result in totally unexpected invitations abroad. Some women feel they are forced to stare intently at the ground while they walk down the street.

You will have to learn what the unwritten rules are about what you can and cannot do abroad. Women can provide support for each other, and former students suggest that you get together several times early in your stay overseas to talk about what works and what doesn't for dealing with the unwanted attention. American women are seen as "liberated" in many ways, and sometimes the cultural misunderstandings that come out of this image can lead to difficult and unpleasant experiences.

Needless to say, this special and surprising status may make male-female friendships more difficult to develop. Be careful about the implicit messages you may be unintentionally communicating. Above all, try to maintain the perspective that these challenging (and sometimes difficult experiences) are part of the growth of cultural understanding which is one of the important reasons you are studying abroad. Prepare yourself by trying to understand in advance not only the gender roles and assumptions

which may prevail elsewhere, but also the uniqueness of American gender politics, which may or may not be understood, much less prevail, in other countries.

### Racial & Ethnic Concerns

No two students studying abroad ever have quite the same experience, even in the same program and country. This same variety is true for students of color and those from U.S. minority ethnic or racial backgrounds. Reports from past Amherst participants vary from those who felt exhilarated by being free of the American context of race relations, to those who experienced different degrees of 'innocent' curiosity about their ethnicity, to those who felt they met both familiar and new types of ostracism and prejudice and had to learn new coping strategies. Very few minority students conclude that racial or ethnic problems which can be encountered in other countries represent sufficient reasons for not going. On the other hand, they advise knowing what you are getting into in advance, and preparing yourself for it. Try to find others on your campus who have studied abroad and who can provide you with some counsel.

### Being Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans-gendered, or Questioning Abroad

It is important to be aware of the laws pertaining to homosexuality in other countries, as well as the general attitudes of the populace toward members of their community with other than heterosexual orientation. The countries you visit may be more, or may be less, "liberated" (on a general U.S. scale of values) in these regards, but will in all cases be at least somewhat unique. Moreover, whatever the general rule, there will always be pockets of difference and personal idiosyncrasies. Country-specific information is often available from campus offices, personnel, and student groups. You should certainly talk with other students who have been where you will be.

For information on issues and resources pertaining to gay, lesbian, and bisexual travel, you also may want to consult publications available in most bookstores and libraries which carry such literature as Gaia's Guide, "an international guide for traveling women," that includes information on restaurants, accommodations, travel, and the like; or Spartacus International Gay Guide, which provides listings of hotlines, publications, bars, etc. for gay men throughout the world. For a bibliography regarding sexual orientation issues in countries outside the U.S. try the following Web-site:

<http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay>

### "What's Up With Culture?": An Internet Resource on Cultural Adaptation

To prepare yourself for the cultural adaptation you need to make daily while living and learning in a culture not your own; and coming home—and after this experience, re-adjusting both to this country and to Amherst-- we again urge that you utilize "What's Up With Culture?" The URL is:

<http://www3.uop.edu/sis/culture/index.htm?page=/sis/culture/> It offers an opportunity to explore various aspects of intercultural communication and adjustment models that are known to impact upon all study abroad experiences. It is organized around materials collected and developed over 30 years of offering cross-cultural training courses at the University of the Pacific, specifically the linked orientation and reentry courses of the School of International Studies (SIS). The site also includes materials adapted from the "Culture Matters" Peace Corps Workbook. It was developed to support and enhance a

student's ability to make successful cultural adjustments while overseas and upon returning home from studying abroad.

The focus is generally on the concept of culture and how it impacts one's ability to understand and function in a new and unfamiliar environment. It concentrates on the skills, attitudes, and behaviors which all study abroad students, regardless of their specific destination, will find useful. This site is self-guided and self-paced. Use it as a vehicle for self-exploration. There are many self-assessment and activity exercises from which you can learn a great deal about your communication style, your cultural values, and your attitude towards and reactions to different ways of doing things.

If you take the material seriously and work carefully through the exercises, you should better understand that the culture you are living in has a somewhat or dramatically different 'worldview' from that of mainstream US-American culture. You can further realize the extent to which your ordinary 'American' behavior and preferences are based on core cultural values and assumptions. These assumptions can have a profound effect upon how you react to those you meet abroad and, just as importantly, how they might react to you. Since the ways people think and act in different countries may differ significantly from what you know and may have expected, the more you know about what culture is and how it works, the better you will be able to manage and adapt to a new cross-cultural context. This site can help you learn what is required to be effective and comfortable while living internationally. In short, it offers an opportunity to make the cross-cultural experience you are having much richer and easier -- both for you and for those you meet abroad and, finally for your family and friends -- when you return.

#### Further Reading on Cultural Adaptation

Social customs differ from one country and culture to another, and there is simply no way you can fit in and be at home unless you learn what is and isn't appropriate behavior. It is impossible to make generalizations that can be applicable to every situation. Therefore, it is not inappropriate to inquire politely about local customs and social niceties. Expect things to be different overseas. One of the basic reasons for your participation in a study abroad program should necessarily be to develop a sensitivity to and appreciation for the people and customs of a totally different culture and way of life. Anyone who goes overseas demanding that everything be the same as what (s)he is accustomed to in the United States will be sorely disappointed and probably better served by staying at home. Be flexible and receptive in dealing with these differences and you will find your own life experiences will be greatly enriched.