

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 your 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.

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.