

Explore
Experience
Engage
Excel

UVA Education Abroad



2018-2019 Handbook



Dear UVA Student:

Congratulations on your decision to study abroad!

This will inevitably be one of the most exciting times in your life as a student. Study abroad is a time filled with learning, observing, practicing new skills, and making new relationships.

This handbook should serve as a reference tool to prepare you for your upcoming education abroad experience. This guide should help you explore issues such as credit transfer, passport application, and cultural adjustment, as well as encourage you to do some preparation for living in the area of the world in which you will be a guest.

This handbook is **not** a substitute for your own research about your host country!

Plan to make the most of your education abroad experience! Have a great adventure; make it a positive and rewarding experience! Characteristics that play a vital role in your success abroad are: patience, flexibility, adaptability, a sense of responsibility, and perhaps **most importantly, a sense of humor**. Avoid rigid ideas of "right" and "wrong" ways to do things. You will most likely form a new perspective on yourself and the world.

We challenge you to be **good will ambassadors** and to actively participate in improving international relations whether in the classroom or on a train, in a restaurant or with new friends. Take every opportunity to open your mind to new experiences, customs, and people. Remember...you are a guest in another country, so the utmost respect and appreciation should be evident in your words and actions.

Be safe, learn from every situation, and enjoy the journey.

The Education Abroad Team at the International Studies Office

Table of Contents

Academics	5
Course Approvals	5
Transferring Credit.....	6
Transfer Credit and Grades	6
Registration in SIS.....	7
Registering for Courses on Grounds	8
Finances	8
Billing and Payments.....	8
Managing Your Money Abroad.....	9
Documentation.....	11
Passports	11
Visas	11
Working Abroad.....	12
Personal Belongings and insurance	12
Power of Attorney.....	12
Packing.....	12
Carry-on	12
Clothing	13
Medications	13
Electronics.....	13
Communications	13
Telephones	14
Email/UVA Services	14
Mail	14
Health	14
Identify Your Health Needs.....	15
Immunizations	15
Insurance Coverage	16
Local Facilities.....	16
Jet Lag	17

Pack a Medical Kit.....	17
Alcohol and Drugs.....	17
Sexual Activity.....	17
Mental Health.....	18
Safety and Legal Matters.....	18
Conduct.....	19
Security.....	19
Traveling Safely.....	21
Women Abroad.....	22
Race and Ethnicity Abroad.....	22
LGBTQ+ Abroad.....	23
Access Abroad and Students with Disabilities.....	23
Heritage Seekers Abroad.....	23
Religious Diversity Abroad.....	24
Legal Matters.....	24
Traversing Cultures.....	25
Culture Adjustment and Culture Shock.....	25
Cultural Baggage.....	26
Cultural Sensitivity.....	27
Food.....	27
Representing the U.S. Abroad.....	28
Preparing for Reverse Culture Shock.....	29
Challenges of Readjustment.....	31
Coping Strategies.....	32
Advice from Study Abroad Returnees.....	33
Pre-Departure Checklist.....	33
Fire Safety 101.....	33

Academics

Studying abroad affords you the opportunity to learn about and take part in a different educational system. This may require a bit of “relearning” on your part, as you discover new teaching styles and are expected to perform according to a new set of standards. Find out what professors’ expectations of students are at your host university or program, and make realistic expectations for yourself.

Course Approvals

Students participating in transfer credit programs must get their courses PRE-APPROVED as part of the application to the program. Participants should have already secured approval and submitted the Transfer Credit Approval Form to the International Studies Office. Students are strongly advised to take a copy of their signed Transfer Credit Approval Forms abroad.

Should your course enrollment change upon arrival abroad, follow the steps below as you select your new course(s).

Steps for College students:

1. For **elective credit**, email Dr. Holeman at collegestudyabroad@virginia.edu. Consult <http://ascs8.eservices.virginia.edu/studyAbroad> to see if your new course has previously been approved. If you are unable to find the course in the elective database, include a description of the course in your email to Dr. Holeman.
2. For **major/minor or foreign language credit**, email a course description and/or syllabus to both the departmental director <http://college.as.virginia.edu/ugrad-directors> and Abigail Holeman (collegestudyabroad@virginia.edu) as soon as possible. Forward the departmental director’s approval of a substitute major/minor or foreign language course to Abigail Holeman. Save a copy of this correspondence.

Steps for students in other Schools:

1. E-mail the course syllabus to the appropriate academic department. Refer to the copy of your pre-approval forms for your contact person within your school. You can also find this person listed in the requirement in your study abroad application.
2. Upon departmental approval, forward the email approval to the School Registrar (*email should include the student’s name, host institution, overseas course number and title, and the UVA equivalent course number and title*). Save a copy of this correspondence.

*** Remember that the Dean’s Office in your School of Enrollment has the final authority on the number of credits you will receive, thus if the number of course credits is in question, be sure to communicate directly with the School Registrar/Transfer of Credit Evaluator.

Transferring Credit

In order for your study abroad credits to be posted to your UVA records, all courses must be pre-approved on the Study Abroad Transfer Credit Approval Form. Transfer Credit forms can be obtained from your online UVA application OR by contacting the appropriate person listed on your online UVA application.

You must earn the minimum transfer grade or better in order for the credits to transfer:

CLAS	SEAS	Curry	Architecture	Commerce	SON	Batten
C	C	C	C-	C	C-	C

- If in the College:** It is your responsibility to request that an official transcript be sent to:
 Abigail Holeman, Transfer Credit Evaluator
 PO Box 400133
 University of Virginia
 Charlottesville, VA 22904-4133
 E-mail: collegestudyabroad@virginia.edu
- For students not in the College,** you should have your transcripts sent to the registrar of your school.
- Transcripts are usually sent 2 to 3 months after a program has ended.
- We suggest you obtain extra copies of your transcript or any other relevant documents, especially if you plan to apply to graduate school in the future. You will need to produce official transcripts for admission to most graduate programs and it could be difficult to obtain them after you have departed. Keep these transcripts sealed as many schools will only consider transcripts official if they have not been opened.

Transfer Credit and Grades

Once a transcript is received, the credits you earned will be listed on your transcript as “credit received” in accordance with your transfer credit approvals. **Your transcript must match your transfer credit approval forms for your credit to be processed. Credits will not factor into your UVA GPA. Below is a sample unofficial UVA transcript showing how credit will appear on your UVA record.**

						Cuml Credits	31.0	Grd Pts	107.000	GPA	3.452
2009 Fall											
Test Credits	School:		College & Graduate Arts & Sci								
Test Credits Applied Toward Arts & Sciences Undergraduate	Major:		Arts & Sciences Undeclared								
Transferred to Term 2008 Fall as	ANTH 2680		Peoples of Polynesia		B+	3.0					
ENLT 249 Intro Lit Crit	TE	3.00	ARTH 2871	The Arts of India	B+	3.0					
ENWR 110 Accelerated Academic Writing	TE	0.00	ECON 2010	Principles of Econ: Microecon	B+	3.0					
SWR 000 Second Writing Requirement	TE	0.00	HIUS 3458	U.S. Foreign Relatn Since 1914	B	3.0					
			PLCP 2120	Politics of Developing Areas	B+	3.0					
Test Credit Total:		3.00	Curr Credits	15.0	Grd Pts	48.600	GPA	3.240			
			Cuml Credits	46.0	Grd Pts	155.600	GPA	3.383			
2010 Spring											
Transfer Credits	School:		College & Graduate Arts & Sci								
Transfer Credit from Inst Internatnl Educ Students	Major:		Art - Art History								
Applied Toward Arts & Sciences Undergraduate Program	Major:		Foreign Affairs								
Incoming Course	ARTH 3559		New Course: ARTH		A-	3.0					
AH 231 Renaissance & Classical Herita			Course Topic:		Greek Sculpture						
Transferred to Term 2010 Fall as			GERM 3000	Intensive Grammar	B+	3.0					
ARTH 2251 Italian Renaissance Art	TM	3.00	ITAL 1020	Elementary Italian II	A	4.0					
Incoming Course	PLAP 1010		Intro to American Politics		B	3.0					
AH 325 Medieval Art in Rome			PLCP 3110	The Politics of Western Europe	B	3.0					
Transferred to Term 2010 Fall as			Curr Credits	16.0	Grd Pts	55.000	GPA	3.438			
ARTH 2151 Early Christian & Byzantine Art	TM	3.00	Cuml Credits	62.0	Grd Pts	210.600	GPA	3.397			
			Honor:	Dean's List							
2010 Summer											
Incoming Course	School:		College & Graduate Arts & Sci								
IR 251 Internl Peace & Conflict Resol			Major:		Art - Art History						
Transferred to Term 2010 Fall as	Major:		Foreign Affairs								
PLIR 3500 Special Topics	TM	3.00	PLCP 4150	Comparative Public Policy	A-	3.0					
Incoming Course	Curr Credits		3.0		Grd Pts	11.100	GPA	3.700			
IR 343 Italy & US: Hist of Long Inter			Cuml Credits	65.0	Grd Pts	221.700	GPA	3.411			
Transferred to Term 2010 Fall as											
PLIR 3000T Non-UVa Transfer/Test Credit	TM	3.00	2010 Fall								
Incoming Course	School:		College & Graduate Arts & Sci								
IT 201 Intermediate Italian I			Major:		Art - Art History						
Transferred to Term 2010 Fall as	Major:		Foreign Affairs								
ITAL 2010 Intermediate Italian I	TR	4.00	ZFOR 3558	International Study	N	0.0					
			Course Topic:		External Transfer Credit Pgm						
Transfer Credit Total:		16.00	Curr Credits	0.0	Grd Pts	0.000	GPA	0.000			
			Cuml Credits	65.0	Grd Pts	221.700	GPA	3.411			
2011 Spring											
Beginning of Undergraduate Record	School:		College & Graduate Arts & Sci								
	Major:		Art - Art History								
	Major:		Foreign Affairs								
2008 Fall	ARTH 2451		Modern Art, 1900-1945		A	4.0					
School: College & Graduate Arts & Sci	ECON 2020		Principles of Econ: Macroecon		B	3.0					
Major: Arts & Sciences Undeclared	MATH 1210		Applied Calculus I		C	3.0					
ARTH 101 History of Art I	A	4.0	PHIL 3180	Locke, Berkeley and Hume	A-	3.0					
CHEM 141 Introductory College Chemistry	B-	3.0	PLIR 3310	Ethics & Human Rights in Polit	A-	3.0					
CHEM 141L Introductory Chemistry Lab	A-	2.0	Curr Credits	16.0	Grd Pts	53.200	GPA	3.325			
COLA 101 Myths of Adolescence & Lit Imagin	A	1.0	Cuml Credits	81.0	Grd Pts	274.900	GPA	3.394			
GERM 201 Intermediate German	B+	3.0									
PHIL 151 Human Nature	A-	3.0	2011 Summer								
Curr Credits	16.0	Grd Pts	56.500	GPA	3.531						
Cuml Credits	16.0	Grd Pts	56.500	GPA	3.531						
Honor: Dean's List											
2011 Spring											
2011 Fall											

Registration in SIS

Clicking the "commit" button on your ISO study abroad application at educationabroad.virginia.edu confirms your participation in a study abroad program.

Both your commitment and your online post-decision requirements must be completed by November 15th for spring semester participants and April 15th for summer, fall, and year participants. Please log back in to your application to verify that you have completed all post-decision requirements and have committed to your program.

Note: The only questionnaire that can be edited after being submitted is Travel Information. You should enter **confirmed ticket information** in this questionnaire, not just intended plans. In the event that your flight reservations need to be changed, you can edit the information.

After your commitment and post-decision requirements are completed, the ISO will register you into a course titled ZFOR 35XX International Study. In addition to maintaining your UVA enrollment for the term, allowing you to be billed appropriately, and facilitating the use of financial aid, this registration adds a note to your academic transcript documenting your study abroad experience. **You cannot register yourself for ZFOR 35XX and you should not register for courses on grounds for the term in which you will be abroad (unless you plan on taking a summer course on-Grounds).**

Registering for Courses on Grounds (applicable only to year and semester students)

Shortly before course enrollment begins for the semester following your study abroad program (early November for spring semester; mid-March for fall semester), you will be able to log in to SIS to view your enrollment appointment, the date and time at which you can begin course enrollment. Your on-Grounds course registration time will not be impacted by your being abroad. You should notify your advisor that you are abroad so s/he can arrange for email advising if needed.

The University Registrar (UREG) will ensure that you are not given an Advisor Hold, but you will need to clear any and all other holds that you may have on your record. You will enroll in courses through SIS in the usual fashion.

If your appointment time is particularly inconvenient due to the time difference or lack of access to the internet, you may send a list of your desired courses to UREG at ureg@virginia.edu, who will attempt to enroll you at the appropriate time. You should include a list of possible alternate courses. *****UREG will only enroll students during normal business hours (M-F, 8am-5pm EST)*****

Finances

Billing and Payments

University of Virginia fees will be posted to student accounts upon registration. Please consult the program webpage at educationabroad.virginia.edu to verify which fees are charged by UVA for your program.

If you are participating in an **Outside** program you will be billed the Study Abroad Administrative Fee. This per-term fee covers costs associated with pre-departure orientation, study abroad advising, transfer credit approval and the repackaging of student financial aid, and is subject to increase. For the 2018-2019 academic year, this fee is \$500.

If you are participating in an **Exchange** program you will be billed regular UVA tuition and mandatory on-Grounds fees (including the Student Activity Fee and the Comprehensive Fee) by UVA. Housing will be paid to the host institution or privately, depending on your host's housing options.

UVA bills may be paid as usual according to the due dates on your student account.

Fees billed by an outside program, or from a host institution, are paid directly to the program's provider or host institution.

Financial Aid

Students who have applied for financial aid will be notified of their award package in SIS by Student Financial Services. Funds will be credited to the student's account around the first day of on-grounds class for the term. [Note: Outstanding charges on the student account will be paid first and may result in insufficient funds to cover the study abroad program cost. To avoid this, ensure that you have no outstanding charges.] Any remaining funds will be refunded to the student. Students are strongly encouraged to set up direct deposit and [Power of Attorney](#) to facilitate immediate access to the refund.

See <http://sfs.virginia.edu/studyabroad/pay> for more information. **Questions regarding financial aid should be directed to Student Financial Services at (434) 982-6000.**

Payment Plans

To inquire as to the use of Tuition Management or Virginia Pre-Paid Tuition plans, please consult the plan provider.

Managing Your Money Abroad

Understand the costs your program covers; make sure you know how much money you will require beyond what you pay for the program. Be aware of spending habits as well as payment and tipping practices in your host culture.

Cash

Upon arrival abroad, you can find an airport ATM (know what they are called in your host country!), or you may change U.S. dollars at an exchange service (although rates are typically higher, so change the least possible at this point). Carry only the amount of cash you need on a daily basis. You may want to use a money belt to keep it hidden. Find a secure way to lock up excess cash in your accommodations.

Exchange rates fluctuate on a daily basis. Check online or at a local exchange service for the daily rate.

Debit/ATM Cards

ATMs are available in most cities across the globe and are a fast way to obtain foreign currency. An ATM, debit, or checking card is excellent for international travel because it allows you to withdraw money from your bank account in the currency of the

host country. Debit cards with Visa, MasterCard, Cirrus or Plus signs are the most widely accepted cards. Check the back of your debit card to know which system your card belongs to.

The ATM transaction will debit the money from your account at that day's exchange rate. There are usually transaction fees, and the fees vary significantly. Be sure to call your bank before departure and check on the fees charged for each ATM or purchase transaction. If you will have significant transaction fees, withdraw larger amounts to avoid multiple transactions and fees. Be sure that you (and someone back home) know your PIN number for ATM or credit cards. Alert your debit card issuer of the dates and location(s) of your travels, or you run the risk that the card may be cut off following a foreign transaction. Make copies of both the front and back of the card and know the country-specific customer service phone number to assist you should the card be lost or stolen.

Some U.S. banks have “no-fee” agreements with banks abroad. Check with your bank for their specific information.

Opening a Bank Account

If you are abroad for a semester or year, it may be a good idea to open a local bank account. This could aid in avoiding significant fees assessed by your U.S. bank for international use. There are many types of banks abroad, and your program's resident director or your host institution should give you advice about banking during your orientation. This may require you to produce a variety of documentation; be prepared to gather the necessary documents and exercise flexibility and patience as you learn the banking system of your host country.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are convenient for most purchases, emergencies and cash advances, although there are usually higher interest charges for cash advances. Most major credit cards are honored abroad, but there are exceptions. You will be billed in dollars on your statement, and the amount will reflect the exchange rate of the day the transaction was posted. The interest charged on an outstanding balance adds up quickly so you will need to arrange online banking to be able to pay your bill online, or leave someone you trust in charge of paying your monthly credit card bill since most credit card companies will not send bills to non-U.S. addresses. As with debit cards, alert your credit card issuer of the dates and location of your travels. Know the country-specific phone number and make copies of both the front and back of the card to assist you should the card be lost or stolen. If you have a credit card with a chip, get a PIN from your bank – some countries expect that, if you have a chip, you will have a PIN. Bring more than one credit/debit card in case you encounter problems with or lose one; be prepared to provide a card to your hotel when traveling (even if your program is paying for the room rate and taxes, some hotels require a card on file for incidentals).

Documentation

Keep a photocopy of your documents in a safe place at home with family and keep a copy in a secure place with you abroad (away from the originals).

Passports

All students need a passport to travel outside the United States. If your current passport expires within **six months** of the end of the program, your passport is not considered valid for the purposes of your education abroad program. **Apply for or renew as soon as possible** to avoid delays and extra fees for expedited processing. Passport applications and instructions can be accessed from the U.S. government website (<http://travel.state.gov>) and picked up at the main post office in Charlottesville or from most major passport offices.

Keep a photocopy of your passport ID pages in a safe place at home in the U.S. (or your home country) with family and keep a copy in a secure place with you abroad. If your passport is lost or stolen, it is easier to replace if you have a photocopy. You should also bring two U.S.-produced passport photos with you abroad. Information about passport photos can be found at: <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports/photos.html>.

It is important to remember that your passport is your most crucial legal document while you are outside the U.S. **Treat it with special attention.**

Visas

Most countries require a visa allowing you to enter the country as a student. Each country has its own regulations, application process, and timeline; it is the student's responsibility to know and abide by the visa requirements for their country of study. Students may consult the appropriate Embassy or Consulate for information. There is almost always a fee attached to the visa application and the process can take several weeks or even months; don't wait until the last minute! Delays in obtaining a visa may cause you to miss your flight.

Should your visa application require enrollment verification, please contact your Education Abroad Advisor at least one week in advance of your preferred pick-up date.

Keep a copy of your visa document in a safe place at home with family and keep a copy in a secure place with you abroad. If your visa is lost or stolen, it is easier to replace if you have the copy accessible.

International Students

International students may have different visa requirements from U.S. students for the country to which you are traveling, and the application may involve longer processing time. Begin researching these requirements early. Your host institution or program provider may provide support for obtaining a visa, but it is ultimately your responsibility to obtain proper documentation. Your Education Abroad Advisor can provide limited support and an enrollment

verification letter if needed. All UVA international students need to meet with their International Student Advisor to discuss re-entry documentation and requirements.

Working Abroad

As you will be participating in an academic program, you should take full advantage of the opportunity to study and travel. Therefore, it is recommended that you do not work. However, if you are interested in working during your study program, consult the Embassy for regulations pertaining to a work visa/permit. While it may be permissible in some countries, in others it is strictly prohibited.

Personal Belongings and insurance

Personal belongings should be covered by your personal or parents' homeowners' or renters' insurance policies. However, you may need to purchase a "rider" or "personal articles floater" itemizing any high-value items with which you are traveling (i.e. laptops, jewelry, etc.). With the rider or personal articles floater, the specified items are covered anywhere in the world. Because study abroad students have been targets of theft, it is recommended that students NOT take precious articles abroad. Leave valuable jewelry and irreplaceable items at home.

Power of Attorney

It is advisable to designate an individual to take care of legal or financial matters on your behalf while you are abroad. This is particularly helpful in regards to filing taxes, arranging financial aid, and paying bills. Designate someone you trust to uphold financial obligations such as a parent or sibling. Find out what the proper procedure is and make those arrangements legal before you depart.

Packing

It is nearly impossible to pack everything you want. The trick is to pack what you need and **can carry!** Consult your airline's policy regarding baggage size, weight limits, and overweight baggage fees. Soft-sided bags are easier to store and provide more "give" when packing. Backpacks are ideal because they will leave your hands free. Pack your luggage; carry it around the block and up and down some stairs. Then re-evaluate what is absolutely necessary and empty half of it. Remember, you will probably want to bring home some items from your host country; account for this by leaving some space in your baggage. Verify regulations for carry-on liquids and put your name and address on a luggage tag as well as inside your suitcase in case the suitcase breaks or is lost. Never leave your bags unattended!

Carry-on

- Important documents: passport, visa, insurance cards, credit/bank card
- Medication and/or glasses or contacts

Leave
irreplaceable
items at home

- Arrival and accommodation instructions/addresses
- Copy of completed Transfer Credit Approval Forms()
- Valuables: Please leave jewelry, expensive watches, etc. at home
- Toiletries and change of clothes in case your luggage is lost

Clothing

Take interchangeable clothing that can be layered. Dress may be more or less formal in other countries; pack accordingly. As you may be abroad through more than one season, plan ahead and take some clothes for changing weather. You will be walking far more than usual. A good pair of comfortable shoes is a must!

Medications

Know what is legal to bring into your host country – contact [CISI](#) once you have enrolled yourself. Embassy websites sometimes include information about what visitors can bring as well. Take enough prescription medication to last you throughout your stay if possible. Pack medications in their **original** containers, and bring the prescription documentation with you. Medication sent from the U.S. may not get through customs. Pharmacies in other countries will be able to fill most prescriptions, but check to be sure what is available in your host country. Getting a new prescription will also necessitate a visit to a local doctor. If you wear contact lenses, bring extra contacts, cleaning solution, your written eye prescription, and extra glasses.

Electronics

Electronic voltage and wattage levels are varied and can wreak havoc if your devices do not match. The electrical outlets and voltage used in countries around the world are shown on <https://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets/>. Power converters, as well as outlet adapters, are available at electronic stores and travel shops. Be selective about taking electronics with you! For your return flight, be aware that for some flights to the U.S. airlines now require electronic devices to be charged when going through security, so as to confirm they are not hollowed out; be sure to fully charge any devices you are carrying before going to the airport. Others may require you to check electronic devices over a certain size. Restrictions and requirements regarding electronics can change quickly; verify with your airline before departure.

Communications

Family and friends will be eager to hear about your experiences abroad and you will have plenty to share. Prior to departure, establish a realistic communication plan based on the access to communication tools in your host country as well as your academic requirements and cultural explorations. Check in with your family upon arrival so they know you have gotten to your destination safely.

Telephones

It is important that you be able to call local numbers when you're in your host country, in case you need to contact program staff, emergency services, taxi services, etc. You also may want to be able to call home. Options include:

- For local calling: check with your program to see if they provide a local phone. If not, you can either unlock your U.S. phone and purchase a local SIM card (check with your carrier to confirm, and for fees), or purchase a local phone on arrival.
- For calling home: use your U.S. phone (again, check with your carrier to confirm this is an option, and make sure you understand the fees involved!), international calling cards with a local phone, or chat online through a service like Skype (confirm your internet connectivity in-country will support this).

If family or friends in the U.S. call you while you're abroad, reference this FCC Tip Sheet: <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/international-long-distance-calling-made-simple-tip-sheet>.

Email/UVA Services

Continue checking your UVA email account while you are abroad—this is the official form of communication at UVA and the means by which the University will notify you of important changes or events. You will also need to access sites requiring 2-Step Login, like SIS, while abroad. **Important information about using 2-Step Login internationally can be found here:** <https://www.secureuva.virginia.edu/2steplogin/faq.html>; **about EduRoam here:** <http://its.virginia.edu/wireless/eduroam/>.

Mail

Have your mail forwarded to an updated address in the U.S. while you are abroad. You may wish to set up electronic banking and bill pay to make the process of paying bills easier while abroad.

Health

Before you travel abroad, it is worthwhile to take a close look at the many factors that contribute to your physical and emotional well-being. Traveling abroad will almost certainly affect your health, because so many factors of your daily health have to do with lifestyle and environment. Conversely, the state of your health will have a significant impact on the success and enjoyment of your trip.

Going abroad is not a magic "geographic cure" for concerns and problems at home. Both physical and emotional health issues will follow you wherever you go. In particular, if you are concerned about your use of alcohol and other controlled drugs or if you have an emotional health concern, you should address it honestly before making plans to travel. Contrary to many

people's expectations, travel does not minimize these problems; in fact, it often exacerbates them to a crisis stage while you are away from home, in an unfamiliar environment.

Identify Your Health Needs

Be clear about your health needs. Thoroughly and honestly describe allergies, disabilities, psychological treatments, dietary requirements, and medical needs so that adequate arrangements can be made. In addition, resources and services for people with disabilities vary widely by country and region. If you have a disability or special need, identify it and understand ahead of time exactly what accommodations can and cannot be made.

If you require regular medical care for any condition you have, tell those in your host country who can be of assistance. Notify the program director and the International Studies Office of your disabilities and special needs in advance.

A visit to your family physician, gynecologist, dentist, and mental health professional will help you prepare for a healthy journey and might prevent emergencies abroad. Update your health records, including eyeglass prescriptions and regular medications. Identify medical resources before you leave. If you expect to need regular medical care abroad, take a letter of introduction from your physician at home, providing details of your medical conditions, care, and specific needs. If you use prescription medication, check to be sure it is legal and available in your host country. Take enough prescription medication to last you throughout your stay, and carry it in the original containers. If you self-inject prescribed medication, you may need to carry needles and syringes with you. If you wear contact lenses, bring an extra set of contacts, cleaning solutions, glasses, and your written eye prescription.

If you have a disability please tell your Education Abroad Advisor so s/he can assist in identifying programs with appropriate support

Immunizations

Consult the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Travel Clinic at Elson Student Health Center for guidance early in your preparations. For travel to medium to high medical risk destinations*, students are strongly encouraged to make a travel appointment at the Student Health Center Travel Clinic at least 4-6 weeks in advance of departure. The Student Health Travel Clinic offers specific vaccinations for travel, such as typhoid, rabies, Japanese encephalitis, and yellow fever, which may not be available at most doctors' offices. All travel vaccines given at the Student Health clinic are covered in full for students with Aetna Student Health Insurance. Care providers provide travel counseling regarding food and water borne illnesses, insect borne diseases, traveler's diarrhea prevention and treatment, malaria prophylaxis, and rabies risk. The clinic is coordinated by health care providers Certified in Travel Health™.

For travel to **all** destinations, make sure your routine vaccinations, such as tetanus, are up to date. Your immunizations can be checked at Healthy Hoos:

<https://www.healthyhoos.virginia.edu/>.

***Medium to High Medical Risk Destinations:** all countries *except* for Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and Japan

NOTE: There is currently a yellow fever vaccine shortage in the U.S. If you are traveling to a country that requires or recommends the yellow fever vaccine, consult the CDC, the Travel Clinic, and/or your healthcare provider immediately.

**Travel Clinic in the Elson
Student Health Center**

(434) 924-5362

<http://studenthealth.virginia.edu/international-travel-clinic>

Insurance Coverage

Just as at home, it is important to have adequate medical insurance coverage while abroad.

Students traveling outside the U.S. for University-related purposes (including education abroad) are required to enroll in the UVA international health and emergency assistance insurance plan through Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI). Students participating in outside and exchange programs will be prompted to self-enroll with CISI when they complete their post-decision requirements. Please view our Insurance page for more information: educationabroad.virginia.edu/insurance. Some outside program providers include insurance that meets the same coverage as CISI, so students on these programs are exempt from purchasing UVA's CISI insurance policy. See our Insurance page linked above for a list of those providers.

It is recommended that all travelers plan for medical emergencies by carrying a credit card and/or information on who should be contacted in the event that it is necessary to make financial arrangements to pay for treatment. This is necessary even if your health insurer provides coverage in foreign countries because health care providers in some countries expect payment in advance of admitting or treating patients.

If you are traveling independently before or after your program, try to purchase/extend your insurance coverage for your entire time abroad.

Local Facilities

Your on-site orientation will highlight health and medical resources in your host community. Learn how to utilize the resources, whether routine or emergency, before you need them. Obtain the emergency number for police, fire, and ambulance services. If you require regular medical care for any condition you have, establish an open line of communication with your program's site director or the international office at your host institution.

**Centers for Disease
Control (CDC)**

(800) CDC-INFO

www.cdc.gov/travel/

Jet Lag

Depending on the length of your flight and the time difference, you may experience jet lag or traveler's stress. Some helpful ways to counteract jet lag include: avoid caffeine and alcohol while traveling, get plenty of rest, eat healthy food, drink plenty of fluids (particularly juices and water), get moderate exercise and wear loose, comfortable clothing, and go outside as daylight helps the body adjust to the new environment.

Pack a Medical Kit

Pack all medications in their original containers in your carry-on.

- Medication: prescriptions, pain relievers, anti-diarrhea, etc.
- First Aid Kit: band-aids, antibacterial ointment, sunscreen
- Contraceptives, feminine hygiene products, other routine health and medical products you may need or brands you prefer
- Glasses, contacts, contact solution
- Depending on the region: water purification or salt tablets, moisturizers, insect repellent

Alcohol and Drugs

The consumption of alcohol is encouraged in some societies and prohibited in others. Many cultures teach young people to drink moderately and responsibly in the home, and thus do not experience the reactionary or “rebellious” alcohol abuse to which some American students expose themselves. The negative social and physical effects of the use of alcohol and other drugs are well documented. Use of these drugs may exaggerate existing physical or mental health conditions and may cause: blackouts, poisoning and overdose; physical and psychological dependence; damage to vital organs; inability to learn and remember information; and psychological problems including depression, psychosis and severe anxiety. Impaired judgment and coordination resulting from the use of alcohol and drugs are associated with acquaintance assault and rape; contracting sexually-transmitted diseases; un-wanted or unplanned sexual experiences and pregnancy; DUI/DWI arrests; hazing; falls, drowning and other injuries.

The University of Virginia does not condone the illegal or otherwise irresponsible use of alcohol and other drugs. It is the responsibility of every member of the University community to know the risks associated with substance use and abuse. This responsibility obligates students and employees to know relevant policies and laws and to conduct themselves in accordance with these laws and policies.

Sexual Activity

There are different attitudes and expectations concerning dating and sexuality in other countries. Words and actions that mean one thing to you may mean something completely different to another person. It is important to discuss your expectations regarding interpersonal and sexual involvement with your partner so that you can reduce physical, emotional, and other risks. Become aware of the particular attitudes and customs concerning sexuality in the country

you will be living in and make responsible decisions about sexual relationships while overseas. Not only will your decisions affect you, but also your partner, possibly her/his family and your host family as well.

HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases exist in every country, and can be easily transmitted through many sexual behaviors. Cultural factors often determine whether you can negotiate condom use with your partner. In some countries, condom use is expected and encouraged. In other countries, individuals risk accusations of unfaithfulness if they suggest that their partner use a condom. Please use good judgment and communication skills with your partner concerning this issue. Condoms and other contraceptives are not available in many areas, so it may be a good idea to take some with you if you think you may need them. You may also wish to take an extra supply of birth control and a prescription, if appropriate.

If you anticipate being sexually active, take health precautions and be aware of the social implications in your host society.

Mental Health

Living in a new environment may cause additional stress on a condition that is easily manageable in the United States. Whether or not you currently take medication or see a psychologist or psychiatrist, it is important to prepare yourself for possible shifts in your mental health, at least at the start of your experience abroad. If you do see a mental health professional, discuss your upcoming sojourn abroad and determine support and communication strategies ahead of time if needed. Once on site—or ahead of time—identify local resources through your provider or host institution. Determine prior to departure whether the medications you take are legal in your host country and whether you can take enough with you for your entire time abroad.

In addition to on-site resources, the Office of the Dean of Students is available to all UVA students while abroad, and Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) is available to students for one initial consultation while abroad.

(434) 924-7133—Dean of Students office

(434) 243-5150—to reach CAPS

Safety and Legal Matters

College life in other countries can be very different from the U.S., especially in urban areas. You may not even be on a university campus and have to commute to and from your classes; possibly between classes as well. Because you are in an unfamiliar environment, it is possible to misinterpret how to properly navigate your new surroundings. On the one hand, it may be easy to perceive that your new environment is much more dangerous than in the U.S. This perception may be heightened by international media coverage of violent incidents that may or may not occur as frequently as the media leads one to believe, or they may not occur at all in your destination. On the other hand, you may become naïve to the true security nature of your

new environment, as traveling may give you a new sense of freedom and a false sense of security. It is very important to be aware of the environment and take necessary measures to ensure your safety.

Conduct

While studying abroad, you are a representative of the University of Virginia and have agreed to comply with UVA's rules, standards, and instructions for student conduct and behavior, as well as any stated codes of conduct from the host institution/program provider. Please see the links below to the most pertinent University policies:

Honor Code: <http://honor.virginia.edu/>

Standards of Conduct: <http://scs.student.virginia.edu/~judic/about-the-ujc/standards-of-conduct/>

Parental Notification Policy: <https://parenthandbook.virginia.edu/policies/parent-notification>

Student Rights and Responsibilities:

http://records.ureg.virginia.edu/content.php?catoid=33&navoid=1249#statement_of_students

Policy on Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment and Other Forms of Interpersonal Violence:

<http://eocr.virginia.edu/title-ix>

Continuing Duty to Report Criminal Arrests: Students have a continuing duty to promptly report to the Office of the Dean of Students any arrests for violations of federal, state, local, or international law, excluding minor traffic violations that do not result in injury to others. This duty applies regardless of where the arrest occurred (inside or outside the Commonwealth of Virginia), and regardless of whether the University is in session at the time of the arrest. An arrest includes the issuance of a written citation or summons regardless of whether the student is taken into custody by law enforcement. Charges related to driving under the influence of alcohol or other drugs are not “minor traffic violations” and must be reported. Students must contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 434-924-7133 within 72 hours of the incident that led to their arrest. Failure to comply with this continuing duty will result in the immediate referral of a student to the University Judiciary Committee and may also result in imposition of an interim suspension by the Dean of Students or his/her designee.

-from Student Rights and Responsibilities

Security

No matter how safe your community appears to be, you should acquaint yourself with your new environment by reading all information that your host institution or program director provides or recommends. Explore your new neighborhood during the day and become familiar with areas around you. When in doubt, ask program staff and students which areas you should avoid. Always carry the address and telephone number of your home with you until you have memorized them. Become familiar with laws and customs of the host country. It is very important that you listen to security recommendations provided by your program provider or host institution. Gaining insight from locals is another important method to learning how to safely navigate your new home.

**Know the local
emergency
number for police**

Stay informed

Stay well-informed about local and regional politics and conditions. Read news sites with international coverage of local issues as well as local publications.

Local opinions of people and foreign nations, including the United States, fluctuate and can be influenced by a variety of factors including politics, economics, and personal experiences. Check the U.S. State Department Travel Advisories regularly at travel.state.gov. Visit the Students Abroad section on their website as well: <http://studentsabroad.state.gov/>

Be alert

Be aware of your surroundings and your possessions. Pay attention to the normal patterns and behaviors in your community. Listen to and trust your instincts. Take notice if there is a deviation from that norm, including unknown individuals "hanging out" in your building or any strange activity nearby. Beware of pickpockets and purse-snatchers, especially in crowded areas. You may be bumped casually and unaware of a violation. Be aware that there have been cases of students studying abroad being recruited by foreign intelligence offices.

Take precautions

Exercise precautions as you would in any U.S. city or unfamiliar location:

- Take a reliable cab or walk with a friend rather than walking alone at night. Do not go into unsafe or unknown areas alone.
- Be selective and cautious in giving your name or address to strangers.
- Use money belts or a concealed purse for your passport, visa, money, credit cards, and other documents. If you want to explore a city, leave your belongings in a secure "checked luggage" area.
- Know where the nearest police station and hospital are, and keep emergency numbers handy.
- Avoid demonstrations.
- Understand fire safety best practices for both prevention and what to do during a fire (see the addendum to this handbook for more information).
- Do your best to blend in; dress like the locals, use the language, be polite and low-key. The more confident you seem, the less likely you will be a target for trouble. Don't gather at "American" hangouts.
- Avoid carrying photo cameras, video cameras, i-pods, etc. exposed to the public eye while walking in the streets, especially if you are walking alone.
- Be skeptical of "money-for-nothing" offers and other opportunities that seem too good to be true, and be cautious of being offered free favors, especially those involving government processes such as obtaining visas, residence permits, and work papers.
- Minimize personal information you reveal about yourself, especially through social media.
- Minimize your contact with people who have questionable government affiliations or who you suspect might be engaged in criminal activity.

- Properly report any money or compensation you received while abroad on tax forms and other financial disclosure documents to ensure compliance with U.S. laws.

Keep in contact

When you travel, leave your itinerary with the on-site staff and with your family. Your parents and friends will have concerns while you are away even if you feel safe and sound. Keep in contact with them to let them know how you are. Alert your on-site program or exchange staff of any concerns and should something happen, be proactive about communicating to the on-site staff that you are alright.

Before leaving UVA, make sure to update your emergency contact information.

Traveling Safely

You will probably be doing a lot more traveling than you would normally do at home. You will likely be using a variety of public transportation methods such as buses, trains, metros, taxis, and planes. There are several things to be aware of during your travels.

Airline Travel

Contact the airline and reconfirm your seat at least 72 hours in advance. Airlines notoriously overbook flights, especially those to the United States. You may decide to travel before leaving the country, or have your family and friends join you. If you want to change the return date contact the airline directly or visit a travel agency. They can tell you what, if any, restrictions apply. Depending upon your ticket restrictions there may be a possible fee.

Some countries will not allow you to enter unless you have a round-trip ticket showing you intend to depart the country. Research entry and exit requirements at travel.state.gov for further information.

As part of the [Policy on Student International Travel](#) the University may limit how, when, and where University students may travel abroad for University-related purposes. Do not book any flights that travel through a [restricted area](#).

International Driving

Automobile accidents are the #1 cause of injury to U.S. study abroad students. Because signs, roads, and laws are quite different in other countries it is NOT recommended that students drive while abroad. However, if you intend to drive, you should verify the required identification/licenses for the countries in which you will be traveling. Some countries require an International Driver's Permit, while others will accept your own state license.

Public Transportation

You are most likely going to be using some form of public transportation in your host country, whether to get to class or to get around the city and surrounding areas. While it is likely you will receive information in your on-site orientation, you may want to research the local systems prior to departure. Learn any cultural practices and be safe. Consult local resources for the best means of inter-country travel during your free time.

Women Abroad

“Despite our personal beliefs about what women should have the right to do around the world, we need to reach a balance of maintaining our identity and respecting the culture we are visiting. Women face unique challenges as we travel abroad. While we are excited to meet new people, we also have to think about our personal safety. Understanding cultural differences in the areas of sex roles, verbal and non-verbal communication and the reputation of foreign women can empower us as we go abroad.”

- from *American Women Abroad* by Holly Wilkinson-Ray

Many American women traveling abroad are adventurous, independent and eager to meet new people. Make the most of your time overseas and become involved in a variety of activities. In the United States, women are used to being active: talking with people they don't know, making friends quickly, and going out at night. Yet, in some parts of the world the role of women is to stay at home. Friends are made through family ties, not at night in a bar. There are often strong differences between how women are expected to act in public and in private. Dress, behavior, activity, eye contact, and topics of conversation are shaped by spoken and unspoken cultural norms.

Traveling alone, frequenting bars at night, and making eye contact with men is sometimes dangerous. The non-verbal messages that we send in a different cultural context may surprise us all. Media images of female celebrities and students on spring break have created powerful, lingering stereotypes of American women. As American women jog in the streets of Cairo, wear shorts in Kenya, and smile at people in the Paris metro, they may unintentionally reinforce stereotypes.

Being culturally sensitive is one step towards understanding and integrating into your host culture. Be observant of gender-specific roles, customs, and norms. Getting to know women in the host culture can help explain what you observe and how to navigate the norms and expectations.

See **Women Abroad** at <http://educationabroad.virginia.edu/student-identity-abroad> for links to resources.

Race and Ethnicity Abroad

“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 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

See **Race and Ethnicity Abroad** at <http://educationabroad.virginia.edu/student-identity-abroad> for links to resources.

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 and preparing yourself for it. Try to find others on your campus who have studied abroad and who can provide you with some counsel.” – www.studyabroad.com

LGBTQ+ Abroad

“It is advisable to do some reading before departure regarding culture-specific norms of friendship and dating for relationships between people of any sexual orientation in the country where you are headed. Knowing about the culture-specific norms of friendship and dating for relationships between people of any sexual orientation in the country where you are headed is especially essential. Laws regarding same-sex relationships differ from country to country so you should inform yourself about those before your program begins.” – www.studyabroad.com

See **LGBTQ+ Abroad** at <http://educationabroad.virginia.edu/student-identity-abroad> for links to resources.

Access Abroad and Students with Disabilities

We encourage all students to study abroad! UVA is dedicated to creating an environment of access and inclusion both on Grounds and abroad. To make this the best experience for you, it is vital that you inform the International Studies Office (ISO) and the Student Disability Access Center (SDAC) of your disability, including serious medical conditions, and your desire to study abroad as early as possible. Planning, preparation and good communication are key factors to a successful experience abroad. **It is recommended that you work with SDAC and ISO to start planning your experience at least six months in advance.**

See **Access Abroad and Students with Disabilities** at <http://educationabroad.virginia.edu/student-identity-abroad> for more information and links to resources.

Heritage Seekers Abroad

Going abroad gives students a wonderful way to explore their own cultural heritage. Whether you are going to a region that was home to your distant relatives, or revisiting the place of your own birth, you inevitably will be confronted with a range of emotions and experiences. You may expect to feel at home, but find yourself identifying with your American culture, or you may find that you identify deeply with your ancestral culture. You will want to consider in advance that you may have ideas about your destination that are outdated or specific to your family’s history. As in all aspects of preparing to study abroad, having an open mind will be a great asset.

See **Heritage Seekers Abroad** at <http://educationabroad.virginia.edu/student-identity-abroad> for links to resources.

Religious Diversity Abroad

Whether you consider yourself religious or not, through study abroad you will be exposed to local religious practices and norms. You may find yourself confronted with a religious belief that is different from your own or a unique take on the religion you practice. Before you embark on your study abroad program you are encouraged to research the role religion plays in your host culture, and how members of the local community may perceive your religion.

See **Religious Diversity Abroad** at <http://educationabroad.virginia.edu/student-identity-abroad> for links to resources.

Legal Matters

There are a number of common legal matters you should be aware of, regardless of your host country. Some of them are much more serious than others, so please read the information below carefully so that you are aware of the liability involved.

Arriving at the Airport

Upon arrival in your host country, you will go through Immigration and Customs checkpoints in the airport. The Immigration officer will ask for your passport and your acceptance letter to your host institution to prove that you are entering as a student, and in countries that require it, your visa paperwork. If the immigration officer is satisfied with the proof of your student status, they will stamp your passport. The customs inspection is to check if you are bringing any illegal items into the country. The airline companies usually give you a customs declaration form that you fill out on the plane; you will hand this to the customs officer. Be aware that some countries conduct actual inspections of your luggage and personal effects.

Registering

Some countries require students to "register" with the local police department. If your host coordinator has not advised you, please ask if this is a requirement. It is always a good idea to register with the local consulate.

Local Laws

It is critical to remember that you are a guest in your host country and are **subject to all of its laws**. Ignorance of the local laws will not excuse you from local prosecution and/or fines.

Illegal Drugs

NEVER travel with any contraband drugs. You are subject to the law of the country you are in. Even if you find yourself in a location where the use of drugs by local citizens is either ignored or treated very lightly, when American students are apprehended indulging in or in possession of contraband, they can be dealt with in a very harsh manner. You can jeopardize your experience abroad by taking such a risk. If approached by someone selling drugs, walk away. Even a conversation with a suspected narcotics pusher is seen as an act of intent to purchase by some countries. Conditions of imprisonment in a foreign jail are not something you want to experience. Remember that being a citizen of the United States does not matter; the

U.S. Consulate cannot get you released if you are arrested. They can only help notify family and arrange for legal representation.

- Sentences for possession or trafficking drugs can range from 2 to 25 years and possible heavy fines.
- In some countries like Turkey, Egypt, Malaysia, and Thailand, conviction may lead to a life sentence or even the death penalty.
- In Saudi Arabia, drug smugglers and traffickers convicted of a second offense receive the death penalty.
- The Dominican Republic imposes 20 years imprisonment on anyone caught bringing narcotics into or out of the country.

U.S. Consular Offices Abroad

What U.S. Consulates CAN do:

- Visit the U.S. citizen as soon as possible after the foreign government has notified U.S. embassy or consulate of the arrest.
- Provide the detainee with a list of local attorneys from which to select defense counsel.
- Contact family and/or friends for financial or medical aid and food, if requested to do so by the detainee.

What they CANNOT do:

- Demand a U.S. citizen's release.
- Represent the detainee at trial, give legal counsel, or pay legal fees or other related expenses with U.S. Government funds.
- Intervene in a foreign country's court system or judicial process to obtain special treatment.

For more details, see: <http://travel.state.gov>.

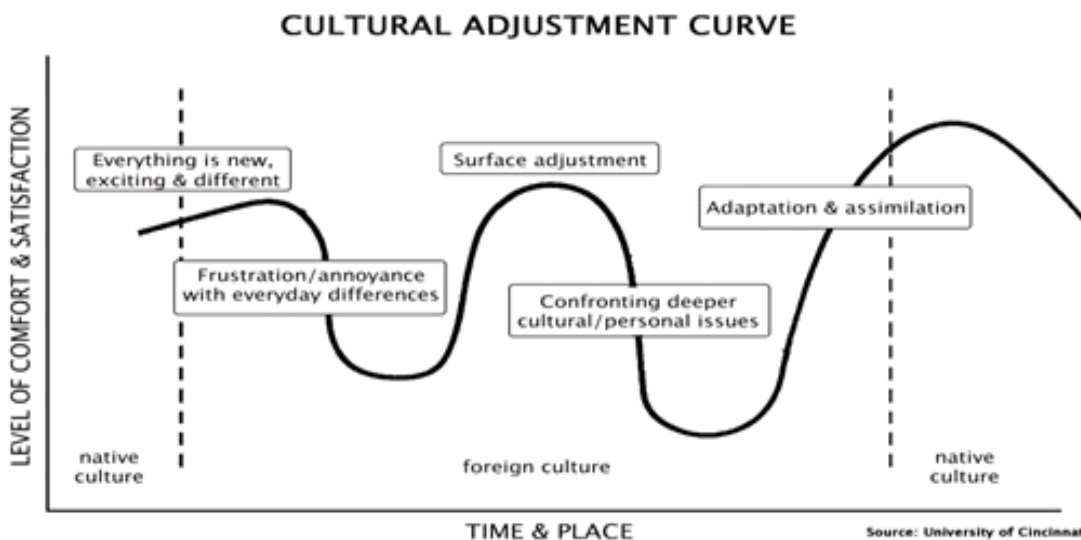
Traversing Cultures

Culture Adjustment and Culture Shock

Culture shock, or culture fatigue as it is more aptly named, is a typical phenomenon when encountering a new culture and country for an extended period of time. Adjusting to using a different language, driving on the other side of the road, wearing different clothes, and eating different food can be both exciting and challenging.

The less obvious aspects of your own culture, such as values (time, personal space, gender roles, communication style, etc.), habits, expectations, common practices and procedures may not coincide with your host culture.

The resulting ‘culture bumps’ can produce an emotional response—frustration, anger, impatience, anxiety, confusion, depression—called culture shock. A moderate amount of these stresses is a natural part of intercultural transition. Remember that stress and ‘bad days’ happen at home as well. However, while abroad you may not have the same support system or outlet to help you resolve the stressors.



There are, however, a number of strategies to help you work through the stressors and adjust.

Communication. Talk to the on-site program staff, host family, and other students. Express your experiences and ask for assistance in interpreting the situation—what happened from the different cultural perspectives and why.

Be open-minded. Remember that there are multiple ‘right’ ways to do things. Learn what is appropriate, and why, in your host culture. Try the host culture approach next time.

Be patient. No one gets it all right the first time. Take it one thing at a time and remember each small accomplishment.

Get Involved. Meet new people and make connections in the community.

Sense of humor. Step back and see the humor in your misunderstandings, missteps, and mistakes.

Cultural Baggage

The culture in which we grow up and live largely defines our perspective on the world, how we see ourselves and others. Just as our perceptions of another culture or society may not coincide with their perceptions, others do not always view us as we view ourselves. Stereotypes are

generated and those expectations shape how we see each other, even when our behavior does not support the expectation. For example, some common stereotypes of Americans, and students in particular, include being outgoing, friendly, loud, entitled, informal, wasteful, disrespectful, wealthy, generous, violent, prejudiced, ignorant of other countries, and promiscuous.

These stereotypes often stem from entertainment or news media. While you may or may not see yourself as an embodiment of those characteristics, they do comprise the 'cultural baggage', or unconscious assumptions, that you carry. Being aware of these perceptions and behaving in culturally sensitive ways can aid you in understanding and being understood by your hosts.

Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity is an important aspect of adjusting to your new environment. That is, recognizing the differences between cultures without making a value judgment (right or wrong, better or worse). Here are some tips for developing cultural sensitivity:

- Research the country. Read books, talk to host nationals and previous visitors. Find out what the typical dress code is, which locations and situations are best to avoid, what message non-verbal communication such as eye contact sends, etc.
- Get to know the people. Learn from local residents, ask questions, and take the time to get to know them as individuals and cultural representatives.
- Observe. You can learn a lot about roles, attitudes, and customs by watching.
- Honor the customs. Students travel to other countries to learn, so make the effort it takes to show them respect. Find out how this new culture views relationships, dating, leisure time, and holidays. Remember that, in all interactions, you are an ambassador for the U.S. and UVA.
- Learn the language. You will make a stronger connection with people by trying to speak in their language and pronouncing names correctly.
- Avoid generalizations. One positive or negative experience is not a reflection on all people or the culture. Seek to understand why certain actions, expectations, or beliefs are common and how they developed.

Writing and reflecting on your experience abroad is a useful tool for coping with cultural adjustments. Share your experiences with the UVA community through our blog: <https://hoosabroad.wordpress.com>

Food

"If I'm an advocate for anything, it's to move. As far as you can, as much as you can. Across the ocean, or simply across the river. Walk in someone else's shoes or at least eat their food. It's a plus for everybody." - Anthony Bourdain

One of the first ways that people interact with another culture is often through its cuisine. Whether you're off to France or Thailand or another country known for its culinary traditions, or a location where food isn't the first thing you think of (what is South African cuisine?), you will

have the opportunity to explore your host culture through its food and related customs. Some "food" for thought:

- Research what foods are common in your host culture, as well as mealtime customs: is it polite to finish your food, or leave a little bit? when are meals usually served? If you're in a homestay or living with local students, these can be good topics of conversation as you get to know each other.
- Understand the meal arrangements for your program: if you are in a homestay, what meals are provided, and do you have access to the family kitchen to prepare others? if you're in an apartment, what are your kitchen facilities? if you have a meal plan, is the dining hall open 24/7 or only at set times?
- Also understand that, just like in the U.S., food won't be homogenous in your host country: in China, for example, there are multiple types of cuisine throughout the country, and they may not have much in common with the food you get at your local Chinese takeout in the U.S.
- **If you have food allergies or dietary restrictions based on medical or religious grounds:** pay extra attention when researching the cuisine. How likely are you to encounter the food(s)? What alternatives are available? What happens if you have a reaction, what is your on-site plan for managing the reaction, and is there medication you need to bring with you? Make sure your program knows about your allergies or restrictions, as well as anyone preparing your food (a host parent, etc.). If you're traveling to a non-English-speaking country, pay careful attention to vocabulary around food: does that word for "meat" mean all meats, or just red meat? etc.
- **If you have dietary preferences:** also pay attention when researching the cuisine. Additionally, think about how you will approach food during your time abroad and the role food plays in your host community. Will you be refusing food that is a key staple in the local cuisine, or that your hosts would have gone through significant trouble or expense to prepare? Or are you studying somewhere with a wide range of meal options (or the ability for you to cook your own food), that would allow you to continue with your current eating habits? When you disclose your preferences to your program, make sure to indicate whether you are willing/open to being flexible or not (if everyone at a group meal gets a prosciutto appetizer at dinner and you get cheese, will you want what everyone else has, or will you appreciate being given the special meal to accommodate your preferences?).

Representing the U.S. Abroad

While abroad, you will be seen by many people you meet as a representative of the U.S. (even if you're an international student here, you may be seen in this light since you attend a U.S. university). Depending on where you go abroad, and when, you may find that you are frequently asked about aspects of U.S. culture and politics. Many students are surprised at the extent to which people in their host country are informed about U.S. politics in particular, and how frequently politics (including people's individual beliefs, candidate preferences, etc.) is discussed even among relative strangers.

Here are some strategies identified by other UVA students who have studied abroad:

- Stay informed about current events in the U.S. that are being covered by international news media.
- Stay informed about politics in your host country/community.
- Come up with a tactful response to questions about your own political beliefs ahead of time.
- Don't make assumptions about the political beliefs of people who engage you in conversation.
- Be honest and prepared for people who might have different opinions from you. Discuss the topics maturely and be polite and respectful, even if you disagree.
- Don't get wrapped up in a political conversation you don't feel comfortable with. A simple "Honestly, I don't know enough about it. I'll check it out/read up on it" is always an acceptable response.

Preparing for Reverse Culture Shock

The cycle of overseas adjustment begins at the time you plan to study abroad. You may think that adjustment ends when you have successfully assimilated into the life of your host country, but, in fact, the cycle of cultural adjustment continues through your return to the United States or your home country. Culture shock and re-entry shock (more commonly known as "reverse culture shock") are not isolated events but rather part of the total adjustment process that stretches from pre-departure through reintegration at home.

You are preparing to go abroad, but it is not too early to begin thinking about the day you will return home. Questions such as "Why did I choose to study abroad?" and "What do I want to accomplish during my time here?" can help you clarify how you are going to integrate your international experience into your academic, professional, and personal goals for the future. Preparing for the surprises that often greet travelers after an extended period abroad will enable you to turn what, for some, is a very awkward time into a productive one (and your photo album will hopefully reflect it all.)

Change and Adaptation

As one returnee explains, "Living abroad has a deep, broadening effect on a person--an effect that I didn't realize until my return." For some people, living abroad and having those changes occur outside of their home country can magnify those experiences, thus causing the return home to be a bit unsettling. In addition, some of the experiences are specific to being abroad and could not have occurred in the U.S. or your home country. While abroad you may have experienced a greater degree of independence, both academically and personally, than you previously experienced at home. You may have become increasingly sure of yourself and possibly have gained a more mature or focused attitude about your future. Some of these new views and attitudes may be in conflict with the views and attitudes of family

Just as you had to adjust overseas, you may face adjustment issues at home

and friends. They may question your new way of thinking and doing things or even pressure you to "reform."

New Skills

You likely acquired some new skills while abroad. These may include discovering a new way to do an old task, a different perspective on your field of study, or increasing your foreign language skills.

These new skills will now become a part of your daily life. Increasing ease of use with your foreign language will probably have one of the greatest impacts. If you have learned to become dependent on these skills to communicate from day to day, then it may feel strange for you to revert back to your native language. You may feel frustrated and depressed if you cannot communicate your new ideas, skills, or opinions, and this can be distressing. Again, patience, flexibility, and time will be required as it was at the beginning of your sojourn.

Loss of Status

In your host country you may have been seen as an informal ambassador from the United States or your home country. This gave you a certain status of being "special." When you return home, you are just like everyone else and the loss of feeling a bit "special" can be a factor that you must deal with in your readjustment. One returnee describes it this way: "Being in a foreign country as a foreign visitor, you are to a certain extent a 'special person'; your new views, accent, and lifestyle are all interesting to your hosts. As such, you will receive a lot of attention, make friends, and, generally, be popular. However, when returning 'home', you become again a 'normal person'. I found it very difficult to make that transition."

Friendships

Now that you have studied abroad, you obviously have a new circle of friends. Leaving your new friends can be, for many, the most difficult part of re-entry. Having to abandon intense friendships, girl/boyfriends, and/or cultural supports, frequently brings disturbing feelings characteristic of those associated in a grieving process. Though you may seem to make an easy surface adjustment once home, that adjustment may, at times, cover many contained feelings of uncertainty, alienation, anger, and disappointment.

Upon your return, friends at home will ask about your experiences and appear to be interested. They will often show a slight fascination with your adventures but this may quickly fade. You should be prepared for their cursory interest in your stories and pictures. After a while you may find that your friends are more eager to talk about what has gone on in their lives as opposed to hearing more about your life abroad. When you talk "too much" about your experience, people may accuse you of being elitist even though that may not be your intention.

People are often threatened by new and unusual points of view if they have not had a similar experience. As much as you need to talk about your recent time away from home, it is advisable to be sensitive to the attitudes and feelings of others. Be patient. If the friendship is worth maintaining, adjustment can and will be made; if not, developing new friendships can be as exhilarating as traveling.

Family Relationships

The "changed you" will have to re-adjust to life back home, and, for some, this can be difficult. It can be a surprise to learn that you are not the only one affected by re-entry. Remember, and be aware, that people at home change too, so expect things to be different.

You and your family may view each other differently upon your return.

It is normal for you to desire to hold onto the person that you have become. The "new" you cannot be discarded or forgotten for the "old" you. However, you and your family must come to terms with that "new" you and continue to build upon your existing relationship from this point forward. It will require commitment to work toward mutual respect and understanding of each other's views. You may find that you have a totally different relationship with your family.

University/College Life

You may face a new set of re-adjustment issues upon return to academic life. If you have become very accustomed to a different type of academic system, you will have to readjust to UVA's way of handling things. For example, some students experience a greater amount of academic independence abroad than they had previously experienced. If you have found that academic freedom is particularly gratifying and challenging then the re-adjustment to a system that is more structured can be difficult. Returning to university life you may also feel a bit "removed" from your major and department.

Recognize your academic experience abroad might differ from UVA.

Challenges of Readjustment

As stated earlier, no readjustment experience is the same for everyone. You may go through re-entry much differently than someone else. There are several variables that may affect the degree of difficulty faced by individuals during re-entry. Some of these variables include:

- Expectations of difficulty upon return
- Length of time spent abroad
- Readiness to return home, to the United States, or to UVA
- Degree of cultural difference or similarity
- Changes and perceived changes in the home environment
- Support networks

The length of time that the readjustment phase lasts will, of course, vary from person to person, but it will also depend on the level of intensity you experience. If you experience a very high level of intensity your adjustment will most likely take longer than if you experience a very low level of intensity. One returning student said: "I have been back four months and I still find it very hard to communicate about my experiences and often I feel I must hide many of the new attitudes or knowledge I may have gained that seems at odds with my old life." In addition, the length of time the readjustment lasts depends on you and how you cope with the situations that occur.

Coping Strategies

The good news is this phase of readjustment to life in the United States does not last forever! Here are some suggestions of ways to make this phase a bit easier on you, your family, and friends.

Acknowledge your adjustment

First, and foremost, acknowledge the re-entry phase as part of the study abroad experience. Just as you had to give yourself time while going through the culture shock phase (if you did experience culture shock) you must also give yourself time to go through the re-entry phase. As one returnee stated in a survey, "Don't blame yourself, give yourself time. I'd have felt less guilty and peculiar if I'd realized it was a common phenomenon."

Share your adjustment

Educate your family and friends about this phase of adjustment. Many people have never heard of reverse cultural adjustment and are not aware of its existence. If the people around you know a little about what you are experiencing, then, hopefully, they will be a bit more patient and understanding towards you and help you to re-adjust. Remind those around you that you cannot unlearn what you have learned, but that you need time to re-integrate those sometimes conflicting components within yourself.

Stay in contact with your host country

Keep in contact through letters (and, if possible, through telephone calls and email) with the friends you made in your host country. It will help you feel that what you experienced was real and not one big dream.

Get involved and seek out others

Seek out other returnees that live nearby. The fact that they have gone through (or are going through) re-entry and can offer support and advice about how to cope will be helpful. Other returnees often want to hear of the overseas adventures because they have a multicultural and international perspective. Becoming active in events sponsored by the International Studies Office offers you an outlet to share your concerns and also your experiences. Review the Re-entry Checklist for more detailed information and ideas.

Set goals for the future

Now is the time for you to look towards your future. You have finished one phase of your life and are ready to move ahead. Think about your next challenge or goal. Begin to make plans and put those plans into action. Even if you will return to UVA to finish a year or two of a degree, you can develop goals for that period of time so that you will feel you are moving ahead rather than regressing. It is common for students who return to their university to feel they have gone "10 steps forward (their overseas experience), and now are going 11 steps backward (the return to university)." It is up to you to get the most out of that time by giving yourself new goals and challenges. Take the influence of your overseas experience and use it positively to help plan this next phase of your life.

There are many opportunities to study, intern, and work abroad. Build on this experience through continued international academic and/or professional experience.

Advice from Study Abroad Returnees

- *"I think one of the best steps to take is to give yourself and your friends and family time. It was good to visit with people and catch up on their news and listen to them. Listening is important."*
- *"Don't be surprised- it will take time to re-adjust, but you'll feel at home again in time. Don't expect to view/see people or things as you did when you left. Try to look for the positive things in returning home, not the negative."*
- *"Try and reflect on the positive aspects of your stay away and the positive aspects of your here and now and how they compare and contrast."*
- *"Be patient with yourself and your mood swings. Keep in touch with friends you've met, but don't forget to build new bridges at home."*
- *"Try not to take yourself too seriously (if possible). Keep up your ties with your friends in the 'foreign' country by letters and phone calls and email."*

Pre-Departure Checklist

See "Your Master Checklist" in the Learning Content section of your application record for a printable checklist.

Fire Safety 101

See below for important information provided courtesy of the University of California Education Abroad Program.

Know what to do during a fire

1. **Do not panic. Stay calm!**
2. **Test any closed doors with the back of your hand for heat.** Do not open the door if you feel heat or see smoke. Close all doors as you leave each room to keep the fire from spreading.
3. **Crawl low under smoke.** Cleaner air is always near the floor.
4. **Don't delay.** Choose the safest and closest exit. Once you are out, do not go back.

Stop, drop, and roll!

What if You Can't Get Out Right Away?

Fire spreads quickly. In less than 30 seconds a small flame can get out of control and turn into a major fire. It only takes minutes for thick black smoke to fill a house or for it to be engulfed in flames.

If you can't get out fast, because fire or smoke is blocking an escape route, yell for help.

Identify Fire Hazards

Check for sources of ignition, fuel, and oxygen: A burning candle; too many items plugged into one outlet, a shirt thrown over a lamp, a worn electrical cord; a space heater used to dry clothes, windows that are stuck; security bars on windows that cannot be opened, etc.

Resources

Fire Safety Foundation:
www.firesafetyfoundation.org

FEMA Home Fires
<http://www.ready.gov/home-fires>

Passport to Fire Safety
<http://www.passporttofiresafety.org/>

Fire Safety 101

Take Fire Safety Seriously

Prevent Fire

Install Smoke Detectors

Be Prepared if a Fire Occurs

Fire Safety

Fire injuries and deaths occur among college-age students every year in the U.S. and around the world. An important step you can take to protect yourself against fire is to install smoke alarms and keep them in good working order. You can buy smoke alarms before departure to make sure you will have one once you arrive abroad.

Safety Precautions

- Read more about fire safety and prevention in the UCEAP Guide to Study Abroad.
- **Know how to call the fire department.**
- **Smoke alarms save lives:** You are responsible. Install smoke alarms outside every room and every level of housing facilities. Test them regularly.
- **Do not disable smoke alarms.**
- **Have a fire extinguisher** and know how to use it.
- **Look for fire hazards**
Inspect rooms and buildings for fire hazards. Ask your UCEAP Study Center and/or partner institution staff for guidelines.
- **Do not overload electrical outlets**
- Use extension cords properly.
- Learn to correctly use and maintain heating and cooking appliances.
- **Inspect exit doors and windows** and make sure they are working properly.
- **Create an escape plan.**
- **Practice** escapes and evacuation plans.
- **Take fire alarms seriously.**

If you Discover a Fire

Every second counts Alert people to evacuate.

Activate the nearest fire alarm, and exit the building.

Know your Way Out

Have an escape plan and practice it regularly. It could save your life. Smoke from a fire will make it hard to see and may disorient you. It is important to learn and remember the different ways out. How many exits are there? How do you get to them from your room? Have everyone in your group to draw a map of the escape plan for shared accommodations.

Get outside quickly and safely.

Cooking and smoking are leading causes of fire injuries around the world.

People living in rented or shared accommodations are seven times more likely to have a fire. (direct.gov.uk)

The Cause

Many factors contribute to housing fires.

- Many students are unaware that fire is a real risk or threat.
- Fire alarms are often ignored.
- Building evacuations are delayed due to lack of preparation and preplanning.
- Misuse of cooking appliances, overloaded electrical circuits and extension cords increase the risk of fires.
- Alcohol is a major factor contributing to burns in college-age students. In most cases where fire fatalities occurred on college campuses, alcohol was involved. Alcohol use impairs judgment and hampers evacuation efforts. A student under the influence of alcohol is more likely to fall asleep while smoking or while a candle is burning. (USFA, FEMA)

80% of all US fire deaths occur in residences. (USFA)

Candles and incense cause 12,000 residential fires annually. (College Fire Safety)

Recordkeeping and fire classification practices worldwide prevent reliable comparisons with the U.S.