

UVA Education Abroad

A Division of the International Studies Office

HANDBOOK



UNIVERSITY
of VIRGINIA

EDUCATION
ABROAD

Dear UVA Student and Family:

Study abroad will inevitably be one of the most exciting opportunities in your (or your student's) academic life. It is a time filled with learning, observing, practicing new skills, and forming new relationships.

Use this handbook as a reference to help you learn about key topics as you consider and prepare for time abroad, including academic credit, passports and other travel documents, and cultural adjustment.

We also encourage you to do independent research about your host country!

Characteristics that play a vital role in your success abroad are: flexibility, adaptability, a sense of responsibility, and perhaps most importantly, a sense of humor. Not sure you have all of those? Education abroad is a great opportunity to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will help you now and later in life.

We also challenge you to be good will ambassadors 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, enjoy the journey, and know that we are here to support you!

The Education Abroad Team at the International Studies Office

Table of Contents

Academics	5
Academic Culture	5
Courses & Credits	5
Registration in SIS.....	6
Registering for Courses on Grounds (<i>for Semester and Year Students</i>).....	7
Finances	7
Cost, Billing, & Payments.....	7
Managing Your Money Abroad	9
Documentation.....	10
Passports.....	10
Visas.....	11
International Students.....	11
Insurance.....	11
Medical & Emergency Insurance	11
Personal Belongings and insurance	12
Trip or Travel Insurance.....	12
Travel & Packing	12
Flights	12
Packing.....	13
Sustainable Travel	13
Communications	13
Telephones	14
Email & UVA Services.....	14
Health	14
Identify Your Health Needs.....	14
Travel Abroad and COVID-19.....	15
Medications & Medical Supplies.....	15
Immunizations.....	15
Jet Lag.....	16
Mental Health.....	16
Alcohol & Drugs.....	17
Sexual Activity.....	17

Safety & Security.....	18
Stay Informed.....	18
Be Situationally Aware.....	18
Take Precautions.....	19
Keep in Contact.....	19
Common Hazards.....	19
Legal Matters.....	20
Conduct.....	20
Working Abroad.....	21
Power of Attorney.....	21
Arriving at the Airport.....	21
Registering.....	21
Local Laws.....	21
Illegal Drugs.....	22
U.S. Consular Services Abroad.....	22
Identity Abroad.....	22
Access Abroad and Students with Disabilities.....	22
First Generation Students Abroad.....	23
Gender Abroad.....	23
Heritage Seekers Abroad.....	23
LGBTQ+ Students Abroad.....	24
Race and Ethnicity Abroad.....	24
Religion & Spirituality Abroad.....	25
Traversing Cultures.....	25
Culture Adjustment and Culture Shock.....	25
Accommodation & Food.....	26
Representing the U.S. Abroad.....	26
Preparing for Reverse Culture Shock.....	27

In this handbook, you will see reference to Pre-Departure Modules. These online modules are made available to students after acceptance. We have tried here to cover key topics at an introductory level at least; if you do not yet have access to the modules and have questions that are not addressed here or on our website, please contact us: studyabroad@virginia.edu or (434) 982-3010.

Academics

Academic Culture

The academic culture you experience abroad will be different than here on Grounds – and that’s not only okay, it’s part of the reason to study abroad in the first place!

Even students on UVA faculty-led programs will find that their academic experience is different as the traditional classroom-based model of learning is often replaced with or supplemented with on-site learning.

If you’re going on an exchange or attending a host university, you will have 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.

Academic culture is discussed in more detail in pre-departure modules, and expectations for students on UVA faculty-led programs are set by the individual faculty directors.

Courses & Credits

The type of credit you receive will vary based on the type of program you select. Programs can offer **Direct Credit** (awarded by UVA), **Transfer Credit** (awarded by another institution), or a combination of the two.

- Not sure which type of credit the program you are considering will offer? Find your program(s) in the [Program Search](#), click on the program name, then scroll to the Fact Sheet and look at the Credit Type field.
- Do the grades get factored into my GPA? How can I use the credit? How do I secure the appropriate approvals? Find answers to these and other questions on our website’s [Academic Considerations page](#).

Course Approvals

Students participating in Transfer Credit programs must get their courses pre-approved as part of the application to the program. If you discover the courses you want to take abroad are not available upon arrival, or you change your mind, you can secure new approvals remotely (instructions are available on our website’s [Academic Considerations page](#) and in each school’s Transfer Credit Approval form in your program application).

On a Direct Credit program? You are taking UVA courses so there is no equivalent process, but it's always a good idea to talk to your academic and/or major advisor about the courses you plan to take abroad and how they can best work for you.

Program Transcripts (*for Programs with Transfer Credit*)

You are responsible for requesting your official transcript at the end of the program:

- **If in the College:** It is your responsibility to request that an official transcript be sent to:
 Transfer Credit Evaluator, College of Arts & Sciences
 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 (this information is on the Transfer Credit Approval Form instructions).

Transcripts are usually sent 2 to 3 months after a program has ended – in other words, don't expect to do a spring semester program and graduate that same May!

Make sure you know how to request official transcripts from the program or host university in the future, in case you need them for graduate school applications, etc. You might even want to order an extra copy or two when the program ends. Keep transcripts sealed so they stay official.

Transferring Credit (*for Programs with Transfer Credit*)

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.

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

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

Grades for transfer credit courses do not appear on your UVA transcript, and they are not factored into your UVA GPA, but be mindful that others may see them in the future when you apply to graduate school or other advanced degree programs.

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, communicate directly with the School Registrar/Transfer of Credit Evaluator.

Registration in SIS

All students on credit-bearing study abroad programs, regardless of the type of credit, are registered in the course **ZFOR 35XX or 55XX 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. It is not credit-bearing in itself and is not graded.

You cannot register yourself for ZFOR 35XX or 55XX 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 before your after your study abroad program). If you are on a Direct Credit program in which you are taking UVA courses, the ISO will enroll you in those course(s) as well.

Registering for Courses on Grounds *(for Semester and Year Students)*

If you're abroad for a semester or year, you will most likely be abroad when registration opens for your next semester on Grounds. You will still enroll in courses in SIS as usual (just note the time difference!), but make sure you don't have any holds (UREG will ensure you don't have an Advisor hold), and that you're able to successfully log into SIS, *before* your actual enrollment open date.

More information about this topic is shared with students in pre-departure modules.

Finances

Cost, Billing, & Payments

Cost

What does study abroad cost? As with a term on Grounds, you will have a total Cost of Attendance: a combination of billable plus other expenses (commonly including items like airfare, personal expenses, and meals not included in the billable fees). What that cost will be, who you pay, and where to find the information about your program varies by type:

- **UVA programs = Program Tuition & Fees + Non-billable expenses**
Consult the Budget Sheet at the top of the program page.
- **Exchange programs = UVA Tuition & Fees + Other expenses**
Consult [SFS](#) for your UVA Tuition + Fee rates. A list of the types of expenses to expect plus links to the host institution website are on the program page. Housing will be paid to the host institution or privately, depending on your host's housing options.
- **Outside programs = Program Tuition & Fees + UVA Admin Fee + Other expenses**
Program Tuition + Fees and estimates of non-billable expenses can be found on program provider websites. Information about the UVA Admin Fee is found on our [Fees, Billing, and Payments page](#).

As with all things, there are exceptions in certain cases! Look carefully at the Fact Sheet (particularly the "Tuition Payments Made To" and "Admin Fee" fields), Budget Sheet (if available), and information on the rest of the program page for confirmation for your program.

Not sure how to find the program page on our website? Use the [Program Search](#) and click on the program name to access the relevant page.

Billing & Payments

University of Virginia fees will be posted to student accounts upon registration. 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.

Paying with 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.

Pre-Travel Advance

Airfare, visas, and immunizations are just some of the expenses that you may have to pay for before a study abroad program begins. For students waiting for financial aid to disburse, or for whom providing the funds upfront is otherwise a hardship, the ISO is pleased to announce that the Pre-Travel Advance is now available as a resource. Talk to your Education Abroad Advisor about this option to secure up to \$2,500 at the time that you need it as you prepare to travel. See our [Additional Financial Resources](#) page for details.

Payment Plans

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

Additional Resources:

Fees, Billing, & Payment: <https://educationabroad.virginia.edu/fees-billing-and-payments>

Cost Comparison Worksheet: <https://educationabroad.virginia.edu/forms-policies>

Using Financial Aid to Pay for Study Abroad: <https://sfs.virginia.edu/financial-aid-current-students/current-undergraduate-students/study-abroad>

Financial Aid Process: <https://educationabroad.virginia.edu/financial-aid>

Scholarships: <https://educationabroad.virginia.edu/scholarships>

Direct questions regarding financial aid to Student Financial Services at (434) 982-6000

Managing Your Money Abroad

General money management best practices:

- Make a budget based on the expected costs of your program and location – and stick to it!
- Understand how money works in your host location – is it a cash economy or will you get by with cards? Is there a tipping culture?
- Use your program or host institution's resources to help you plan, plus dependable sources like travel guides.

Cash

Have a plan for accessing cash regularly while overseas (especially if you're going to a place where buying a small coffee with a credit card is frowned upon!). Things to consider:

- In most cases, you can plan to withdraw cash at an ATM at the airport when you arrive, but have a plan in place in case it doesn't work.
- For that reason (and others), it's helpful to travel with some US dollars (\$50 or so). Airport exchange desks are another option, though their rates are often a bit higher.
- You may be able to purchase host country currency at your US bank before departure (to get by for the first day or so) – but some currencies can't be purchased outside of the country.
- Exchange rates fluctuate daily; you can find them online or at local exchange services.
- Carry only the amount of cash you need daily; consider a money belt; secure any additional cash in your accommodation.

Debit & Credit Cards

Plan to bring a debit *and* credit card with you when you travel abroad – it is important to have multiple ways of accessing funds. Keep the following in mind as well:

- Debit cards with Visa, MasterCard, Cirrus or Plus signs are the most widely accepted cards (check the back of your debit card). American Express is not widely accepted.
- Transactions will post to your account at that day's exchange rate. There are usually transaction fees, and the fees vary significantly.
- Call your bank and credit card company before traveling to:
 - Alert them of the date and location(s) of your travels (you don't want your card to get shut off when you attempt your first transaction!).
 - Find out the fees charged for each transaction. For your debit card, find out if your bank has any "partner banks" in your host location as they may provide reduced or waived fees.
 - If your credit card has a chip, make sure you know the PIN; your credit card company can set one up for you, or you may be able to select one yourself.
- 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. Keep a set securely at home with family, and a set (away from the actual cards) in your important documents.

Opening a Bank Account

If you are abroad for a semester or year, it may be advisable for you to open a local bank account. Your program should provide guidance (including what documentation you may need to bring with you) if that is the case.

Additional information about this topic is covered in the pre-departure modules.

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). These include:

- Identity page of your passport
- Visa page (if applicable)
- Flight information
- Insurance card(s) and policy details
- Copies of your credit and debit cards (front and back)
- Also bring two U.S-produced passport photos; [visit Travel.State.Gov for photo requirements](http://travel.state.gov).

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. Go to <http://travel.state.gov> for applications and instructions.

Passport Grant

For Pell Grant recipients applying to an education abroad program, UVA will provide funds to cover costs of obtaining a passport. The Passport Grant is available for students who have either never had a passport or would need to renew theirs to participate in their intended program. See our [Additional Financial Resources](#) page for details.

Remember that your passport is your most crucial legal document while you are outside the U.S. Treat it with special attention.

Visas

Many 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 your responsibility to know and abide by the visa requirements for your country of study. Your host institution or program provider, Education Abroad Advisor, and the appropriate Embassy or Consulate are good resources. 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.

International Students

In addition to the above guidance, if you are an international student, you may have different visa requirements for the country to which you are traveling, and the application may involve longer processing time. Begin researching these requirements early. All UVA international students need to meet with their International Student Advisor to discuss re-entry documentation and requirements.

Insurance

Already have health insurance in the U.S.? Great! But there's a lot more to insurance while you're abroad, including required medical and emergency coverage for UVA students traveling for University-related purposes, and the potential for host-country requirements – and more. This topic is discussed in more detail in the pre-departure modules, but here's what to know to get started:

Medical & Emergency Insurance

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).

Enrollment

Students participating in Outside and Exchange programs will be prompted to self-enroll with CISI when they complete their post-decision requirements; students on most UVA programs are enrolled by the ISO. 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](#) for more information and a list of those providers.

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

In Case of Emergency

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.

Personal Belongings and insurance

You or your parents may already have a homeowner's or renter's insurance policy. Contact the policy provider to see if personal belongings you're bringing with you are already covered, or if you need to purchase a rider. 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.**

Trip or Travel Insurance

Travel insurance can protect you from certain financial losses such as a delayed suitcase, or having to cancel travel due to illness or a medical emergency. This type of coverage is optional and not included in the UVA insurance policy or through your personal homeowner or renter policy. Look into this when purchasing your flights.

Travel & Packing

“Pack[ing] light is a good move. This one may seem obvious, but I recall my third weekend of traveling where I hauled my huge winter coat away to a small Tuscan town on an uncharacteristically sunny weekend in February. I wanted to burn that coat after that weekend. I surprised myself with how little I really needed to get by over the course of the semester.” - Ariana

Flights

Before purchasing airfare, verify with your program or host institution that you have been cleared to book your tickets (hint: this will be *after* you've been accepted). Confirm all arrival and transit instructions.

There are many websites online that can help you to identify affordable flights. Use reputable airlines or search engines. You can also try student-oriented companies like STA or Student Universe.

In addition to looking at the price of the flight, make sure to consider:

- Length of time provided for layovers between flights. Allowing yourself less than an hour and a half for an international connection is not recommended—your first flight could be delayed, or there could be a long line to clear customs and immigration.
- Where you're transiting through. 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 flights that travel through an area with a University Restriction or Department of State Level 3 or 4. See <http://iso.virginia.edu/travel-alerts-notices-warnings/>.

- You may travel independently before or after your program, but it is your responsibility to make accommodation and other arrangements.

Packing

Pack what you need and what you can carry yourself! After you pack, carry your bag around the block and up and down some stairs. Lift it over your head if you'll need to get it in an overhead bin on a train or plane. Make sure your name and address are on your suitcase.

Consult your airline for restrictions on baggage size, weight limits, and overweight baggage fees. Check with the TSA for an updated list of what you can pack in your carry-on and checked baggage. **Leave irreplaceable items at home.**

More suggestions for packing are shared with students in pre-departure modules.

Sustainable Travel

Our choices and actions every day directly relate to sustainability, and there are many ways to support sustainability while abroad. Just as you do at home, conserve resources, be conscious of the waste you create, and support the health of our planet and the wellbeing of your host community through your daily actions.

Although environmental sustainability is often the first to come to mind, it isn't the only type of sustainability to consider – social and economic sustainability are important pillars, too. Our [Sustainability and Education Abroad website](#) provides a plethora of information on this topic and highlights ISO's Sustainability Plan, but here are a few things for you to begin considering:

- How do you plan to travel around your host site? What environmentally friendly methods are available?
- What resources do you use daily, and how do these compare to the way the locals of your host country live?
- How is waste and recycling managed in your host country?
- What are locals' attitudes towards sustainability generally?

Find more tips for sustainable travel on the [While Abroad](#) page on our website.

Communications

Family and friends will be eager to hear from you. Prior to departure, establish a realistic communication plan based on the access to communication tools in your host country. 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 of emergency. You also should be able to contact 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 connect online through a service like Skype (confirm your internet connectivity in-country will support this).

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 information.

You will still need to access sites requiring 2-Step Login, like SIS, while abroad.

Health

Before you travel abroad, 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. 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 in an unfamiliar environment.

Identify Your Health Needs

Be clear about your health needs. Your Education Abroad advisor can help you identify locations and programs that can offer appropriate support.

- Disclose and describe allergies, disabilities, psychological treatments, dietary requirements, and medical needs to the ISO, SDAC, and your program or host institution. Arrangements may need to be made in advance.

- Resources and services for people with disabilities vary widely by country and region, as does access to specialty care. If you have a disability or require accommodations, share this with your Education Abroad advisor early in your program search.

Your healthcare providers can help you prepare for a healthy journey. Update your health records, including eyeglass prescriptions and regular medications. Identify medical resources before you leave.

Travel Abroad and COVID-19

The International Studies Office regularly monitors health and safety conditions around the world, including current advice and restrictions related to COVID-19. Please see the [COVID Considerations](#) page of our website for the most up-to-date information.

Medications & Medical Supplies

Know what is legal to bring into your host country – contact CISI insurance once you are enrolled. 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 and a doctor's letter 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.

Not bringing any prescription medications? It's still a good idea to bring a medical kit. [The CDC has a checklist](#) (not all items are relevant for all travelers and destinations).

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 (all countries *except* for Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and Japan), you 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 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 also provide travel counseling regarding food and water borne illnesses, insect borne diseases, traveler's diarrhea prevention and treatment, malaria prophylaxis, and rabies risk.

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/>.

The CDC recommends that international travelers be fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and many countries limit entry to travelers who can provide proof of full vaccination against COVID-19. Some education abroad programs and host organizations require students to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

Travel Clinic in the Elson Student Health Center

(434) 924-5362 | <http://studenthealth.virginia.edu/international-travel-clinic>

Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

(800) CDC-INFO | www.cdc.gov/travel/

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

Jet Lag

Depending on the length of your flight and the time difference, you may experience jet lag. 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
- go outside as daylight helps the body adjust to the new environment

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.

While on-site resources are often able to provide the most timely and direct assistance, 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

While abroad, students may also access on-demand mental health consultations via TalkNow. Students should plan to download the [CAPS TimelyCare app](#) prior to leaving the U.S. TalkNow will allow students to connect with a trained mental health expert any time of day. It is not therapy but is effective for managing in-the-moment stressors or crises and making a plan for how to connect with ongoing mental health care.

Alcohol & 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 binge drinking is unheard of or deeply frowned-upon.

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.

Students should be aware of laws regarding possession and consumption of alcohol in their host society (or countries through which they transit). **If consumption of alcohol is prohibited, travelers may need to abstain from drinking even while in transit to their host location.**

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 laws, attitudes, expectations, and cultural norms concerning dating and sexuality in other countries. Words and actions that mean one thing to you may mean something completely different to another person. If you anticipate being sexually active:

- Take health precautions to [prevent HIV](#) and [other sexually transmitted diseases](#), which exist in every country
- Be aware of the social and health implications of sexual activity in your host society

- Research the availability of contraceptives in your host country, since they may not be available in all areas, or may be of a lower quality than is available in the US. Take contraceptives with you if you think you may need them, including a prescription if necessary.
- Discuss your expectations regarding interpersonal and sexual involvement with your partner so that you can reduce physical, emotional, and other risks.
- Research attitudes and customs concerning sexuality in the country you will be living in and make responsible decisions about sexual relationships while overseas.
- Remember your decisions won't just affect you, but also your partner, possibly their family and your host family or roommate as well.

If you choose to be sexually active while you're abroad, always exercise caution, open clear channels of communication with your partner, and use your best judgment.

Safety & Security

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.

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/>

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.

Be Situationally Aware

Be aware of your surroundings and your possessions.

- Listen to and trust your instincts.
- Pay attention to the normal patterns and behaviors in your community. 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. Examples of best practices include:

- **Know the local emergency number for police.** Know the location of the nearest police station and hospital, and keep emergency numbers handy.
- Don't be conspicuous with valuables, documents (like passports), wallets and money, or electronics when you're out and about.
- Always carry the address and telephone number of your home with you until you have memorized them. (Separate from your keys!) Be selective in giving this and other personal information to strangers.
- 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 and avoid demonstrations.
- 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.

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.

Common Hazards

You hear about major incidents on the news, but it's also important to be prepared for how you might experience things you're already used to here in the U.S. – but may encounter differently abroad.

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 U.S. state-issued driver's license.

Pedestrian Safety

Rules and norms for pedestrian safety vary widely – it's more than knowing what side of the street traffic drives on! Understand what's expected of pedestrians (and drivers) in your host location. This is a good time to take out your ear buds and pay attention to what's happening around you.

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. Learn about any relevant cultural practices or prevalence of (and how to avoid) petty crime. Consult local resources for the best means of inter-country travel during your free time (and notify program staff of travel).

Water Safety

According to the CDC, drowning accounts for 13% of deaths in U.S. travelers abroad. Consult their [resource on water safety](#) for best practices if you will be engaging in water activities.

Fire Safety

Understand fire safety best practices for both prevention and what to do during a fire. See the addendum at the end of this handbook, courtesy of the University of California system, for more information. You can find a [PDF of the addendum here](#).

See the Health & Safety page on our website for more: <https://educationabroad.virginia.edu/health-safety-abroad>

Legal Matters

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

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 your host country Embassy for regulations pertaining to a work visa/permit. While it may be permissible in some countries, in others it is strictly prohibited.

Power of Attorney

It is advisable to designate a trusted 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.

Arriving at the Airport

Upon arrival in your host country (or first point of entry in some regions), you will go through Immigration and Customs checkpoints in the airport. The Immigration officer will ask for your passport, and may also ask for your acceptance letter to your host institution or your visa documentation. 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 may give you a customs declaration form that you fill out on the plane; if so, 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.

In some places, foreigners may find discrepancies between actual law and what is commonly practiced (for example, drinking may be illegal but tourists may be served alcohol at hotel bars) – but that, too, does not mean you will not face possible harassment, detention, 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.

U.S. Consular Services Abroad

What U.S. Consulates **can** do in case of arrest:

- Visit the U.S. citizen as soon as possible after the foreign government has notified the 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>.

Identity Abroad

Access Abroad and Students with Disabilities

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.

Changes in food, lifestyle, and climate, in addition to increased physical demands, can create stress in the body which can worsen some conditions. It is important to be aware that some programs are more physically demanding than others, and some universities do not provide the same learning accommodations as are standard in the U.S. Many countries do not have the same accessibility laws as the U.S. With these important factors in mind, it is imperative to inform both SDAC and ISO of accommodation requests as early as possible because these may take a considerable amount of time to arrange. **It is recommended that you work with SDAC and ISO to start planning your experience at least six months in advance.**

First Generation Students Abroad

As a first generation college student, you already have what it takes to embark on a study abroad experience after navigating the process of applying for college, and forging your own path to study here at UVA. You may face unique challenges when explaining to your family your reasons for studying abroad and the value of the experience. You may also have financial needs, but this does not have to be a barrier to a successful abroad experience.

Gender Abroad

Gender has a cultural context, so whether you have traveled abroad before or if this is your first time, it's something to consider as you plan for your study abroad program. Gender roles, expectations of gender, and gender expression will vary not only from country to country but also within a country. Relationships between men and women, expectations about gender expression (dress, language, topics of conversation, etc.), spaces people occupy assumptions about physical touch, and body language may all be different in your host country. Consider stereotypes your host country may have about you and make conscious decisions about how you engage with your host country's culture. If you plan to attend a local university in your host country, learn about any dress codes – some of which may be gender-specific.

Being culturally sensitive is one step towards understanding and integrating into your host culture. Be observant of gender-specific roles, customs, and norms. You do not need to change your identity to fit into the culture. However, it is important that you inform yourself about gender expectations and roles so that you can make considerate, informed, and safe decisions while abroad.

Some students may have concerns about safety while studying abroad given their gender identity and expression. Learn about gender-based rights and protection of gender expression in your host country before you go. Getting to know people in the host culture can help explain what you observe and how to navigate the norms and expectations. Remember that you are your own best resource – stay alert, be aware, and trust your intuition.

Heritage Seekers Abroad

Going abroad gives students a wonderful opportunity 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 may find that people in your host country identify you

as an American and don't recognize your heritage identity within that 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.

LGBTQ+ Students Abroad

Studying abroad can be a wonderful way for LGBTQ+ students to explore their identities in another culture. For many LGBTQ+ students, studying abroad can be a time to celebrate their identities and experience what it is like to live in a country that is accepting and welcoming of LGBTQ+ people. Many LGBTQ+ students have profoundly positive and affirming experiences while studying abroad. Consider what your personal hopes and goals are for study abroad as you think about what location and program will be the best option for you.

LGBTQ+ students may have additional concerns to think about when planning to study abroad. Students should research country-wide and local laws regarding legality of and discrimination against sexual orientation and gender identity. Learn about social norms of friendship, displays of affection, and dating ahead of time – these will vary from country to country and even within different parts of the same country. If you plan to study abroad in a country in which there are no or limited protections for LGBTQ+ people or where same-sex relationships or activity are illegal, consider your online presence, including social media and dating apps.

You may want to think about what housing situation will best meet your needs and will allow you to fully engage in your study abroad experience. If you plan to secure your own housing, research housing discrimination laws. If you are interested in or required to have a home-stay as part of your program, consider speaking with your program staff about your needs and your identity ahead of time so they can find a good match for you.

Race and Ethnicity Abroad

All students have a different experience of study abroad – even those on the same program. As you begin to prepare for your abroad experience, it is important to consider how your race or ethnicity will be viewed abroad. Some students who are in the minority in the US may study in a location where their race is the majority, and others may find that they are in the minority for the first time. You may find yourself excited to be outside of the US and experiencing a new culture outside of the context of the current events in the US.

However, you may also find yourself a subject of unwanted attention, be asked uncomfortable questions, and face new assumptions from people in your host location, especially from children. Consider reading blogs and doing some research to learn about how race and ethnicity are addressed in your host country as you prepare to study abroad. As part of your preparation to study abroad, think about the culture you will be entering and how people's perception of you may be quite different from your self-perception.

Religion & Spirituality Abroad

Whether you consider yourself religious, spiritual or neither, through study abroad you will be exposed to local religious and spiritual practices and norms. You may find yourself confronted with a religious or spiritual 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 and spirituality plays in your host culture, and how members of the local community may perceive your religion. If you would like to connect in with a local religious or spiritual community while abroad, do some research ahead of time to learn what communities will be available to you. Communicate any needs to your program staff.

Additional Resources:

Education Abroad Identity Page: <https://educationabroad.virginia.edu/student-identity-abroad>

Diversity Abroad: <https://www.diversityabroad.com/>

Traversing Cultures

"Looking back at this semester, I can remember going through a whirlwind of emotions. When I first arrived in London, I remember sitting in my room the first day and saying "Why am I here? What am I doing?"...This past semester was easily the best one of my life and opened my eyes to so many things. I experienced a variety of cultures that I never thought I would be able to encounter. I think the best way to put this experience is that if I wouldn't have gone, I would not understand the world as we know it and I wouldn't understand that I don't understand it." - Christopher

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. 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.

As part of your pre-departure preparation, you will be guided towards additional resources and best practices to manage your cultural adjustment. The modules also cover concepts like Cultural

Baggage (our perspectives and what we bring with us from our own culture) and Cultural Sensitivity (recognizing the differences between cultures without making a value judgement).

Accommodation & Food

Accommodation

Accommodation for study abroad can be with a host family, in a dorm, in a private apartment with other students, or in a hotel. The type of accommodation will invariably require you to adapt, either in adjusting to fitting into a family's lifestyle or learning how to navigate living in an apartment with other international or local students. Be sure to consider your individual housing needs and communicate with your program if you need specific parameters for your health (ie: access to a refrigerator for storing medicine or air conditioning to prevent asthma attacks).

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.
- Understand the meal arrangements for your program.
- Also understand that, just like in the U.S., food won't be homogenous in your host country.
- **If you have food allergies or dietary restrictions based on medical or religious grounds.**
- **If you have dietary preferences**, think about how you will approach food during your time abroad and the role food plays in your host community.

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 at UVA, you may be seen in this light since you attend a U.S. university). Depending on where and when you go abroad you may find that you are asked about 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.

Preparing for Reverse Culture Shock

"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."

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

There are many resources available to study abroad returnees here:

<https://educationabroad.virginia.edu/life-after-education-abroad>.

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.