

West Chester University of  
Pennsylvania

**Study Abroad  
Pre Departure  
Information**

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Center for International Programs

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### Study Abroad Pre Departure Information

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Dear Study Abroad Participant:

Congratulations on being selected to participate in a study abroad program at West Chester University (WCU)! We, at the Center for International Programs (CIP), are pleased that you have chosen to take part in what will surely be one of the most memorable and formative experiences of your life! It is our hope that your time abroad will be educationally enriching and personally rewarding, and that you will gain a broadened global perspective, develop new knowledge, share ideas, and obtain insight into different cultures.

The health and safety of students is of utmost concern to WCU. While no location in Pennsylvania, the United States, or internationally is 100% safe, making good decisions abroad will help protect your health and keep you safe. The CIP provides you with the information and tools necessary to make good decisions abroad. Use the information in this guide as you prepare to participate in a study abroad program. Also, remember to use it while you are abroad! .

It is not possible to prepare yourself for all possible situations. . There will be situations that you will not have anticipated and your preparation and flexibility will go a long way towards making each aspect of your time abroad a positive one.

We wish you a safe journey and on your return, look forward to hearing all about your study abroad experience.

Sincerely,

Angela Howard  
Director of Study Abroad Programs

## **Transfer “Course Credit” West Chester University Study Abroad Programs**

### Background Information

Overseas educational systems are very complex and often different from ours at WCU. Nowhere is this more evident than when you are trying to determine “course credit” for study abroad. A few differences are:

- Courses carry different number of credits
- The content in any given course can change from semester to semester depending on the needs of students
- Many courses are taught through a lecture once a week for the whole class and several weekly sessions in smaller groups
- Some courses are not offered every semester and course cancellations can occur due to low enrolment or other reasons.

### Recommended Procedures

It is important to note that there is a difference between getting credits for a course and making sure the credits count towards your degree program. Here are the recommended procedures for students planning to study abroad:

1. Meet with your academic advisor to determine what courses you need to meet your degree requirements.
2. Review the general course offerings for the study abroad program that you plan on attending. This information can be found on the program provider’s website or print/online catalog.
3. Review and follow the “Transfer of Credit” and “Transferring Credits from Other Institutions” in the WCU Undergraduate Catalog.
4. Contact the appropriate department chairperson to get written authorization for each course that you plan on taking and the corresponding WCU course for which credits will be provided. Use the **Transfer Credit Permission Form** available on the Registrar’s website for this purpose. In addition, you will need description of the course(s) you want to take abroad.
5. Even though a full course load at your chosen school may be four (4) courses, we suggest that you get written authorization for at least six (6) courses because some of the courses you have selected may not be offered when you arrive at your overseas institution.
6. If you are studying abroad during the academic year, you must be a full-time student (12 credits or more each semester) for financial aid consideration, coverage through parents’ insurance, etc.

Grades

Course credits earned at an overseas institution do not generally transfer back with the grades. The grades are used to determine whether the credits for the course can transfer back. A failing grade (F) will not transfer back, D grades may not transfer back and are subject to evaluation by the Registrar.

Credit Transfers

You will receive transfer credits for classes that have been:

1. Approved by a Department Chairperson or your Academic Advisor
2. Passed with a C grade or better

Fill in this information prior to leaving:

My Academic Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Transcripts

It is your responsibility to ensure that your final transcripts from the overseas institution are sent in a sealed envelope to:

**Center for International Programs  
ATTN: Angela Howard  
McKelvie Hall  
102 W. Rosedale Avenue  
West Chester University  
West Chester, PA 19383**

Once your transcripts arrive, the original will be sent to the Registrar's Office and a copy will be placed in your file. Note that an unofficial online transcript or one that you have printed yourself is not acceptable. Transfer credits, once approved, will be added to your student record. The Registrar's Office makes the decision as to whether or not you receive credit for your classes based upon your course pre-approval sheet and your passing the courses with a C or higher grade. The Registrar's Office requires adequate time to process these records from overseas institutions.

**NOTE: The Registrar's Office makes all final decisions on transfer credits from overseas institutions.**

# Health & Safety Issues

## Health and Safety

- Visit a travel clinic before going abroad. Travel clinics can give you information on health concerns for many international destinations.
- If you require special prescription drugs you must take an adequate supply with you and know how to administer them. You should also carry a copy of the prescriptions, including the generic names for the drugs, and written instructions from your physician in case of emergency. It may also be useful to have a translation of your prescription in the local language. If a medication is unusual or contains narcotics, carry a letter from your doctor attesting to your need to take the drug. If you have any doubt about the legality of carrying a certain drug into a country, consult the embassy or consulate of that country first. Pack medications in your carry-on luggage. It is appropriate to notify your on-site coordinator of any medications you are taking or any special health concerns.
- Learn about your new environment. Is tap water potable? What are common illnesses? Country-specific guidebooks such as *Lonely Planet* or *Let's Go* are a great way to prepare for the unique context of your destination. International health information is available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx>
- Research local clinics and hospitals. Know where you will go in case of an emergency before you leave the U.S. You may need to find an English-speaking doctor if you do not speak the local language well.
- Frequently wash your hands with soap or carry hand sanitizer if soap is not available.
- Learn about your new environment. What kind of crime is most common? What other safety hazards do you need to be aware of? Again, country-specific guidebooks are great resources.
- Blend in while in public. By not calling attention to yourself you are more likely to stay safe. See what the locals do and adapt their behaviors. Clothing and behaviors common in the U.S. may be offensive in some foreign cultures. While physically it may not be possible to blend in, modifying your behaviors shows respect for local customs.
- Before travelling internationally, be aware of Department of State Travel Warnings at [http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis\\_pa\\_tw\\_1168.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis_pa_tw_1168.html) and Department of State travel resources at <http://www.state.gov/travel/> Consider registering your trip with

the State Department's Smart Traveler Program (STEP) at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/> Registering your trip allows the U.S. Embassy to notify you of important safety issues while abroad. The U.S. Embassy or Consulate in your study abroad country is there to assist you in an emergency (for example, if you were to lose your U.S. passport).

- Start conservative. You will be in a new environment with its own unique traffic rules, social protocols, and crime rates. You should spend your first few weeks abroad observing the behaviors of others. Watch when and how locals cross the street. Ask someone you respect where it is okay to walk late at night and where it is not. Once you gain an understanding for your new home, you can then make *educated* decisions to keep yourself safe.

**NOTE: Within a week after arrival at the overseas institution, please log into your WCU study abroad profile and update your current address and contact information.**

Homesickness affects most people that go abroad. It is perfectly normal to go through an adjustment period when living in a new country. When you are homesick, there are several things you can do to ease this difficult time.

1. Realize that your family and friends miss you too.
2. Be nice to yourself. Find ways to fill your time including hobbies. Exercising, listening to music, and talking to friends are all ways to provide relief.
3. Keep a journal. Write down what you like and dislike about your journey thus far. Set some goals for yourself while abroad (i.e. improving language abilities, traveling to a new city, making friends from different countries etc.)

## Your Conduct Abroad

- Part of the thrill of going abroad is being immersed in a new culture. Every culture has its own cultural norms and social protocols. As you go abroad and your socio-cultural environment changes, your conduct should change as well. Make the effort to adjust to your new environment and adapt many of the behavioral norms of your new home.
- Your new home will have its own unique set of laws. Be aware of what is legally acceptable abroad and remember that all WCU study abroad students are subject to the

laws of their host country. Additionally, all students abroad are expected to abide by the Student Code of Conduct.

# Packing

## **Should I take my laptop?**

Many study abroad programs will give you access to computer labs, so having a laptop is not always necessary. However, if you are someone who likes to do homework in the evenings, late at night, or early in the morning, then you probably will want to take your laptop as many computer labs may not open during these times or on the weekends.

Do not expect to have internet access from your bedroom. Many foreign countries have Wi-Fi in internet cafes and on university campuses, but many homestays and apartments abroad may not have internet access.

## **Will my U.S. cell phone work in foreign countries?**

Talk with your cell phone provider before departure to find out what options you have for using your U.S. cell phone while abroad. Many students choose to buy or rent an inexpensive cell phone once they arrive in their study abroad country.

## **How many suitcases should I take and do I need to pack sheets and towels?**

Pack light! Airlines have very strict baggage limitations, so it is imperative that you check with your airline to see how many pieces of luggage (usually only 2) and the maximum weight allowance per luggage (usually 50-70 lbs per suitcase). Remember that you will most likely accumulate souvenirs while abroad and so you need space to bring back those items, and shipping packages is very expensive. Housing with most study abroad programs will provide you sheets but you may need to provide your own towels.

## **Will I need an electronic converter for my electronic devices?**

In the United States, we use 110v electronic system. Many countries abroad use other electronic systems such as 220v or higher. Laptops and cell phone chargers, for example, are compatible with both systems, but you need to check your electronic equipment to ensure that is compatible with both systems. If your electronic device (such as a flat iron) is not compatible, then you need to buy an electricity converter.

This said, you will need to buy a plug adaptor (for most countries), as the outlets in many foreign countries are different than ours in the United States. It is frequently easier to buy inexpensive

electronic devices (blower dryers, flat irons, alarm clocks, electric razors, etc.) in the country, where you are studying, instead of purchasing converters and adaptors for your U.S. devices.

### **I'm staying with a host family, should I bring them a gift?**

It is a very nice gesture to bring your host family a gift from the United States. You do not have to spend a lot of money, but something thoughtful is usually appreciated. WCU souvenirs make good gifts for host families.

## **Culture**

### **Where can I learn more about the country I'm going to?**

The more you learn about your study abroad destination prior to your departure; the better off you will be when you get there. You can read books and browse the institutional website, buy travel guides, and meet international students or program alumni, who know the country where you will be studying.

### **What is culture shock?**

Experiencing new cultures and obtaining a better understanding of your own culture can result in some of the most positive, life-changing experiences you will have while studying abroad. While the introduction to a new and foreign culture will greatly benefit you, it can also be overwhelming. Cultural differences can be so great that you may need extra time to adjust. *This is normal.* The new cultural norms that you encounter may be so different that they seem "shocking" in comparison to cultural norms back home. Your reaction of feeling "shocked" by a culture's attributes can manifest itself in mood swings ranging from anger, to depression, to panic.

Prepare yourself for some down times. Culture shock is experienced by practically everyone trying to make it in a culture he or she has never lived in before. Realizing that what you are feeling is natural and that other students are probably experiencing the same thing will help you from being discouraged. Culture shock has its ups and downs, good days and bad--but you will pull through. Many students studying abroad experience times when they feel depressed. However, the overwhelming majority comes away from their experience abroad even stronger and better adapted for living and working with others. One of the best ways to work through culture shock is to keep yourself busy, and try to be open about your feelings with friends and family. Remember program directors and other staff are willing to listen and help where they can.

## **Finances**

### **How will I get cash while abroad? Can I use my debit card?**

It is important to have at least three (3) forms of "money" at all times, just in case some options cannot be accessed. The most common forms of "money" are debit cards credit card, cash (US or foreign), Traveler's Checks, and local bank accounts. What you choose to use is dependent upon how long you will be staying and where you will be going.

If you have a major debit card (Visa or Master Card), there are ATMs in major (and lots of minor) cities in the world. Withdrawing money using your debit card is a lot more cost-effective than making wire transfers and safer than bringing a lot of cash with you. If you plan to withdraw money from a U.S. bank account, make sure that there are ATMs in your host city which are on NYCE, PLUS, or CIRRUS. Also, make sure to notify your bank before you leave home as your bank may put a hold on your card if they see unusual card activity. Be aware that the ATM machines may charge a high usage fee and may not always be reliable (especially in developing countries).

In addition to using your debit card to withdraw cash, many students use credit cards. Credit cards often give you the best exchange rates, though many small restaurants, stores, and cafes may not accept them. Make sure to find out which card is most commonly accepted in your host country. Again, consult with your credit card company before you leave home to avoid account holds, which may be activated due to unusually activity on your card. Be aware that credit card fraud is a reality all over the world.

### **Can I work while studying abroad?**

Some countries will allow you to work part-time on a student visa. However, WCU promotes and expects students to focus full-time on their studies. The labor laws of many countries may not allow you to work while you are in their country, so it is important to know the laws and to be realistic about the time and commitment working abroad may take. Furthermore, it can be difficult to find work as a foreigner or without knowing the local language. Additionally, special permits may be required for foreigners to work in some nations.

## **Tips for a Successful Homestay**

Living with a new family can be difficult when you are already going through a major adjustment period. Consider the following tips to alleviate problems and to build a long-lasting relationship with your host family.

1. Be yourself.
2. Keep an open mind and ask questions. You will not learn otherwise.
3. Spend time with your host family from the beginning.
4. Don't run to your room after dinner. Make an effort to get to know the family. Easy ways to do this include starting conversations, watching television together, playing games, asking questions and sharing information about you. Photos can sometimes help initiate conversations.
5. Observe local and family customs. If you are not sure what is happening, ask.
6. Be considerate and treat your hosts with respect.
7. Be aware that tone of voice, body language and facial expressions will be different than what you are used to. This is usually a cultural difference you will have to adjust to. Avoid problems by observing individual behavior during your first several days. Pay attention to how the family interacts together including sense of humor and moods.

# Returning Home

As difficult as it is to adapt to an entirely new culture, **it can be just as challenging to come back home** after being away for any period of time. It is best to know what you might encounter in order to prepare for this adjustment period.

Expect to experience some measure of reverse culture shock. Reverse or re-entry shock can be defined as the unexpected confrontation with the *familiar*. Remember that the world at home hasn't stopped while you were gone. Upon your return home, you may find you aren't the only one who has changed during your absence. Everyone and everything else will have changed too! Remember to take time to readjust slowly.

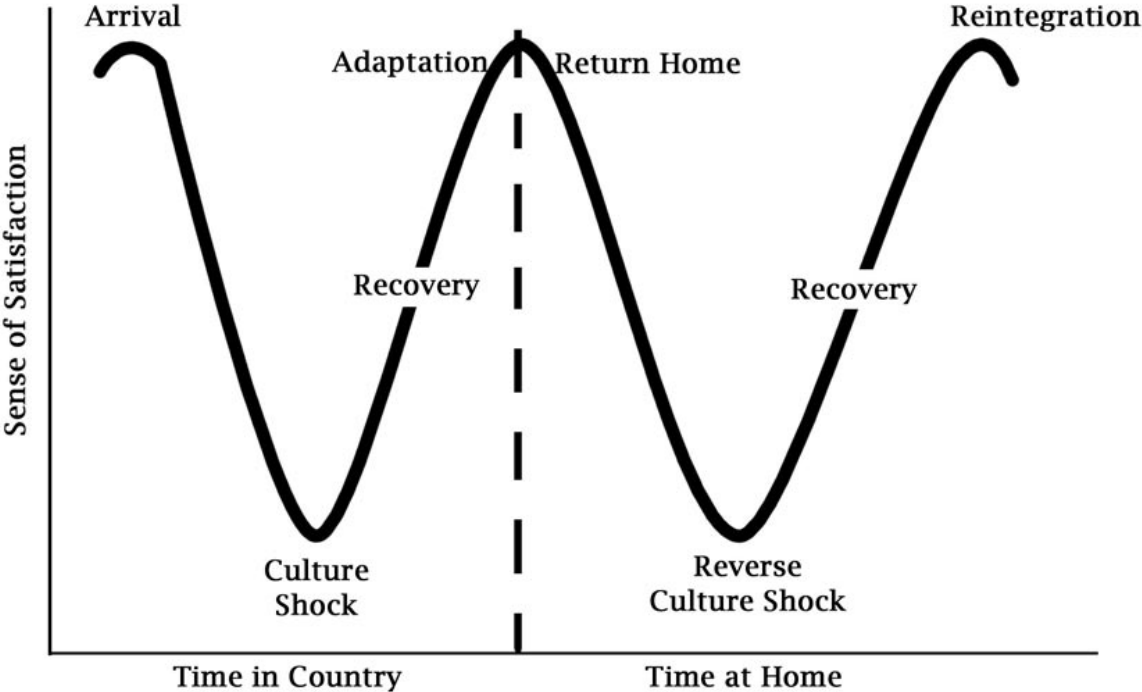
You'll notice that you may think differently about the United States. You'll spend time reflecting on the differences between the U.S. and your former host country, just as you did when you left. Friends and family may be interested in stories or photos for a while, but "really don't understand." It may be difficult to express your feelings in words. Remember that many people may have difficulty relating to what you are saying because it hasn't been part of their experience.

Avoid experiencing anxiety about getting a job when you return home. Your study abroad experience can open employment doors for you, so be creative while abroad, ask for interviews by e-mail and promote the self-reliance and maturity you have gained through your experience.

## **Some points to consider for readjustment upon return to the US**

1. Driving everywhere instead of walking
2. Finding that family and friends quickly lose interest in your stories from abroad
3. Speaking in [American] English
4. Handling the fast pace of U.S. life
5. Returning to mundane or trivial details of your previous life
6. Feeling a disconnect from friends who have a body of shared experiences you missed out on
7. Adapting to a different eating schedule
8. Returning with an expanded worldview—particularly with a more acute awareness of one's own preferences, culture, country's policies, etc.

# THE RE-ENTRY W-CURVE



# REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

*Reverse Culture Shock* is a term associated with the phenomenon of returning to one's own country and culture. Very similar to culture shock, a person entering into their home environment will have to make adjustments to reacquaint themselves with their surroundings. Unlike culture shock, most do not anticipate feeling like a foreigner in their own home. However, it should be expected. If you have made any cultural adjustments while abroad, you will have to readjust once back home.

## **EUPHORIA**

Most travelers will experience some form of euphoria or high when returning home. For weeks the traveler has anticipated returning home and has now come face to face with family, friends and double chocolate donuts. To friends and family you are nothing short of a celebrity. People want to hear about your trip, most enthusiastically look at your photos and everyone is really glad to see you. This eagerness can last for a surprisingly short period of time. As can your tolerance to hearing over and over again, "how was your trip?"

## **SHOCK**

All those social cues that you once took for granted now have to be relearned. You feel frustrated that loved ones have so quickly put your travels into the past. You may feel similar to the effects of culture shock: anxious, irritable, nervous, unable to sleep, or oversleeping. There really is no one pattern or set list of symptoms for reverse culture shock. And unlike culture shock, there is no timetable for moving past it.

## **ADJUSTMENT**

Given time, the majority of travelers will come to some final state of adjustment. They will take the experience provided them and put them into the context of their home. Homesickness for the home that you left behind gives way to a renewal of bonds with old and new friends and family. Your life begins to resemble a little of the life you left, except with a broader perspective from your journey.

*Excerpted from the Glimpse Foundation's "Culture Shock" Acclimation Guide. For more helpful tips, visit: [www.glimpseabroad.org/guide.php](http://www.glimpseabroad.org/guide.php)*

# INTEGRATE

## **Integrating Study Abroad Into Your Daily Life**

Chances are that studying abroad has helped you grow immensely, opened your mind to the world, and given you the confidence to do anything you put your mind to. One of the challenges to returning from an abroad experience is trying to retain these newfound characteristics now that you're back home and finding a way to balance the new you with your old life.

Besides sharing your experience, there are other ways to integrate the benefits of studying abroad into your daily life now. The main goal should be to continue learning, keep challenging yourself, and find ways to meet new and interesting people.

Try some of these suggestions:

### **Join a student club on campus or an organization in your community:**

- Volunteer group
- International, multicultural group
- Student/social/political awareness group
- Leadership group

### **Continue learning/expanding your mind:**

- Subscribe to alternative and/or international news media
- Find ways to incorporate some of the activities you did, foods you ate, music you listened to, etc. into your daily lifestyle now
- Take an international relations, world history, cultural/ethnic studies, language, or social anthropology class

### **Stay connected to the experience:**

- Read your journal
- Make a CD of songs that remind you of your time abroad or songs that represent the experiences you encountered

### **Stay informed about your host city/country:**

- Subscribe to the local online newspaper from the city, region, or country in which you lived
- Stay in touch with your new friends: Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace
- Plan a reunion

# WCU Contact Information

<b>General Information</b>	<b>610-436-1000</b>
<b>Angela Howard, Director Study Abroad Programs</b>	<b>610-436-3515 or 484-354-3179 cell</b>
<b>Public Safety</b>	<b>610-436-3311</b>
<b>Health Center</b>	<b>610-436-2509</b>
<b>Counseling Center</b>	<b>610-436-2301</b>
<b>Financial Aid</b>	<b>610-436-2726</b>
<b>Registrar's Office</b>	<b>610-436-3541</b>

**Have these numbers handy!**

Your Academic Advisor \_\_\_\_\_

Your Department Chairperson \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix

## Sources

West Chester University of Pennsylvania Undergraduate Catalog 2009-2010; page 56-57.

Available at [http://www.wcupa.edu/\\_information/official.documents/undergrad.catalog/](http://www.wcupa.edu/_information/official.documents/undergrad.catalog/)

Travel Abroad,

Available from <http://www.state.gov/travel/>

Student Travel Essentials

Available from <http://www.studyabroad.commarketplace.aspx>

Preparing for your trip abroad

Available from <http://www.state.gov/travel/>

Smart Traveler Program (STEP)

Available from <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/>

Reverse Culture Shock [http://www.globalinksabroad.org/for\\_alumni/reverse\\_culture\\_shock](http://www.globalinksabroad.org/for_alumni/reverse_culture_shock),  
*Retrieved on April 25, 2011.*