

WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY

Education Abroad Handbook For Students & Families



Center for International Programs (CIP)
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CIP Mission

As a catalyst for comprehensive internationalization, the Center for International Programs leads the WCU community of educators in developing and preparing students to become globally aware and engaged members of a diverse society.

The CIP will endeavor to increase WCU student participation in education abroad by:

- Providing students with a high level of service and preparing them to meet the challenges of an international experience
- Advise students about their study abroad options and assist them in finding the programs that best meet their needs
- Articulating to the WCU community the importance of study abroad as part of a student's overall education
- Continuously assess and improve study abroad at WCU

Program Options at WCU

Faculty-led & Exchange

Each year WCU offers 25-30 faculty and staff-led programs, including for-credit and non-credit options (musical and art performances abroad, service-learning programs, and sports team travel abroad). WCU also has several exchange partnerships with institutions around the world. The deadlines, application process, and costs vary by program.

To view a full list of current faculty-led and exchange offerings, please visit our website at <https://www.wcupa.edu/international/educationAbroad/programSelection.aspx>, click on WCU Programs, then “faculty/staff-led and exchange programs list.” This list is always being updated as new programs come about, so we encourage students to check it often especially during the fall and spring semesters.

Affiliate Programs

The CIP, in collaboration with our education abroad affiliates, offers programs during the semester (fall and spring) academic year, summer, and winter sessions. The CIP provides assistance and advice in finding a program that best meets the needs of students.

Currently the CIP is affiliated with the education abroad providers listed below. For more information on our study abroad affiliate partnerships, please contact Nora Maurer, Associate Director at studyabroad@wcupa.edu.

American College of Norway (ACN)

American Institute of Foreign Study (AIFS)

CEA Global Education

Center for International Studies (CISabroad)

IAU College

International Studies Abroad (ISA)/The Education Abroad Network (TEAN)

WCU Education Abroad Steps to Application

1. Make contact with the Center for International Programs by either contacting our office directly (studyabroad@wcupa.edu), attending an event such as the Fall Involvement Fair and/or Study Abroad Fair, stopping by one of our tabling events at Sykes, or attending any CIP sponsored event on campus. (We recommend attending as many as you can!)
2. Attend an information session with a Global Ambassador in our office. Or, watch our pre-recorded information session on our website.
3. Meet with our Education Abroad Coordinator, Lisa Drusedum, to learn about different program options and talk out your goals.
4. Meet with your Academic Advisor to discuss your plans to go abroad and what term you are thinking of going (Academic year, semester, winter, spring break, summer).
5. Be sure you fully understand what courses you've taken thus far and what types of courses you still need to take prior to graduation. For example, how many gen-ed, elective, major courses, minor courses do you have left?
6. Contact studyabroad@wcupa.edu once you know which program you want to apply to in order to receive the WCU application.
7. Be sure to contact the Financial Aid Office (finaid@wcupa.edu) if you have questions regarding how your financial aid package can be applied to your program of choice or if you need to take out loans.

Helpful Information for Parents/Guardians

Studying Abroad During/After the COVID-19 Pandemic

Under normal circumstances, it is natural for parents to have concerns about his or her student studying abroad. Add in a global pandemic and the concerns and questions understandably grow to new heights.

For the most current and up-to-date information, we encourage all students and parents to closely monitor the [Department of State travel website](#) throughout the application process and time spent abroad for travel advisories, governmental directives regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in the host country, and general tips for staying safe while abroad. It is important for you and your student to remain flexible and patient throughout the entire process and understand that protocols may be put in place at a moment's notice given where the world and the host country is at with the pandemic. If you have any questions before your student's program begins about the COVID-19 pandemic and the program/host country's protocols, please reach out to your student's Program Director. Please remind your student to always refer to their Program Director while abroad should they ever have any questions or concerns.

General Safety Reminders

Using common sense, becoming aware of a country's laws and regulations and following them are some of the most important ways a student can ensure his or her safety. The school or university where your student will be studying typically does their utmost to provide the most enjoyable and safe environment for your student. These schools want their visiting students to have the best time they can and to leave with a good impression of their school and country.

Knowing the best way to communicate before your student studies abroad can also help in making sure they are prepared in case of an emergency. Communication is becoming easier all the time due to efficient and inexpensive technology. Your student should find out about the easiest ways to communicate before leaving for their study abroad program. Learning about different cell phone plans, and country codes, postal rates, and the availability of the internet are some items that are good to know before traveling.

Helpful Travel Information Websites

For U.S. State Department travel warnings (urgent notices), public announcements (milder heads-ups) and consular information sheets (broad intelligence and travel reports):

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

The U.S. Department of State Student Travel Abroad Website: <http://studentsabroad.state.gov/>

For more information regarding airline safety and flight regulations: <http://www.tsa.gov/>

LOGISTICS:

- **FERPA: The Federal Education Right to Privacy Act:**

Federal Privacy regulations restrict the Center for International Programs to discuss student records and study abroad information. A student may sign a form to allow named individuals to access to such information. Federal law stipulates that students may not sign under duress; therefore, the form is available for your student in the Registrar's Office. We recommend that you discuss this with them.

- **Course Registration:**

The Registrar's office will register each student for study abroad at WCU under a schedule code "CSE 199 – Study Elsewhere." The student must have their schedule clear (of any scheduled classes or HOLDS in order for this process to be completed. A hold is placed on a student's account for many reasons: parking ticket, health center fee, etc. Registration cannot occur if there is a hold of any kind. Students can access this information through their myWCU account.

- **Financial Aid:**

Please have your student contact the Office of Financial Aid regarding grants and loans. Each student will be encouraged to meet with a financial aid advisor to learn about funding their student abroad experience. Even if students normally do not use loans or receive grants, it is highly recommended that they discuss not only financial options, but procedures and policies they might not be aware otherwise. The Office of Financial Aid can be reached at finaid@wcupa.edu

- **Passports, Visas, and Immigration:**

All US Citizens are required to have a valid passport as means of official identification for any travel outside of the USA: Including Canada and Mexico. If you plan on visiting your student, or even consider it an option, getting your own passport early is a good idea. This could take up to 8 weeks. For more information regarding passports and renewals, visit: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports.html> for the latest information.

- **Communication:**

Please be aware that even in this age of technology, students may not have the opportunity to call or email as soon as they arrive in their host country. It is common for students to call or email within the first few days and not uncommon for it to take up to forty-eight hours. There are a number of reasons:

1. Layovers
2. Delayed flights
3. They are too tired
4. They have to check-in with their university
5. They have a scheduled itinerary from the host institution
6. They cannot get a phone card immediately
7. They cannot access the internet yet (new passwords, student accounts, etc.)

Internet Phone services: These are an inexpensive way for you to communicate with your student. Please talk with your student and set up appropriate “accounts” before they leave. Many students have found the following to be helpful:

- a. ZOOM
- b. FaceTime

Tips for Parents/Guardians

Contact Information is important

- Make sure your student has provided you with several different contact methods, including the study abroad providers office in the US and onsite, your student’s cell phone numbers, social media handles, and an email address.
- Provide your student with all your contact information, including office and home phone numbers, email, along with the contact information for a neighbor, close relative, and/or good friend that will be able to reach you in case of an emergency.

Communication about Health and Safety

- Discuss with your student any travel plans and activities that may be independent of the study abroad program
- Engage your student in a thorough discussion of safety and behavior issues, insurance needs, and emergency procedures related to living abroad.
- Keep in touch with your student.

Be Informed

- Stay informed about what is happening in your student’s country

- Check out the State Department website for specific information pertaining to an individual country and general information about travel and safety.
- Read the foreign press. Many foreign press websites now host an English language version.

Be Prepared

- Have a valid passport.
- Make sure you have a copy of your student's passport.
- Purchase flexible tickets for your student.

Culture Shock, Re-Entry, & The W-Curve

Culture Shock

Culture shock is defined by Merriam-Webster as a sense of confusion and uncertainty sometimes with feelings of anxiety that may affect people exposed to an alien culture or environment without adequate preparation.

Culture shock can be an inevitable experience that every student abroad may face, but one of the best ways to prepare for dealing with bouts of culture shock is to thoroughly research your host country's culture, customs, and way of life before you leave. Should culture shock feelings become intense and hard to deal with, we encourage all students to reach out to their Program Director for guidance and to talk through what they are experiencing. More than likely, other students on the program are going through the same feelings and don't even realize that they are not alone. Journaling and creating friendships with locals are also ways students can feel more connected to their surroundings. Past studies on culture shock have shown that it may present itself in 4 different stages throughout the time abroad. These stages include:

1. Honeymoon Stage (Initial Euphoria)
2. Anxiety Stage (Irritation and Hostility)
3. Adjustment Stage (Gradual Understanding)
4. Mastery Stage (Adaptation/Biculturalism)

To learn more about these stage of culture shock, please visit GoAbroad.com's article, "[Culture Shock Stages: Everything You Need to Know & How to Deal](#)"

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

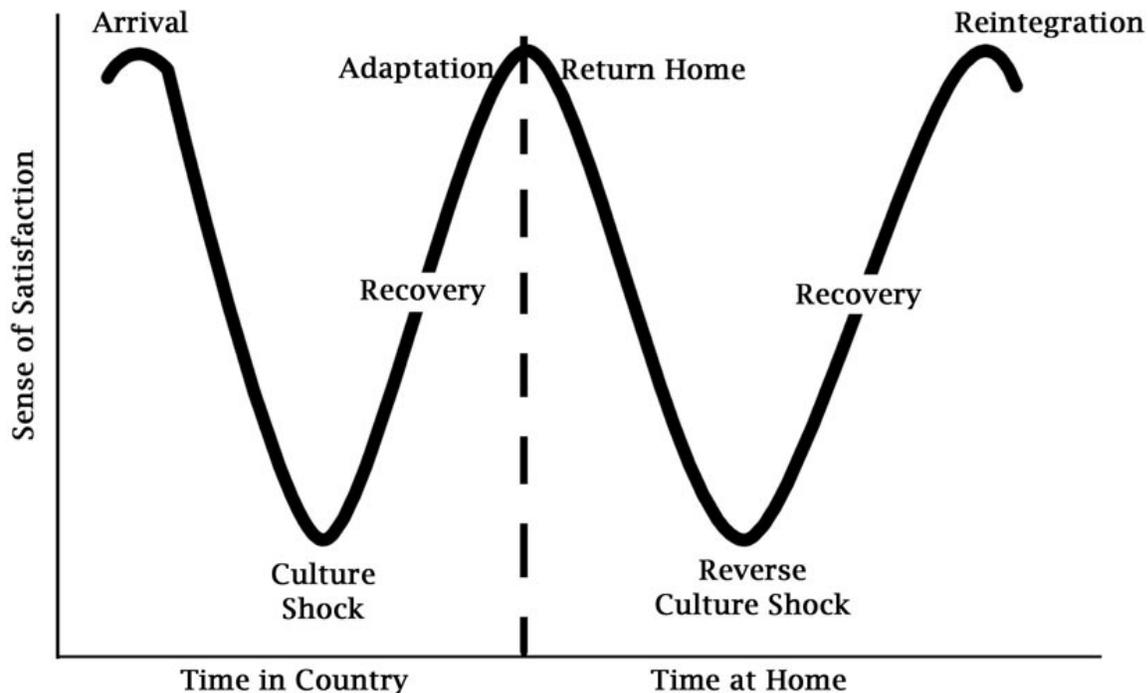
All those social cues that you once took for granted now have to be relearned. You feel frustrated that loved ones have so quickly put your travels into the past. You may feel similar to the effects of culture shock: anxious, irritable, nervous, unable to sleep, or oversleeping. There really is no one 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/guides.php.

The W-Curve



TOP 10 POINTS OF ADJUSTMENT UPON RETURN

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

Integrating Your Study Abroad Experience 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 heaps of 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
- Become a Global Ambassador for the CIP
- 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
- Download music that reminds you of your time abroad or songs that represent the experiences you encountered
- Stay connected with the friends you made abroad

Stay informed about your host city/country:

- Follow local online newspapers from the city, region, or country in which you lived on social media
- Continue to educate yourself about the history of your host country

Education Abroad Testimonials

To view our most recent testimonials from WCU study abroad alumni, please visit our [Global Ambassadors page on our website to learn about 12 of our office ambassadors and their time spent abroad:](https://www.wcupa.edu/international/meetOurAmbassadors.aspx)