

Meredith College  
Office of International Programs

# Study Abroad Predeparture Handbook



2025



## *Study Abroad Handbook*

Dear Study Abroad Student,

You are about to begin what will probably be one of the most exciting adventures of your life—studying abroad. With your departure only a few weeks or months away, you have probably begun to wonder what you should pack, what health precautions you should take before departing, and what it will be like living and studying in your host country. Hopefully, this handbook and the study abroad orientations will help answer most of those questions.

The information that follows is a collection of advice from our office staff and former participants. All information is accurate to the best of our knowledge at the time of printing. If you have updated information upon your return from study abroad, please let us know. We would greatly appreciate it if you could help us update this handbook for next year's participants.

Remember to EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED. Ultimately, no written materials or suggestions are going fully to prepare you for what lies ahead. A lot of the responsibility for the experience comes down to you and your attitude and preparation for your sojourn abroad. We recommend that you do some independent preparatory research on your host country on your own through guidebooks, suggested reading and movie lists, the identity-based resources on our website, and talking to students who have recently returned from studying abroad. Also, the best approach to take is to keep an open mind, remain flexible, and be patient, especially with yourself, as you adjust to your new environment. We wish you all the best!

Sincerely,

The Office of International Programs  
Meredith College  
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3800 Hillsborough Street  
Raleigh, NC 27607  
919-760-2307

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# **IMPORTANT PEOPLE & DEADLINES TO REMEMBER**

## **Meredith Office of Int'l Programs**

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3800 Hillsborough Street  
Raleigh, NC 27607

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[ahbisset@meredith.edu](mailto:ahbisset@meredith.edu)

## **Faculty Director/Program Manager:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

## **Financial Aid Office**

Judith Schram

Phone: 919-760-8159, 919-760-8120

[jmschram@meredith.edu](mailto:jmschram@meredith.edu)

## **Registrar's Office**

Phone: 919-760-8593

[registrar@meredith.edu](mailto:registrar@meredith.edu)

## **Residence Life Office**

Phone: 919-760-8633

[reslife@meredith.edu](mailto:reslife@meredith.edu)

**Program Specific Orientation Dates:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Study Abroad Forms & Deadlines**

- Payment Deadlines – Be aware of payment deadlines!
- Post-Acceptance Forms due in VIA
- Study Away Financial Assistance Form
- Off-Campus Credit Form
- Senior Forms, if applicable to you
- Visas and Entry Authorizations: If you are required to apply for entry authorization or a visa, you should apply as soon as possible and no later than three months prior to your departure.
- Registration: If you are going abroad for a semester, remember the early registration deadlines and contact your faculty advisor.

## **Affiliate Programs:**

- Be sure to email your on-site contact information (address, phone, email) directly to Dr. Brooke Shurer or Liz Yaros once you arrive.

## **“TO DO BEFORE YOU GO” CHECKLIST**

- If you do not already have a **passport** that will be valid for at least six months after your return, **apply for one immediately** (see “Applying for a Passport”).
- Apply for **electronic travel authorization or a visa** to enter your host country, if required.
- If you are making your own travel arrangements, start looking into **flight arrangements** soon (see “Travel Arrangements”).
- If necessary, make arrangements for things to be handled **in your absence** (see “Handling Home Issues from Abroad”).
- Read this Study Abroad Pre-departure Handbook.**
- Make copies of all of your important documents** such as your passport, student visa, COVID-19 vaccination card, flight itinerary and reservation, prescriptions, credit and debit cards, ATM cards, etc. Leave one set of copies in the U.S. with a family member or trusted friend and take another set with you packed in a separate place from the originals. These copies will speed up replacements if lost or stolen.
- Make an appointment with a travel clinic or your doctor** to discuss immunizations, vaccinations, your current health conditions, and health information for your host country. Also talk to your doctor or the OIP about any issues regarding taking your personal medications abroad (see “Medications & Vaccinations” section).
- Develop a budget** for your trip and **plan for multiple ways of accessing money** while abroad (see “Money & Budgeting” section).
- Check into different ways to **keep in touch** with family and friends back home through email, Zoom, FaceTime, WhatsApp, and international cell phone plans (see “Keeping in Touch” section).
- Pack light!** Lay out everything you plan to take abroad and then get rid of a third of it (see “Packing for Your Travel” section). **This is the #1 piece of advice from past students every year.**
- Read, read, read!** You will be going to a place where everything will be different from what you know—the food, the customs, the weather, the toilet paper, the electrical outlets, the clothes—EVERYTHING. If it were going to be the same as home, why bother going abroad? The more you can learn about your destination—its history, its culture, and its people—the better prepared you will be to enjoy the differences rather than be overwhelmed by them (see “Culture” section).

# **TRAVEL DOCUMENTS**

## **Applying for a Passport**

If you have not already done so, you should apply for a passport IMMEDIATELY. Applications for first-time passport are estimated to need at least 18 weeks of processing time. For information on applying for a passport see the U.S. Department of State website (<https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports.html>), which provides information on where to apply for a passport (only those renewing their passport can apply by mail), printable passport applications, current passport fees, expedited services, and how to check on the status of your passport online.

If you already have a passport—make sure that it has not expired and will be valid for at least 6 months AFTER the end date of your program. If it is not, then follow the process for “Passport Renewal” on the website (which can be done by mail). We suggest that when mailing your passport or receiving it through the mail, you use either FedEx or UPS and not the U.S. Postal Service, since the former have better tracking systems.

You must have a valid passport before you can apply for a visa because you will need to send in your actual passport in order to obtain the visa. Check with your program and/or the Consulate to see if a student visa is required for you or your program. If so, keep the passport timetable in mind when planning for your visa application. For information on expedited passport services, visit <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports/information/processing-times.html>.

### **Authorized Passport Agencies in Raleigh:**

While local post office agencies offer passport processing services, it can take a long time to get an in-person appointment, especially during peak times. We recommend you also check the Wake Country Register of Deeds, as well.

Register for an appointment online: <https://www.wake.gov/departments-government/register-deeds/passports>

### **Cost (fees effective as of March 2025):**

First-time	\$165 (the passport fee is \$130; and the execution fee is \$35)
Renewal	\$130
Expedited Service	\$60 (plus fees above)

### **Passport Photos:** Cost: \$10-15

Passport photos can usually be obtained in any store that processes photos on-site like Rite-Aid, the UPS Store, CVS, or Walgreens. You can also visit AAA on Blue Ridge Road if you



have a membership. The wonderful thing about the Wake County Register of Deeds passport office is that you can get your photos and paperwork done in one stop.

**Special Notes for Non-U.S. Citizens:** If you are not a U.S. citizen, please alert your program director and make an appointment to see someone in International Programs **immediately** to discuss possible additional visa requirements.

### Applying for a Visa

A visa is an official authorization stamped in your passport, permitting entry into and travel within a particular country for a period of time (usually over three months). Visas are most common and usually required for semester study abroad students, but summer students may need a visa to travel to certain countries.

Your student visa is proof that you have the permission of the government to enter their country and stay for the allotted time (generally longer than a tourist visa).

**Meredith Abroad:** If visas are required for your program, your faculty director will discuss the application procedures with you at the program-specific orientation. Please check your host country's entry requirements and alert the OIP if you think you might need a visa. If you are a non-U.S. passport holder, you may be required to apply for a visa to enter your host country. Please research the requirements and reach out to the OIP immediately if you know or think you might need to apply for a visa.

**Affiliate Programs:** Most programs provide information on how to apply for a student visa. Visit the US Department of State website for embassy and consulate information for your host country. <https://www.usembassy.gov/>

A reminder: For U.S. passport holders, studying in most countries for fewer than three months typically does not require a student visa, but check!

**Non-U.S. citizens will have to check with the individual consulates for visa requirements (see OIP for assistance with determining visa eligibility for your country of citizenship).**

# ELECTRONIC TRAVEL AUTHORIZATIONS

## ETA – United Kingdom

Starting in 2025, the United Kingdom launched an Electronic Travel Authorization. This is a digital permission that most non-EU passport holders, including US citizens, will need to in order to travel to the UK, even for short visits. This ETA allows visa-exempt travelers to enter the UK for tourism, business, or family visits for up to six months, but the traveler is required to file an online application **prior to departure**.

If you are participating on an Affiliate program, your study abroad team should provide you with instructions for how to complete the ETA. For Meredith Abroad participants, follow the guidance in this handbook and in the handouts given at orientation. Additionally, if you are planning to travel independently to the UK before, during, or after your program, you may need to complete this requirement.

We highly recommend completing the travel authorization through the ETA UK mobile app, but travelers can also apply through the [UK government website](#). In order to apply, travelers will need:

- Passport
- Facial image
- Ability to pay with credit card, Apply Pay, Google Pay, and Venmo
- It costs £10 to apply (approximately \$13 USD)



You can download the app from the [Apple App Store](#) or [Google Play](#).

### Key Points and Exemptions related to the ETA UK

- The ETA UK does not replace the need for an official visa, should one be required.
- If you are a British or Irish citizen OR are required to apply for a visa to study in the UK, you do not need to complete this ETA.

## ETIAS – European Union

The European Union is planning to establish an electronic travel authorization requirement known as [ETIAS](#) “European Travel and Authorization System” for visa-exempt travelers who wish to visit the EU for short stays. This predeparture security check will be required for all visitors to the Schengen territories.

The EU hopes to launch this authorization in “mid-2025” but there is no official launch date.

At the time of this handbook’s printing (March 2025), the ETIAS program has not been officially launched. While we do not anticipate the need for our summer programs to complete this requirement, the ETIAS may be required for fall study abroad students. Should this requirement change between now and departure of Meredith Abroad programs, the OIP will be in contact with students immediately with instructions.

**Affiliate program participants** should keep an eye on their emails from their study abroad providers for updates and requirements.

Based on current information, the OIP has designed a handout related to the ETIAS.

Travelers can stay on top of updates related to ETIAS here:

[https://travel-europe.europa.eu/etias\\_en](https://travel-europe.europa.eu/etias_en)

# **TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS**

## **Making Flight Arrangements**

If you are responsible for making your own travel arrangements abroad, first confirm the arrival and end dates with your program manager or faculty director before booking any tickets. As a general rule, we recommend buying a round trip or a multi-city ticket with a set return date and flying into the airport that is closest to your final destination. Some students think they should buy an “open-ended” ticket if they are unsure of their exact return date. However, such tickets can be quite a bit more expensive to purchase. Though the fee to change the return date on your flight can cost up to \$300-500, it may still be cheaper than purchasing two one-way tickets. Also, open-ended tickets can cause problems with student visas and going through customs upon arrival.

Thorough research is the key to getting a good flight. Do not assume that the first airline or travel agency you contact has the cheapest fare. Different agencies have access to different fares and these may vary by several hundred dollars, so it is best to compare your options. “Student rates” are typically not available through regular travel agencies or the internet, so it is best to start with travel agencies that specialize in student travel:

- **Teresa McCombs:** An OIP-vetted and trusted local travel agent. Email [teresa@tpmccombstravel.com](mailto:teresa@tpmccombstravel.com) or call (336) 202-4077
- **Student Universe:** A nationally known student travel agency, [www.studentuniverse.com](http://www.studentuniverse.com)

An International Student ID Card (ISIC) may be required to get the student rates (see the following pages). If you are working with a local travel agent, be sure to inquire about student rates.

You may also want to consider purchasing flight insurance. Many student travel agencies offer this for a nominal fee. This provides some coverage for delayed or lost luggage, which in today’s world of increased flight headaches seems to be happening a bit more frequently than in the past.

## What To Expect at the Airport

<http://www.tsa.gov/traveler-information>

Checking baggage and getting through airport security checkpoints can sometimes be a complicated and stressful process, so make sure you know what to expect before heading to the airport. Your overall travel experience will be decidedly more pleasant if you can move quickly and efficiently through the security process while maintaining a patient and cheerful attitude.

**Dress the Part** – Certain clothing or accessory items have a tendency to set off security alarm systems and slow down the screening process. It is a good idea to avoid wearing heavy metal jewelry, belts with buckles, and body piercings while you're traveling. *Note that head coverings and other religious garments are permitted to be worn through airport security.*

**Do I Have to Remove My Shoes?** – Probably. In the United States, and regularly at international security checkpoints, you will be required to remove your shoes to send them through the screening belt before you will be allowed to pass through the metal detector.

**Clean Out Your Pockets** – To keep security lines moving smoothly, take all metal items such as keys, cell phones, and loose change out of your pockets and place them in your carry-on luggage.

### **Carry-On Baggage Guidelines** –

- **Liquids:** All liquids in carry-on luggage must be deposited in a 3.4 ounce (100ml) container or less (by volume) and placed in a 1 quart-sized, clear, plastic, zip-top bag. Visit TSA's website for a list of regulations relating to liquids in carry-on luggage: <https://www.tsa.gov/travel/security-screening/liquids-rule>.
- **Prohibited items:** Many sharp objects such as scissors, razors, and pocket knives are not permitted in carry-on luggage. For a full list of prohibited items, visit TSA's website: <https://www.tsa.gov/travel/security-screening/prohibited-items>.

**Special Needs** – Students with a disability, medical condition, or other special needs should explore the TSA website for guidelines for a hassle-free screening process: <https://www.tsa.gov/travel/special-procedures>.

## International Student ID Card (ISIC)

Purchasing an International Student ID card or ISIC card may be worthwhile if you are traveling to Europe, but for most programs it is not required. The card can sometimes provide access to student discounts on travel, museum and other tourist venue entry fees, theatre tickets, etc. Some Student Travel agencies also require the card before you are eligible for student airfares. The insurance provided through the ISIC card does not fulfill the Meredith insurance requirement (see the “International Health Insurance” section).

**Meredith Abroad:** Check with your faculty director at program-specific orientation about whether or not purchasing an international ID will benefit you or whether it is required for your program.

**Affiliate Programs:** Many study abroad programs already provide the ISIC card to their students, so check with your program before purchasing a card.

## Registering with the U.S. Department of State & Customs

U.S. citizens who travel abroad should register with the [U.S. Department of State Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#). Registration establishes your citizenship, provides a local contact address, and is an opportunity for the U.S. Department of State to add you to the emergency notification, or “warden,” system.

STEP currently does not currently give Meredith College the ability to register travelers in batches, **so all travelers will be required to register themselves**. Many Meredith Abroad groups will provide an opportunity to register for STEP in a group departure meeting setting.

In general, you may enter most countries with any item intended for personal use. If you have an unusually expensive camera or other expensive items (watch, camera, etc.), it is prudent to register with U.S. customs officials BEFORE you leave the U.S. and keep the receipt. If you do not, you may have to pay a duty on those items when you return.

## Handling Home Issues from Abroad

Study abroad students have a variety of issues to handle from abroad. While studying abroad does not mean you can't do some things, you still need to plan ahead for many of them before you leave.

### *ALL STUDENTS*

#### **Bills**

Make sure that you have made arrangements for any bills that need to be paid in your absence through a family member or trusted friend, online bill paying, or canceling service while you are abroad. Be sure to check into the processes involved for paying such bills abroad (logins and passwords, account numbers, etc.) and the costs of doing so (e.g. internet access, fees for late payments, etc.) well before you leave.

#### **Power of Attorney**

Giving a family member or trusted friend a limited power of attorney, while you are abroad for a semester might be a good idea. Power of attorney gives that person the power to act upon your behalf in case a legal document requires your signature while you are away. You can get a specific power of attorney form from any legal services office or office supplies store. Please note these typically require notarization of signatures of both parties, so this is not something you can do from abroad.

#### **Family Emergencies**

Discuss with your family what you will do in the event of a family emergency, illness or death that occurs while you are gone. While these are not pleasant topics, it is much easier to have these conversations around the kitchen table prior to departure than in an intercontinental phone call in the midst of a crisis.

### *SEMESTER STUDENTS*

#### **Meredith Pre-Registration**

You will pre-register for the following semester online from abroad. The Registrar's Office will contact you directly via email regarding upcoming deadlines and instructions on registration. The Registrar is given a list of contact emails at the beginning of the semester. If you change your email address or check a non-Meredith account more often while you are abroad, please email [registrar@meredith.edu](mailto:registrar@meredith.edu) with your updated contact information, so they can contact you in a timely manner.

#### **Meredith Housing**

If you plan to live on campus when you return, have a friend fill out your name on a residence card for the semester you plan to return, especially if you do not have a planned

roommate. That way you will have a room when you return to Meredith. We will also send a list of students studying abroad each semester to the Director of Residence life, who will contact you abroad if you have indicated beforehand that you intend to return to Meredith housing upon your return.

### **Meredith Class Ring**

If you will be abroad as a junior, we recommend that you order your class ring at the end of your sophomore year. The ring should arrive during the summer, before you leave the country.

### **Absentee Voting**

If elections are going to take place in the United States while you are abroad, you can still take part in the election process by completing an absentee ballot. You must, however, register to vote before you leave home. Contact local election officials to obtain information on absentee voting, including whether or not you need not have your ballot notarized at a U.S. Embassy or consulate abroad.



## **KEEPING IN TOUCH**

In case of an emergency, the Office of International Programs and Meredith College must be able to contact you quickly. As a part of the post-acceptance process, you will be expected to uphold the following **Cell Phone and International Communication Requirements**.

### **Cell Phones & International Communication Requirements**

The Office of International Programs requires all participants to have a working cell phone with them throughout the duration of their time abroad.

#### **Meredith Abroad & Affiliate Programs:**

Your program will require that you choose one the following options.

- **Purchase an international plan to add to your existing U.S. phone package.**  
You will provide the OIP with your U.S. cell phone number.
- **Bring an unlocked phone with you abroad so that you can:**
  - **Purchase an eSIM prior to departure (good for short term programs) or**
  - **Purchase SIM card in country (better option for semester students).**
  - You are required to provide your international cell phone number to your faculty director immediately after you receive it.

**Affiliate Programs:** Check with your affiliate provider to learn about their cell phone requirements. You will be required to either purchase an international plan to add to your existing plan or bring an unlocked phone with you and purchase an eSIM prior to departure or a SIM card once you are abroad.

#### *MANDATORY COMMUNICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL STUDENTS*

1. You must have a working cell phone throughout the duration of your time abroad with the ability to send/receive texts and phone calls.
2. Download the WhatsApp messaging service to your phone so that we may communicate with you in the event of an emergency.
3. Follow @MCGoGlobal on Instagram.
4. You will be responsible for keeping your cell phone on and charged at all times.

## ZOOM, SKYPE, WHATSAPP, FACETIME & INTERNET VIDEO CHAT

The cheapest way to communicate internationally is through your mobile phone or computer, through WhatsApp or similar voice data Internet carriers like Zoom, FaceTime, Facebook Messenger, or Google Chat (GChat). Basically, this is an option to call someone abroad over the Internet. Skype is also free for Skype-to-Skype calls (i.e. between 2 computers), but can be set up on one computer to call a landline on the other end. We've heard from students these platforms (WhatsApp, Facetime, etc) are very cheap ways to keep in touch. That said, these platforms require at least one high-speed Internet connection, may not work with all computer systems, and has costs involved (call charges and possibly equipment enhancements). Keep in mind that your internet access may be on a public WIFI network, so there may be additional costs or privacy issues involved outside of any technical equipment or requirements.

### eSIM Options

There are many eSIM providers that offer extensive cell and data coverage in countries where you plan to study for flexible prices. Some of the providers that Meredith travelers have had success with are: [Airalo](#), [Nomad](#), and [Holafly](#).

### Time Differences

When making calls and keeping in touch, please remind your friends and family that when they are making calls to you abroad to **keep time in mind the differences!** We have provided a few samples below:

U.S. – EST	Costa Rica	United Kingdom	France, Italy
5 p.m. Monday	4 p.m. Monday	10 p.m. Monday	11 p.m. Monday

These are general time differences and will probably vary between specific countries, within regions, and possibly within the countries themselves (for larger countries). For exact time differences, you should use <http://www.worldtimeserver.com/> for time and region specific information. Also keep in mind that many countries do not change to and from daylight savings time on the same date as the United States or at all. Local staff can help with further information on this.

## Laptops, Internet Access, and Email

You will probably be bringing your laptop with you when you travel abroad, so it is important to take proper precautions while you are in country to keep it (and all of the important information stored on it) safe: set up a login password, use a laptop lock, and use an external hard drive or flash drive to frequently back up your files, just in case. Keep in mind:

- **Technical Service Limits:** Because of the distance and different systems, Meredith Technology Services will not be available to help with off-site technical problems. You will need to seek help with such issues with technical staff people on-site.
- **Get it insured!** Make sure your laptop is insured for theft either under your or your parent's homeowner's or renter's insurance.

If you are in a homestay or an older university or building, the internet connection may not be as fast or as reliable as it is here back at home. It is always a good idea to check with your program to see if WIFI is an option or not through your housing.

**Be cautious:** If you are using a computer at an internet café or university library, make sure you log out before moving on. You don't want the next person who uses that computer to gain access to your information.

## Travel Journals

Some students choose to set up online travel journals through WordPress or other services to keep in touch with family and friends back home. By writing online entries, you are still communicating and getting responses, but you are doing it in one sitting rather than writing a lot of emails or having lengthy Facetime or Zoom conversations. (These accounts are also great for your scrapbook—so have someone save them).

**Meredith Abroad:** Please check with your program director to see if you will be expected to keep an online journal throughout the duration of your program.

## Mail

We do not recommend sending mail abroad as international mail can be unreliable, is very expensive, and students frequently have to pay customs fees upon delivery.

However, it is understood that sometimes sending mail is necessary (replacement of debit/credit card, forgotten visa documents, etc.) If sending mail should become necessary for you, please check with your program as to where your mail should be addressed—i.e. your homestay, your dorm, or the program center. You should also check

if there is a different address where packages should be sent as well as if there are any additional customs charges for certain types of packages—if they arrive.

### Communicating Too Much?

Please consider how much time you spend on social media and on the phone with friends and family at home. While keeping in touch and sharing all of your exciting adventures is certainly acceptable, you do not want spend all of your time on your cell phone or laptop. You did not take this huge step into another culture just to leave one foot back at home.

This is information you need to share with your parents so that they understand that constant contact with them makes it more difficult for you to immerse yourself abroad. Research shows that those students who interact more with the local culture get more out of their experience abroad, so get out there and enjoy your new adventure!

# MONEY & BUDGETING

## Money to Take With You

1. Check with your individual program for specific advice on what money to take with you and handling your finances abroad.
2. Before you leave, be sure that you understand how you will access money while you are abroad.
3. As a general rule, you should have more than one way of accessing money.

If you are traveling solo, you may choose to take some of your host country currency with you in **cash** when you leave the U.S. This will avoid your having to try and find an ATM or exchange money upon arrival when you are tired, confused, and just want to get to your accommodations and rest. Most major banks can obtain foreign currency, but you should verify this well in advance as it sometimes takes them awhile to order the currency. You should have enough to cover bus/taxi fare, snacks, a phone call, etc. during your first couple of days. We recommend the equivalent of about \$50-100, but you should check with your individual programs for further advice on this.

**Meredith Abroad:** Check with your faculty director about whether it would be best to obtain some local currency before departure or if you'll be able to access cash immediately when you arrive at the airport or accommodations.

## Accessing Money While Abroad

### *CASH MACHINES (ATMs)*

Throughout the world, cash machines are the standard way for U.S. travelers to change money. An ATM withdrawal takes dollars directly from your bank account at home and gives you cash in your host country's currency. ATMs tend to get the best exchange rate, charge no exchange commission and are available 24/7. HOWEVER, there are some things you need to check into before you leave the U.S. regarding using an ATM card abroad:

- Check with your local bank about options for withdrawing money in your host country and any country you plan to visit while abroad.
- Check with your local bank regarding any fees or restrictions (i.e. only 5 withdrawals for free per month) for withdrawing money abroad. Some banks have no charges, others can charge up to \$5-15 per withdrawal.

Know your personal identification number (PIN) numerically. Since keypads abroad may have only numbers, you'll need to remember your four-digit PIN by numbers and not letters (figure out the numbers from your hometown bank's keypad).

- Make sure your ATM card is attached to a Checking Account, not a Savings Account. ATM machines overseas rarely give you the choice of accessing a savings account and typically pull directly from your checking account. We recommend setting up the card to pull only from your checking account and making sure you have online access to move funds over from a savings account, should you need access to additional funds quickly.
- Bringing two different cards provides a backup if one is demagnetized or eaten by a machine. Make sure that your card won't expire before your trip ends.
- Ask your bank how much you can withdraw per 24 hours. Note that foreign ATMs may not let you withdraw your daily limit. Many machines have a small maximum, forcing you to make several withdrawals and incur several fees to get a larger amount. Try requesting a big amount first, if you need a lot. If you're denied, try again, for a smaller amount.
- If you plan to get a new ATM card for your trip abroad, make sure you get your PIN number and try it out here in the U.S. well before you leave to go abroad – do not expect a new card to work first overseas.
- If you give someone access to your account, he or she can deposit money that you can access from overseas typically within 24 hours.
- **Be cautious** when accessing your banking information on computers in internet cafés and university libraries. Remember to log out of your accounts so that your information is protected.

### *CREDIT & DEBIT CARDS*

Credit and debit cards tend to work fine throughout the world (at hotels, shops, travel agencies, and so on). We strongly recommend that you take both a credit card and a debit card abroad with you (keeping them in separate places or in a money belt in case one is lost or stolen).

Visa and MasterCard are the most widely accepted. American Express is less commonly accepted, but is popular with travelers for its extra services. Some things to consider when using your credit and debit cards abroad are as follows:

- **Should you let your banks and credit card companies know you'll be abroad?** *While many banks and credit card companies have discontinued this requirement, it's never a bad idea to be in contact with them.* Log onto your credit card or bank account to verify if a travel notification is an option or required. This may vary from company to company. Many times, you can register your travel directly on

your bank's website or by calling the customer service number on the back of your card. Nowadays, our banks will often tell us that travel notifications are unnecessary because companies are constantly tracking "abnormal use" activity; for example, if purchases are rung up on your card in London instead of Raleigh, they may send you a text asking you to verify the purchase or deny payment. Sometimes, banks will freeze your account if they can't reach you to confirm that the charges are legitimate.

- **Contactless "Tap" cards are now more widely used:** If you're thinking about requesting a new card from your bank or credit card company so that it comes with a contactless chip, do so now so that it arrives well before departure.
- **Check on fees:** Check with your companies regarding fees for international purchases. Many banks and credit card companies tack fees (~ 2-10%) onto overseas transactions. While it is true that plastic transactions are processed at a great exchange rate, these fees can add up. Also, merchants and hoteliers are fully aware of the percentage they lose when you use a card and will sometimes give you a better deal if you offer to pay with cash rather than plastic.
- **Receipts:** receipts issued abroad may have your credit card number printed on them. If they do, either keep them somewhere safe for your records or destroy them.
- **Cash Advances:** You can use your credit card at banks abroad to withdraw cash advances. Visa and MasterCard are the most commonly accepted credit cards for cash advances. However, we strongly recommend that you only use this option for emergencies. Confirm this with your credit card company, but it is often the case that if you do get a cash advance, it is often better to get large amounts rather than multiple small advances, as the fee is the same for all transactions.

### *PRE-PAID DEBIT & TRAVEL CARDS*

Pre-paid, travel debit cards are cards that you can load with your own funds to make direct purchases and withdraw money from ATMs while you are abroad. It's a bit safer than carrying cash and can help you keep track of how much you are spending via online tools. Visa, MasterCard, and Travelex offer these travel cards options, and they can be used wherever Visa and MasterCard are accepted.

### *TRAVELER'S CHECKS*

Since the advent of electronic banking and ATM cards, traveler's checks are obsolete and not recommended. Traveler's checks have become less used and more difficult to cash abroad.

## Avoiding Theft

Your ATM, credit, and debit cards can be stolen as easily abroad as in the U.S., and tourists are often targeted. There is no surefire protection, but you can take a few precautions. Keep all bankcards safely in your money belt and your money belt in a safe place when you are not traveling.

- Memorize your PIN; you'd be surprised at how many people write it somewhere in their wallet.
- Talk to your bank about setting a daily withdrawal limit for your ATM or debit card.
- Carry the phone numbers of your bank and credit card companies, along with photocopies of the front and back of your cards; also see [www.visa.com](http://www.visa.com) or [www.mastercard.com](http://www.mastercard.com) for their customer-service numbers per country. If your card is lost or stolen, report it immediately.
- If you lose your wallet but you still have your cell phone, log into your bank's mobile app and "lock" your card so that it cannot be used.

Scams do happen abroad (as in the U.S.). When you pay with a credit card, understand the charges and keep the receipts or take pictures of the receipts. Banks sometimes charge a maximum liability fee if thieves go on a shopping spree with your card, but be careful—a thief with your debit card could conceivably empty your account. Ask your bank what would happen in this worst-case scenario. It is likely you'd be out only a maximum liability fee, but you should confirm this.

The best precaution is to keep up with your charges and check your accounts periodically online from a secure server (or to have someone do this for you at home). *See the "Avoiding Theft" and "Advice from Rick Steves on How to Avoid Theft" sections for further advice.*

### **Coins are generally worthless outside their country**

Since big-value coins are common abroad, exporting a pocketful of change can be an expensive mistake. Spend them (on postcards, newspaper, a phone call home, or food or drink for the train ride), change them into bills, or give them away. Otherwise, you've just bought a bunch of souvenirs because most countries do not exchange coins from another country. If you are left with coins, most airports have charity receptacles that accept all currencies.

### **Getting back to dollars at the end of your trip**

At your final destination, gather any leftover bills and change them into that last currency to help fund the tail end of your trip. If you have any foreign cash left before you fly



home, change it into dollars at the airport, or simply spend it at the airport. U.S. banks will buy remaining paper currency, but their rates are generally terrible.

## Budgeting Your Money

Beyond the basic program cost and what it includes, how much money you spend on personal expenses is largely a matter of personal preference. Your program should provide you with a full budget, including both their fees and estimated expenses. Previous participants' estimates of how much they spent **vary widely**, but most have recommended the following strategies:

- **Create a preliminary budget for personal expenditures:** Make sure you understand **exactly** what is and is not included in your program fee. Check with your program or past participants if you have questions beyond what is provided in the overall budget.
- **Plan for communication:** Check with your phone carrier and your program regarding the costs involved for phone and email access. Remember that eSIMs and local SIM cards for semester students may be an option.
- **Figure out discretionary expenses:** Plan out your discretionary expenses such as travel, entertainment, laundry, postage, etc. for your trip. Most programs give you an estimate of “personal expenses,” but you should clarify with them and/or past participants what this really covers. As a general rule these budgets typically do **not** include the costs of extensive travel (or shopping), so you need keep that in mind when budgeting.
- **Figuring out personal travel expenses:** Purchase a guidebook (*see “Comparing Guidebooks” at the end of this section*) for your host country to help figure out the costs of traveling on weekends and for longer breaks. They will list the costs for accommodation; train, plane, and bus tickets; entrance fees; and other items. These figures will help you come up with a rough estimate for personal travel.
- **Some things are more expensive!** Expect some items to be much more expensive than what you are used to at home—don't assume there will always be local alternatives that are cheaper. Items which tend to be heavily taxed (and thus more expensive) are consumer items imported from the U.S. (food, books, jeans, etc.), “luxury” items such as electronics, and clothing. Specifics will vary greatly from country to country. Check with your program or past participants for advice.

# PACKING FOR YOUR TRAVEL

## Luggage

Student preferences concerning luggage vary widely and you should check with your program about what type of suitcase or backpack is most appropriate.

**Suitcases:** Students on programs without a lot of independent travel can get by with suitcases, ideally with wheels, though they can falter on cobblestone.

**Internal-Frame Backpacks:** If you are going to be traveling independently or hiking into a field station, it might be ideal for you to buy a good, internal-frame backpack from a luggage or travel store to use for weekend and vacation travel. We recommend that you go to an REI store to find out what size pack suits you best. Then you can search for deals and order a pack online through a variety of travel sites, such as Sierra Trading Post, Campmor or REI.

You should also consider purchasing baggage insurance, which is available through banks, travel agencies, and some credit cards if you purchase your airline tickets with the card. Baggage insurance often protects your possessions the entire time you are abroad, not just while you are flying. If you or your parents carry homeowner's or renter's insurance, check with your or their insurance agent to see if your belongings can be covered under the policy while you are abroad.

Pack all of your important documents (passport, e-ticket confirmations, prescriptions, arrival and contact information, etc.), toiletries and a couple of changes of clothing in your carry-on bag. These items should not be packed in your checked luggage in case your luggage is lost or delayed. Be sure to:

- Label all luggage inside and outside with your name and address.
- Check with the airline regarding luggage allowances for checked bags—most international flights only allow one piece of checked luggage weighing 50 pounds before charging additional luggage fees. Some domestic flights (if you have a flight leg within your host country) have much tighter restrictions. Check with your faculty or program director on this because some programs have stricter requirements than airlines because coach travel is utilized.
- Check with the airline about luggage if you will be taking connecting flights within another continent (e.g. London). Many airlines allow only ONE checked bag on flights within Europe, Asia, or Latin America.

- Be respectful of the security procedures at the airports. It is not unusual now for customs and immigrations officers to ask detailed questions and/or to open and search luggage.

## Packing

The key to packing for your time abroad is economy—do you really need your favorite three pairs of jeans? We’ve never heard a student complain about taking too little, whereas many wish they had packed lighter. When packing, keep in mind you will have to carry your own luggage at some point—on and off of planes, up and down stairs, to the taxi stand from a train station, etc.

For advice on **packing lightly**, see the packing list at the end of this section. This is not meant to be the “Holy Grail” of packing lists, but is a guide to efficient packing that may mention a few items that you might not have thought of. When using these lists always keep in mind the climate of the country where you will be, how much traveling you will be doing before and/or after the program, your access to laundry services (and the costs of such services), and how you will be getting to your program (e.g. picked up at the airport or will you need to maneuver through a train or subway station). The answers to these questions will truly determine what and how much you will need to pack. Also think about how much traveling you will do during your time abroad. If you are going to travel extensively after your program abroad, do you really want to lug around a large suitcase?

### *TIPS FOR PACKING*

- Make photocopies of key documents—your passport, while COVID-19 vaccination card, student visa, itinerary, prescriptions (for eyewear and/or medicine), and more—to bring along. For a backup, leave a copy with loved ones, too, in case you lose your copy and need to have one sent to you. You could also bring a couple of extra passport pictures.
- You will want to allow some room to bring home purchases you make during the program—shipping things from abroad can be very expensive. So either leave some room to begin with or take an old towel or t-shirts you can leave behind.
- Consider taking clothes that can be layered, as homes and residence halls abroad are often colder or hotter than buildings in the U.S. Also, pack clothes that can be mixed and matched instead of bringing several individual outfits.
- Laundry facilities abroad are often more expensive, time-consuming, and harsher on your clothes than they are here. Try to bring sturdy, dark colored clothes in fabrics that are easy to wash and dry. Leave at home anything that requires dry-cleaning.

- Make sure you understand your host country's standards for modesty and/or neatness in dress. In many countries, students dress more formally than American students. Sometimes shorts or sweats are strictly for the beach or the gym. Even in parts of Western Europe, some tourist venues such as churches and historical monuments may not allow visitors to enter in shorts or sleeveless tops.
- We recommend leaving valuable or sentimental items, such as jewelry, at home. If you take new, obviously expensive items with you be sure to register these with U.S. Customs before you leave (see "Registering with the U.S. Department of State & Customs" above). Otherwise, you may be required to pay duty on these upon re-entering the U.S. You may also want to verify that personal property insurance covers your items during international travel.
- If you require a hairdryer or other small appliance, consider buying inexpensive alternatives in your host country. In the past, students have attempted to take adapters and converters for U.S. appliances and have still ended up blowing fuses or melting their appliances. (See "Electrical Appliances" below.)

#### *TIPS FOR SECURING VALUABLES DURING TRAVEL*

- Don't carry everything in one place! Never pack official documents, medicine (things you cannot live without) in your checked luggage. Put them in your carry-on bag.
- Cash: Never carry large amounts of cash.
- Debit & Credit Cards: Take only the cards you will use. Keep separate a list of cards, numbers, and emergency replacement procedures.
- Insurance: Keep insurance cards, phone and policy numbers with you, in a safe place.
- Carry with you—separate from your passport—two extra passport pictures and a photocopy of your passport. If your passport is lost, report to local police; get written confirmation of the police report and, take the above documents to the nearest U.S. consulate to apply for a new passport.
- Ticket: make a copy of your e-ticket confirmations, itineraries and keep this list separate from your ticket. Keep a copy of your itinerary in both your checked and carry-on luggage

## *ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES: ADAPTERS & CONVERTERS*

**Converters:** Electrical appliances abroad often operate at different volts than the U.S. (e.g. Europe is 220 volts vs. 110 volts in the U.S.), which means you will need a converter in order to use major electrical appliances from the U.S., unless they are dual voltage.

**Adapters:** You will still need an adapter to plug dual-voltage appliances into wall sockets abroad.

Plug adapters can be purchased inexpensively at Target, Walmart, REI, in travel stores, in many airports and in travel sections of Best Buy, etc. These stores also sell electrical conversion sets (with both a plug and a voltage adapter) for around \$15-25.

For more information on voltage converters/ plug adapters, visit the REI website:  
<http://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/world-electricity-guide.html>.

## Packing List

Check out [IES Abroad's fabulous Packing List!](#)

Essentials you must take with you in your carry-on luggage:

- Passport and/or student visa
- Confirmation of ETA or ETIAS registration
- E-ticket flight confirmations or itineraries
- Money
  - Debit and credit cards
  - ATM card (take duplicate, if possible)
  - Local currency and some U.S. dollars in cash (if recommended)
- Photocopies of your passport, visa, prescriptions, COVID-19 vaccine card, etc.
- Prescription medications (enough for entire trip; leave in original packaging) and medical information (blood type, allergies, doctor's letter for prescriptions, eyeglass prescription)
- Over the counter medications that suit your needs well that you might not be able to get abroad
- Bank account and credit card numbers as well as phone numbers to cancel your card if lost or stolen (kept separately from the actual cards)
- Emergency contact information and insurance information
- Change of clothing for at least one day
- This handbook
- Electronic devices (iPhones, iPads, tablets, smartphones, cameras, etc.)

Near essentials you may need in your checked luggage:

- Money belt or pouch
- Meredith ID card
- Compact raincoat and/or umbrella
- Electric plug adapter and voltage converter
- Photocopies of your passport, visa, and prescriptions (not bank information).

Other items to consider taking, depending on your program director's advice:

- Toiletries or beauty supplies that you need for your health and comfort that you might not be able to obtain abroad
- Clothing that can be layered and mixed/matched
- Light weight waterproof jacket &/or raincoat and an umbrella
- A pair of VERY comfortable walking/hiking shoes (waterproof!)
- One nice outfit

- Flip flops (for showers)
- Accessories—a good way to round out a sparse wardrobe, like a belt or scarf (however, do NOT pack expensive items)
- Washcloth
- Toiletries
- Extra contact lenses, solution, glasses
- Small gift for local friends you will make (e.g. NC souvenirs, calendars, etc.)
- Camera and digital memory cards (if applicable)
- Camera replacement battery and other batteries (batteries are expensive!)
- Small first aid kit (band aids, blister tabs, cold medication, etc.)
- Febreze—for that cigarette smoke!
- Daypack for short travel
- Guidebooks
- Journals
- Language dictionary or phrase book
- List of family/friends addresses
- A few photos of family and friends
- A small fan or cooling neck tie to beat the summer heat!
- Anything your doctor recommends

Your program-specific orientations should go through more a detailed description of specific clothing items you may or may not need for your program. We also advise talking with past participants and your faculty director or program manager for advice on what types of clothing are “must haves” for your host country and independent travel. However, remember that weather varies, so layers are always the best way to be prepared.

## **ADDITIONAL TRAVEL RESOURCES**

### **Advice from Rick Steves on How to Avoid Theft**

<http://www.ricksteves.com/plan/tips/theft.htm>

Europe is safe when it comes to violent crime. But it's very "dangerous" in terms of petty theft: Purse-snatching and pickpocketing are rampant in places where tourists gather. Thieves target Americans—not because they're mean, but because they're smart. Americans have all the good stuff in their bags and wallets. Loaded down with valuables, jetlagged, and bumbling around in a strange new environment, we stick out like jeweled thumbs. If I were a European street thief, I'd specialize in Americans—my card would say "Yanks R Us."

If you're not constantly on guard, you'll have something stolen. One summer, four out of five of my traveling companions lost cameras in one way or another. (Don't look at me.) In more than 30 summers of travel, I've been mugged once (in a part of London where only fools and thieves tread); my various rental cars were broken into a total of six times (broken locks, shattered windows, lots of nonessential stuff taken); and one car was hot-wired (and abandoned a few blocks away after the thief found nothing to take). But not one of my hotel rooms has ever been rifled through, nor any of my money-belt-worthy valuables ever stolen.

Many tourists get indignant when ripped off. It's best to get over it. You're rich and thieves aren't. You let your guard down and they grab your camera. It ruins your day and you have to buy a new one, while they sell it for a week's wages on their scale. And the score's one to nothing. It's wise to keep a material loss in perspective.

Remember, nearly all crimes suffered by tourists are nonviolent and avoidable. Be aware of the pitfalls of traveling, but relax and have fun. Limit your vulnerability rather than your travels.

### *BE PREPARED*

Before you go, you can take some steps to minimize your loss in case of theft.

Make photocopies of key documents—your passport, rail pass, car-rental voucher, itinerary, prescriptions (for eyewear and/or medicine), and more—to bring along. For a backup, leave a copy with loved ones, too, in case you lose your copy and need to have one faxed to you. You could also bring a couple of extra passport pictures.

If you have expensive electronics (camera, tablet, smartphone, etc.), consider getting theft insurance. Take a picture of your pricey gear and store the picture at home, in case it'll help you settle an insurance claim. As you travel, back up your digital photos and other files frequently.



Leave your fancy bling at home. Luxurious luggage lures thieves. The thief chooses the most impressive suitcase in the pile—never mine.

### *AVOIDING THEFT*

If you exercise adequate discretion, stay aware of your belongings, and avoid putting yourself into risky situations (such as unlit, deserted areas at night), your travels should be about as dangerous as hometown grocery shopping. Don't travel fearfully—travel carefully.

Here's some advice given to me by a thief who won the lotto.

**Wear a money belt.** A money belt is a small, zippered fabric pouch on an elastic strap that fastens around your waist, under your pants or skirt. I never travel without one—it's where I put anything I really, really don't want to lose.

**Leave your valuables in your hotel room.** Expensive gear, such as your laptop, is much safer in your room than with you in a day bag on the streets. While hotels often have safes in the room (or at the front desk), I've never bothered to use one, though many find them a source of great comfort. Theft happens, of course, but it's relatively rare—hoteliers are quick to squelch a pattern of theft. That said, don't tempt sticky-fingered staff by leaving a camera or tablet in plain view; tuck your enticing things well out of sight.

**Establish a “don't lose it” discipline.** Travelers are more likely to inadvertently lose their bags than to have them stolen. I've heard of people leaving passports under pillows, bags on the overhead rack on the bus, and cameras in the taxi. Always take a look behind you before leaving any place or form of transport. At hotels, stick to an unpacking routine, and don't put things in odd places in the room. Run through a mental checklist every time you pack up again: money belt, passport, phone, electronic gear, charging cords, toiletries, laundry, and so on. Before leaving a hotel room for good, conduct a quick overall search—under the bed, under the pillows and bedspread, behind the bathroom door, in a wall socket...

When you're out and about, never idly set down any small valuable item, such as a camera, ereader, wallet, or rail pass. Either hold it in your hand or keep it tucked away. At cafés, don't place your phone on the tabletop where it will be easy to snatch—leave it in your front pocket (then return it to a safer place before you leave). Make it a habit to be careful with your things; it'll become second nature.

**Secure your bag.** Thieves want to quickly and unobtrusively separate you from your valuables, so even a minor obstacle can be an effective deterrent. If you're sitting down to eat or rest, loop a strap of your daypack around your arm, leg, or chair leg. If you plan to sleep on a train (or at an airport, or anywhere in public), clip or fasten your pack or suitcase to the seat, luggage rack, or yourself. Even the slight inconvenience of undoing a clip deters most thieves. While I don't lock the zippers on my bag, most zippers are

lockable, and even a twist-tie, paper clip, or key ring is helpful to keep your bag zipped up tight—the point isn't to make your bag impenetrable, but harder to get into than the next guy's.

**Stay vigilant in crowds and steer clear of commotions.** Go on instant alert anytime there's a commotion; it's likely a smokescreen for theft. Imaginative artful-dodger thief teams create a disturbance—a fight, a messy spill, or a jostle or stumble—to distract their victims.

Crowds anywhere, but especially on public transit and at flea markets, provide bad guys with plenty of targets, opportunities, and easy escape routes.

Be on guard in train stations, especially upon arrival, when you may be overburdened by luggage and overwhelmed by a new location. Take turns watching the bags with your travel partner. Don't absentmindedly set down a bag while you wait in line; always be in physical contact with your stuff. If you check your luggage, keep the claim ticket or locker key in your money belt; thieves know just where to go if they snare one of these. On the train, be hyper-alert at stops, when thieves can dash on and off—with your bag.

City buses that cover tourist sights (such as Rome's notorious #64) are happy hunting grounds. Be careful on packed buses or subways; to keep from being easy pickings, some travelers wear their day bag against their chest (looping a strap around one shoulder). Some thieves lurk near subway turnstiles; as you go through, a thief might come right behind you, pick your pocket and then run off, leaving you stuck behind the turnstile and unable to follow. By mentioning these scenarios, I don't want you to be paranoid...just prepared. If you keep alert, you'll keep your valuables, too.

### *IF YOU'RE RIPPED OFF*

Even the most careful traveler can get ripped off. If it happens, don't let it ruin your trip. (If you'll be making an insurance claim, get a police report right away. Traveler's check theft must be reported within 24 hours.) Many trips start with a major rip-off. But they recover, and with the right attitude and very light bags, they finish wonderfully.

Before you leave on your trip, copy your valuable documents and tickets. It's easier to replace a lost or stolen plane ticket, passport, rail pass, or car rental voucher if you have a photocopy proving you really owned what you lost.

American embassies or consulates are located in major cities. They're there to help American citizens in trouble, but they don't fancy themselves as travelers' aid offices. They will inform people at home that you need help, assist in replacing lost or stolen passports, and arrange for emergency funds to be sent from home (or, in rare cases, loan it to you directly).

Sources: [www.ricksteves.com](http://www.ricksteves.com), "Outsmarting Pickpockets and Thieves" by Rick Steves and Rick Steves' Europe Through the Back Door.

## Comparing Guidebooks

Guidebooks are \$25 tools for \$3,000 experiences. Before buying a book, study it. How old is the information? The cheapest books are often the oldest—no bargain. What’s the author’s experience? Is the book written for you—or the tourist industry? For whom is it written? Is it readable? Here’s a rundown of our favorite guidebooks from other companies:

### **Rick Steves**

One of the most popular choices among Meredith faculty and students travelling to Europe is the Rick Steves guidebook. Rick Steves adopts the travel-like-a-local approach and these books are great for students on a budget.

Rick Steves’ website has a wealth of information for travelers, especially those going to Europe.

<http://www.ricksteves.com/travel-tips>

Many topics are covered: trip planning, transportation, packing light, money, phones and technology, theft and scams, sleeping and eating, health and hygiene, as well as sight-seeing and activities. All of this information might be useful in planning your independent travels as well as preparing for your study abroad experience.

### **Let’s Go**

Written for young train travelers on tight budgets, Let’s Go guidebooks include the huge Western Europe book *Let’s Go: Europe* and individual country guides. Covering big cities, small towns, and the countryside, *Let’s Go* offers listings of budget accommodations and restaurants; information on public transportation; capsule social, political, and historical rundowns; and a refreshingly opinionated look at sights and tourist activities. Let’s Go doesn’t teach “Ugly Americanism,” as do many guidebooks.

Most Let’s Go guides are updated annually, hit the bookstores in December, and are sold in Europe for 50% more than U.S. prices. Always use the current edition. If you’ve got more money, stick to its higher-priced accommodations listings (although in many cities it lists only hostels and student hotels). With its hip student focus, Let’s Go offers the best coverage on hostelling and the alternative nightlife scene.

Because of its wide scope, *Let’s Go: Europe* is good only for the speedy, whirlwind-type itinerary. The book’s drawback is that nearly every young North American traveler has it, and the flood of backpacker business it generates can overwhelm a formerly cozy village, hotel, or restaurant and give it a whopping Daytona Beach hangover.

Individual country guides in the series cover Britain/Ireland, France, Germany, Switzerland/Austria, Italy, Spain/Portugal, Eastern Europe, Greece, Turkey, Israel, Egypt, and the Middle East. With 10 times the information and one-tenth the readership of *Let’s*

*Go: Europe*, they don't have the negative impact that the big Europe book has on the featured destinations.

### **Lonely Planet**

Published in Australia, these are the top independent-budget-travel guidebooks for most countries in Asia, Africa, and South America. Lonely Planet has successfully invaded Europe with bricklike Western Europe, Central Europe, Scandinavian, Mediterranean, and Eastern Europe editions, along with *Europe on a Shoestring*. It also publishes guidebooks on individual countries and many cities. The Lonely Planet guides offer no-nonsense facts and opinions without the narrow student focus of Let's Go. They are widely available in English editions throughout Europe. The drawback is they are not updated annually; check the publication date before you buy.

### **Rough Guides**

This fast-growing British series includes books about every part of Europe, as well as a fat all-Europe edition. They are a great source of hard-core, go-local-on-a-vagabond's-budget information. While the hotel listings are skimpy and uninspired, these books are written by Europeans who understand the contemporary and social scene better than American writers. Like Lonely Planet, Rough Guides are particularly strong on Eastern European countries.

### **City guides**

Specializing in information overload, these guides can be great for travelers staying put for a week in a city. Let's Go, Lonely Planet, and Rough Guides all publish straightforward guides to Europe's grandest cities. **Access Guides** offer the ultimate in-depth source of sightseeing information for London, Paris, Rome, France Wine Country and Florence/Venice/ Tuscany/Veneto. **Eyewitness** and **Knopf** are two pricey series that also cover the biggies: London, Paris, Rome, Venice, Florence/Tuscany, Amsterdam, Prague, Budapest, Istanbul, and more, plus some regions and countries (\$25-30 each, widely available in Europe). These heavy guides feature futuristic, high-tech, visually super, friendly layouts with appealing color illustrations and tiny bullets of background text.

### **Local literature**

Another great way to get a peek into the local culture is to read fictional literature by national authors. Most programs will provide some suggested reading lists. If they don't, they should. Be sure to ask!

# HEALTH ISSUES

## Know Before You Go

Your health and safety while you are abroad are of the utmost concern to the Office of International Programs at Meredith College. The following information will be helpful to you in better preparing yourself for studying abroad as well as making you ask some important questions that you may not have thought about. We know it's a lot of reading—but in the long run, it's worth it!

Staying healthy while abroad, like staying safe, is mostly a matter of following some basic, common-sense guidelines, although there are a few special precautions to take as well. In this section, you will find information on how to stay well while abroad. The process of wellness starts before you go abroad with a visit to your doctor. You may need to get vaccinations to protect yourself from infectious diseases endemic in the countries you will visit.

- **COVID-19 & Flu:** The Office of International Programs strongly recommends that international travelers be vaccinated against COVID-19 and the flu well in advance of departure.
- **What to Know about Your Country:** Learn all you can about the health and safety issues of your host country or countries. This includes reading about the cultural and political climate of those countries, as well as learning about how others view people from your country, race, ethnic group, religion, gender and sexual orientation.
- **Infectious Diseases and Vaccinations:** Find out about the infectious diseases endemic in countries to which you are traveling, and get the appropriate shots, and take the appropriate medications with you if your doctor thinks it's necessary. Find out about any potential side-effects of shots and pills that you may take.
- **Check-ups:** Get complete physical, eye and dental exams before you leave.
- **Can You Drink the Water?:** Find out if water is safe to drink in the countries to which you will be traveling. Purify unsafe water before you drink it. Make sure water bottles come sealed when you buy them. Remember that ice can also be unsafe, as well as the water you use to brush your teeth or wash food.
- **Food Safety:** Poor refrigeration, undercooked meat, and roadside/outdoor vendors could pose problems related to food contamination. If you get diarrhea or food poisoning, remember to drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated. As with any illness, see a doctor if your condition worsens. Give your body time to adjust to new types of foods you will be eating.
- **Laws and Codes of Conduct:** Make yourself aware of both the rules and regulations of the study abroad program and the local laws and customs of the countries which

you will be visiting. Understand that you will not only have to conform to the legal system of the country you will be visiting, but also obey the codes of conduct required of program participants.

- **Mental and Physical Health:** Consider your own mental and physical health issues when applying for a study abroad program—the first thing you unpack abroad is yourself. Make sure to make all of your necessary health information available to your program staff so they can assist you with any special needs, or advise you on the risks you might face. Study abroad may include both physical and mental challenges for students and is more likely to exacerbate than ameliorate existing health conditions.
- **Prescriptions:** Get a doctor’s signed prescription for any medication you have to bring abroad. Take a copy of any prescriptions with you (some prescriptions may need to be translated) and make sure that they are all up-to-date. Include your glasses or contact lens prescription. Bring an extra pair of glasses.
- **First-Aid Kit:** Consider a well-stocked first-aid kit as a first line of defense. Some items to consider including are: sunscreen, bandages, insect repellent, aspirin, antacid, anti-diarrhea tablets, feminine protection, cold medication, etc.
- **Fitness and Exercise:** Try to get fit before you go abroad. A healthy body helps fight off illness and faster recovery if you do get sick. Also try to stay fit while abroad, even if it is harder to have a structured workout routine. Walk!
- **Walking:** Get a good pair of comfortable walking shoes. You will probably have to do quite a bit of walking. Break in your shoes before you go.
- **Emergency Contacts:** Keep the program staff and contacts at home well informed of your whereabouts and activities and provide these people with copies of your important travel documents (i.e. passport, visa, e-ticket confirmations, itineraries, and prescriptions). Make sure you know how to access the local health services or can get in touch with someone quickly who does.
- **Air Travel:** When you travel by air, drink a lot of non-alcoholic fluids, avoid caffeine, eat light, and stretch often to avoid jetlag. A direct flight is usually easier for most travelers, but layovers can also lessen jet lag.
- **Take it easy!** The first few days when you arrive will be very exciting and you may be tempted to overdo it. Remember that in addition to the psychological and cultural adjustment, your body will be going through a physical reaction and adjustment to the new climate, a new time zone, new food, etc. Eat reasonably, drink plenty of water (start with bottled water if you’re unsure if the local water is drinkable), and get plenty of sleep.
- **Transportation:** Accidents involving in-country travel, whether by air, bus, train, taxi, car, etc., are the major cause of injury to students abroad. It is important to understand what the safe modes of travel are abroad.

- **Alcohol and Drugs:** Use and abuse of alcohol and drugs abroad can increase the risk of accident and injury. Many study abroad accidents and injuries are related to the use and abuse of alcohol and drugs. Also, alcohol dehydrates you, putting further stress on a body that will already be under strain (see above). It, as well as drugs, also impairs judgment, which can be particularly dangerous when you are in a new environment. Violating drug laws abroad may result in very serious consequences. In some countries, being found guilty of violating drug laws can result in consequences as serious as death.
- **Setting an Example:** Set a good example. Remember you're an ambassador for Meredith College as well as the USA. Behave in a way that is respectful of others' rights and well-being and encourage others to do the same.

## Medications & Vaccinations

### *PRESCRIPTION DRUGS & TOILETRIES*

- **Consult & Communicate:** If you are taking **ANY** type of medicine or any prescription drug while abroad, you need to consult the Office of International Programs as well as your physician prior to your departure with regards to any additional requirements or restrictions on this medication abroad.
- **Take Enough for the Duration of Your Time Abroad:** You will need to consult your doctor about the possibility of taking up to 12 weeks' worth of your medication with you abroad (if possible). Most insurance companies allow for a "vacation override" when patients are traveling abroad – ask your doctor! If you need a letter from the Office of International Programs for your insurance company, please ask us at least 60 days prior to departure. If you cannot take the full regimen of medication with you and must get further refills while you are abroad, you will have to see a local physician in order to get a new prescription.
- You cannot fill your prescriptions from U.S. physicians abroad but copies of your prescriptions help local doctors decide what you need.
- **Availability & Legality:** You also should make certain that your medications are both available and legal in the country where you are studying. The Office of International Programs and CISI can help you with this process, but you will need to alert us 60 days prior to departure in order for us to find out information abroad.
- **Written Prescriptions/Letter from Your Doctor:** When taking prescription medication abroad, you should also take with you a letter from your doctor,

explaining the specific medication (in generic terms) and any medical advice for taking the medication, should problems arise. This paperwork will help you through any questions you may get in going through customs, as well as help you with further prescriptions from local doctors abroad. Written prescriptions for medication should clearly outline:

- Purpose of medication
  - Dosage
  - Include generic as well as brand name
  - Medical advice
  - Take a copy of prescriptions with you
- **Do not mail medicines:** they can be held up in customs, and a prescription from a local doctor must be shown to pick them up.
  - Always carry prescription drugs in a drug store bottle with a label showing your name, the generic name and dosage of the drug, and instructions for use.
  - If you are prone to something—say strep throat or sinus problems, it is best to come prepared with medications (both prescription and over-the-counter) that you know will work well for you. It will save you time and money to be prepared.
  - **Eyewear:** If you wear glasses or contact lenses, take your prescription with you so that you can get quick replacements if the need arises and you do not already have a spare pair with you.
  - **Over the Counter Meds:** Certain over the counter medications and toiletries may be difficult to obtain, or it may be difficult to find brands that you are familiar with, or they may be significantly more expensive—some examples may include:
    - Certain pain medicines or allergy meds
    - Contraceptives
    - Anti-anxiety medication or anti-depressants
    - ADD or ADHD medications
    - Contact lens solutions
    - Syringes for allergy treatment, insulin, or other medical injections
    - An extra pair of glasses or contact lenses or disposable lenses



## VACCINATIONS

It is important that you make sure your current vaccines are up-to-date and the Center for Disease Control & Prevention recommends that you have the following vaccinations:

- **COVID-19:** The Office of International Programs strongly recommends that all international travelers be vaccinated against COVID-19 well in advance of departure.
- **Flu Vaccine:** The CDC recommends that people who have not gotten a flu vaccine for the current season should get one before departure for international travel.
- **Routine Vaccinations:** Make sure you are up-to-date on routine vaccines before every trip. These vaccines include measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine, varicella (chickenpox) vaccine, polio vaccine, and your yearly flu shot.
- **Hepatitis B:** if you might be exposed to blood (e.g. be in the hospital), have sexual contact with the local population, or stay longer than six months in Southern Europe (includes Greece, Italy, and Spain).
- **Hepatitis A (or immune globulin):** for travel to Central or Eastern Europe.
- **Booster Shots:** booster doses for tetanus-diphtheria. Meredith students are required to have had a booster shot in the last 10 years by their first semester. However, international travel requires that you have had a booster shot in the last five years.
- **Measles, Mumps, Rubella Booster:** if you are under 45 and if you have not had two MMR boosters already. Two are required for Meredith, but if you slipped through, make sure you have both shots before you leave.
- **Rabies:** travelers who have not had the rabies pre-exposure series must keep their hands off all dogs, cats, and bats—especially bats!

**Give yourself plenty of time!** Some inoculations (including Hepatitis A & B) take 2–3 rounds of shots before they are complete and appointments are not always readily available.

### Who to Ask?

We strongly recommend that you speak directly with a **health care professional**—either your own doctor or someone at a travel center—about vaccinations and immunizations, as well as your own health history before receiving vaccines. While you can consult the Center for Disease Control & Prevention travel website <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel> for a regional overview, healthcare professionals are more familiar with current CDC requirements and what is actually required or strongly recommended for specific destinations.

## **Local Clinics & Centers**

For travel specialists, the closest options are the UNC Internal Medicine Travel Clinic and the Wake County Public Health Center at 10 Sunnybrook Road, Raleigh, call 919-212-7000 to make an appointment. You will need give your departure date and travel location/s. Make an appointment EARLY as they fill up quickly.

Information on the UNC clinic, including services, how to make an appointment, and FAQ's are available online at <https://www.med.unc.edu/medicine/im/patient-care/clinical-services/internal-medicine-travel-clinic/>.

Please note that Travel Clinic services are rarely reimbursed under insurance plans. You must be prepared to pay for services at the time they are rendered.

## COVID-19 & Respiratory Illness Protocols

Be aware that Meredith College and Meredith Abroad have safety protocols regarding COVID-19 and other severe respiratory illnesses on Meredith study abroad programs. Affiliate programs may have their own protocols, and affiliate participants are invited to ask their providers about those community standards.

New [CDC guidance](#) (2024) for respiratory illness informs Meredith Abroad protocols. All students will receive a handout guide at orientation regarding these community standards. For the health and wellness of the study abroad group, reading this guide is mandatory, and travelers are expected to pack this guide and take it with them abroad. Meredith Abroad receives support from Meredith's Health Center and on-campus incident response team in the event of illness abroad.

Health and safety protocols exist around:

- Testing
- Masking
- Social distancing
- Isolation in the event of severe illness

Meredith Abroad community standards are in alignment with [CDC recommendations regarding respiratory illnesses](#). It is your responsibility to adhere to these Community Standards in order to protect yourself, other study abroad students, faculty, and staff, as well as the wider community in which you're living.

These Community Standards are sometimes program specific, subject to change, and will be updated as health & safety situations evolve. We will communicate as frequently & transparently as possible should things change. **Violation of these community standards will not be tolerated and will be considered conduct issues.**

### Managing Expectations

You can be vaccinated against the flu and COVID, follow common sense health and safety practices, and you still might get infected and spread these viruses to others. BUT, you are far less likely to be hospitalized or have severe complications from the infections, if you are vaccinated. And this means the vaccines will have done their job.

### Local Regulations Abroad

Many local regulations around COVID-19 and respiratory illness are no longer in effect abroad. However, should our host country or city put regulations in place, all participants will be required to follow those regulations. Should local guidance and protocols change, students and faculty will be notified by OIP.

## Masks

In many of our host countries, masks are not required except perhaps in hospital settings or if an individual is sick. That said, you may still see locals wearing masks on occasion. **You are always welcome to wear a mask on Meredith Abroad**, if you would prefer to do so. Please be aware that there are many reasons why someone might choose to wear a mask, including private health concerns, so be welcoming and understanding to those around you.

### **On the International Flight**

- The OIP recommends that travelers consider wearing a mask for the duration of your international flights, in airports, and on public transportation. Students: You've invested too much to jeopardize your experience!
- We advise travelers to bring multiple masks and switch to a new mask every four hours.
- Use an N95 or KN95 on flights.
- Disinfect surfaces such as airplane seats, armrests, tray tables, seat backs, and anything you touch in the bathroom with sanitizing wipes.

### **Which Mask to Wear & When**

- N95 or KN95 Masks: A KN95 mask is made to filter at least 95% of particles of size down to 3 microns in diameter. N95 and KN95 masks offer the highest level of filtration and protection.
- FFP2 masks: FFP2 is a European standard with a level of filtration similar to N95 or KN95 masks worn in the U.S.
- Surgical masks: Often used “in the context of economic and social activities” such as tourist activities, gyms, retail stores, museums, exhibitions, and personal services.
- Cloth masks: Many countries abroad discourage the use of cloth masks due to more highly transmissible COVID-19 variants. Do not plan to bring these.

**N95/KN95 and FFP2 masks are required for those who test positive and are actively sick with a fever.**

## Summer COVID Trends & Surges

It is never a bad idea to wear a mask in crowded or congested indoor spaces and on public transportation, like the tube in London, for example. Remember: Over the last few years, COVID-19 tends to have a summer spike in Europe. Take extra care in crowded spaces!

“Summer covid surge hits at least 84 countries and continues to climb. Washington Post. August 2024.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2024/08/07/covid-surge-summer-paris-olympics/>

### Isolation Space for Sick and COVID-19 Positive Travelers

- Separate accommodations may be provided for quarantine and isolation.
- Participants who need to isolate or quarantine, as determined by the Meredith Abroad community standards, must immediately relocate to the space that has been designated.
- If a student has their own room, they may be allowed to stay in that space for the duration of quarantine.
- Isolation spaces and bathrooms will be equipped with the student's needs. Meals and snacks will be dropped off to their room each day.
- In the event that several participants require quarantine at the same time, OIP and study abroad faculty will consider the most appropriate course of action, which may include moving non-quarantined participants to a separate location.

### Testing for COVID-19 & the Flu

If travelers experience COVID or flu-like symptoms, they may be asked to take an at-home test in the first few days of illness. Because of increased immunity to COVID-19, it can take a few days for a test to show a positive result. If travelers continue to test negative after a few days, no mitigation measures will be necessary.

### COVID-19 & Flu Symptoms

- ***Symptoms of COVID-19 include:*** Fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea.
- ***Symptoms of the Flu include:*** Fever (usually over 100.4°F), cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches and pains, fatigue, chills, headache, nausea and vomiting (especially in children).

### Illness Protocol

***You start to feel sick with new respiratory illness symptoms. What should you do?***

**First**, contact study abroad program leaders about your symptoms, take your temperature, and take an at-home COVID-19/Flu test. Then report your results.

If you receive a **positive** COVID-19 or Flu result:

- Contact faculty and put on an N95/KN95 mask
- Take your temperature for signs of a fever (100F or higher)
- If you have a fever, relocate to a private space
- If you do not have a fever, continue to take your temperature daily, wear a mask, and socially distance, where possible
- Attend class or complete activities remotely, if isolated
- Remain in private space until fever subsides and symptoms are improving

- If symptoms escalate and additional medical care is needed, we can arrange for you to see a doctor.
- Once released from isolation, continue to wear a high-grade mask and socially distance from others for 5 days.

If you test positive for COVID but your symptoms are mild and you remain fever-free, isolation may not be necessary. You may simply be required to wear a high-grade mask where possible for up to 5 days.

If you receive a **negative** COVID-19 or Flu result:

- Self-monitor symptoms closely, take temp daily, report any changes.
- Continue to take an at-home antigen test for a few days into the illness
- Continue to follow hygiene & cleaning protocols
- Practice physical distancing whenever possible and consider wearing a high-grade mask when in close contact with others.
- This protocol remains in effect until your symptoms resolve.

Traveling abroad requires flexibility, comfort with ambiguity, and adaptability when things need to change. When you act in ways that support your own health & safety, you also support the group's health & safety.

## International Health Insurance

**Meredith Abroad:** All Meredith Abroad participants are required to purchase the Meredith international health insurance coverage provided through Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI). CISI has an established reputation and an excellent track record in handling claims in every language and from medical providers worldwide.

**Affiliate Programs:** Meredith College requires that students studying abroad have adequate international health insurance coverage for the duration of their term abroad and requires all students to show proof of such coverage by filling out the **Proof of International Insurance Coverage Form** as part of the Meredith application. For affiliate program participants, there are two options for fulfilling the Meredith insurance requirement:

### *THROUGH YOUR STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM*

If you are studying abroad through a study abroad organization, they may already provide international health insurance coverage as part of the regular program fees or paperwork. If this is the case in your situation, you simply have to provide the Office of International Programs with proof of that coverage (e.g. a copy of a catalog excerpt or something from your pre-departure packet) with your Meredith application, which should include a short description as to what is covered. Many programs also provide the International Student ID (ISIC) card as part of the program fees, however this alone does not provide adequate insurance coverage to meet the Meredith requirement. If the program provides only the ISIC card as health insurance coverage, you will also need to purchase the Meredith College CISI Insurance plan.

### *THROUGH THE MEREDITH COLLEGE CISI PLAN*

If you do NOT receive sufficient international insurance coverage through your study abroad program, you will be required to purchase the Meredith CISI Insurance Plan provided through [Cultural Insurance Services International](#). We have negotiated a special health coverage plan (and rate!) for Meredith College students with CISI, which can be purchased through the Office of International Programs. If you need to purchase this insurance, please indicate this on your Proof of Insurance form in your Meredith application. The office will then purchase insurance for all students for the term (about one month before departure) and it will be billed to your student account.

The cost for insurance is currently \$55 per month. (2/15/2025)

## Overview of CISI Plan

### **Meredith CISI coverage provides for:**

- Accident Medical/Sickness Expense: up to \$150,000 per incident. CISI pays hospital or doctor visits at 100%.
- Prescription drugs necessitated by sickness or injury: Paid at 100%
- Mental and Nervous Benefit: Inpatients are covered at 100% up to \$10,000 for a maximum of 30 days. Outpatients are covered at 100% up to \$2,500.
- Injuries received while playing in scholastic or organized sports
- Dental work necessitated by an injury
- Bedside Visit Benefit: Paid round-trip economy airfare for a family member and paid hotel expenses up to \$2,500 in location of hospital confinement.
- Emergency Medical Evacuation: \$150,000
- Repatriation of Remains: \$150,000
- Accidental Death & Dismemberment: \$10,000
- Disappearance (seen as Accidental Death): \$10,000

### **CISI coverage DOES NOT provide for:**

- Preventative medicines and routine physical or eye exams
- Injuries resulting from covered person being under the influence of alcohol
- Dental work, unless necessitated by an injury
- Expenses incurred within the Insured Person's home country (if injury/sickness occurred abroad, there is a 30-day extension of benefits available once they return to the US)
- Injuries from participation in professional sports, scuba diving, hang gliding, parachuting, or bungee jumping
- Loss due to declared or undeclared war (acts of terrorism are covered)
- Injuries arising from a motor vehicle accident if the covered person operated the vehicle without a proper license

The above list covers the main items of coverage. A detailed Meredith CISI policy description defining all items covered and not covered will be given to students with their insurance card. A month before your program begins, we will enroll you in the CISI plan. You will receive your insurance card from the OIP staff or your faculty director either right before you leave or upon arrival. All benefit coverage information and many online resources will be available to you through the website once you receive your Certificate Number. If you have additional questions, please reach out to us at [internationalprograms@meredith.edu](mailto:internationalprograms@meredith.edu).



## **CISI Team Assistance Plan**

Under the CISI plan, Meredith students have access to a multi-lingual, 24/7 call center that offers the following services:

- 24-Hour Emergency and Medical Assistance
- Emergency Medical Evacuation Assistance
- Coordination of Hospital Payment Guarantees and Emergency Travel
- Emergency Message Referrals and Cash Advances
- Lost Document Assistance (i.e. Passports)
- Referrals to Interpreters or Attorneys/Bail Bond Assistance
- Assistance with Replacement of Corrective Lenses, Medical Devices, or Prescriptions

## **CISI Online Resources**

CISI also provides wonderful online resources for students. You can access the following information online at: <http://www.culturalinsurance.com/resources/>

- **Health and Vaccinations:** has country health profiles compiled by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) that includes information on health risks and vaccinations.
- **Country Profiles:** provides travelers with a **geographic, political, economic, historical** and **social** overview for each country (compiled by the US Department of State).
- **Consular Information Sheets:** provides information on **entry/exit requirements, visas, security & safety, crime, standards of conduct** and **religious concerns (compiled by the US Department of State)**
- **English Speaking Doctors Overseas:** provides a list of English speaking doctors in various overseas areas. AXA Assistance Company will provide assistance services for all travelers who enroll in our coverage.

## Who to Call in an Emergency

In an emergency, you should call AXA Assistance Company directly. To contact AXA Assistance Company for emergency assistance:

EMAIL: [MEDASSIST-USA@AXA-ASSISTANCE.US](mailto:MEDASSIST-USA@AXA-ASSISTANCE.US)

(443) 470-3043 – Outside US

(855) 951-2326 – Inside US Toll Free

For questions about claims submissions or benefits, please call (203) 399-5130 or email at [claimhelp@culturalinsurance.com](mailto:claimhelp@culturalinsurance.com). If you run into a snag, let us help you.

## CISI Insurance Information

If you have purchased CISI Insurance, once you receive the insurance certificate number, all benefit coverage information, claim forms, participant ID cards, consulate letters, and many other online resources will be available through the Office of International Programs.

### *INSURANCE FOR YOUR VISA*

You may be required to provide proof of insurance to the Consulate as part of the paperwork for your visa (e.g. French, Italian, and Spanish Consulates have required this information in the past). Make sure to give yourself plenty of time in getting this letter through your program provider, if you need one for your visa. The Office of International Programs will provide a letter for those purchasing the Meredith CISI Plan. Simply email OIP at [internationalprograms@meredith.edu](mailto:internationalprograms@meredith.edu) your request for the letter along with the number of copies needed.

### *WHY MEREDITH REQUIRES INTERNATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE*

Many students (and their parents) think that they have adequate health insurance abroad through their current insurance carrier. However, in today's environment of the rising costs in health insurance, many insurers have decided to cut their coverage of travel abroad or drastically to reduce such coverage to only emergency coverage in order to cut costs in their premiums. For example, coverage through U.S. HMO's does not extend to travel abroad. Even those U.S. insurers who do cover travel abroad, do so mostly through a complicated system of reimbursements and paperwork, meaning you pay for the full expenses upfront and are later reimbursed through a series of claims forms. It can also be difficult to get the necessary payment receipts and procedural descriptions in order to fill out the paperwork for U.S. insurers. Also, we do not have the time or expertise to review every individual health plan in order to make sure that students are adequately insured abroad. It is for these reasons that Meredith College has decided to require that students purchase the Meredith CISI plan or show proof of international health insurance through their study abroad provider.

## OTHER HEALTH ISSUES

### Culture Shock & Emotional Health

Emotionally and mentally, studying abroad can be stressful. Most travelers will experience a degree of culture shock during the normal adjustment period because they are away from everything that is familiar.

Variations of culture shock can affect even experienced travelers and is considered a natural (and perhaps essential) part of adjusting to a foreign culture. Symptoms can include depression, sleeping difficulties, homesickness, trouble concentrating, an urge to isolate yourself, and irritation with your host culture. In general, you can deal with culture shock by keeping in touch with other students on your program to share your experiences, keeping busy doing things you enjoy, exploring the local culture, and keeping in touch with family and friends from home.

Culture shock causes feelings of disorientation and unease that can be intensified for students dealing with ongoing emotional or medical issues. It is thus VERY important that students with such problems discuss these with our office, the Counseling Center, and/or other trained medical professionals **well before** leaving to talk about special issues studying abroad may raise for you or your medications. On-site program staff may be able to advise you about the normal adjustment cycle, but they are not trained mental health professionals. Check with your program director who will check with our office to see if psychological counseling is available, should you need it. Check with your insurance company about mental health coverage abroad.

**Remember the first thing you unpack abroad is yourself** and going abroad does not make such issues simply disappear. In fact it is likely to exacerbate them. We're here to help you prepare for your experience, but you have to inform us before we can help you.

### Nutrition and Diet

Be aware that you will probably experience a change in your diet and eating habits. You may start eating a healthier diet, as most people don't eat as much processed food nor drink as many caffeinated and sweetened beverages as we do in the US. However, for students living in residential halls, the food may have even less variety and be greasier than you are used to. It is customary in many countries to eat more grains, fresh fish, fruits, vegetables, etc. than we do. Some countries do not follow the same health standards for fruits and vegetables sold at markets and street vendors, so you may need to be more careful with such purchases. Your program should go through some of this with you in the program-specific orientation. If they do not, ask! Before you leave, try to learn

more about the foods and the eating habits of your host country as these can be an integral part of the culture and a fun part of your learning experience.

## Substance Abuse

Substance abuse is viewed differently around the world. Sometimes students who are away from their home campuses and the U.S. laws on alcohol, fall into patterns of alcohol abuse. They may misinterpret how alcohol is used in their new culture. It may cost the same as, or less than, a soft drink; there may be a lower drinking age; and the laws against public drunkenness may be less stringent. Your program is likely to discuss this topic during your on-site orientation, to explain the program's regulations concerning alcohol consumption as well as the local consequences for abuse.

If you currently have a support group, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, check on meeting availability abroad through the website: [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org).

Remember, you are a representative of Meredith College abroad and should act accordingly. Some of the biggest mistakes in judgment and cultural faux pas of students abroad have involved over-consumption of alcohol—think about the fact that inappropriate behavior will result in your being sent home prematurely.

## Sexual Health & Disclosure

Standards of sexual health and disclosure differ around the world, as do the transmission rates for AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Simple precautions are the best way to protect yourself: do not have unprotected sex and do not share needles for any purpose.

In our experience, emergencies are rare, but in case of a sexual assault or a sexual health emergency abroad, rely on the study abroad staff to identify appropriate means of medical, psychological and legal assistance.

If you are concerned about healthcare systems and the safety of blood supplies around the world, visit the World Health Organization website: <http://www.who.int/en/>.

Source: [studyabroad.com](http://studyabroad.com), **A Student's Guide to Education Abroad**

## Tips for Being an Engaged Bystander: Looking Out for Each Other

While on study abroad, it is important to keep yourself safe and to look out for other students who are on the program. If you become aware that one of your study abroad peers is in a potentially problematic or harmful situation, you may feel you have the ability to be part of the solution. If so, you can be an active/engaged bystander. Below you will find some helpful tips to help you be a part of the solution and know when to act:

- Be aware of comments and behaviors from others that could lead to a potentially harmful situation.
- Notice if someone is under the influence of alcohol, as their judgement could be impaired.
- Trust your intuition. If you don't trust someone, there may be a reason for this mistrust.
- Publicly support an individual that is being harassed by making it clear that the community does not condone such behavior.
- Involve the group in intervening by suggesting the group head home for the night. This will remove the individual that is in a risky situation without confrontation.
- Be honest and direct whenever possible and address the specific behavior that you have observed.
- Remain calm to keep the situation from escalating.
- Know when it's time to call for help. The important thing is to get help when it is needed, not to be a hero.

*Source: Meredith College, "Engaged Bystander Tips"*

## SAFETY ISSUES

When thinking about safety around the world, it is important to have a balanced perspective. Safety is a global, national, regional, and local phenomenon. The resources and articles provided in this handbook should assist you in understanding the particular safety challenges in the country where you will study. While no study abroad program can offer an absolute guarantee that students will always be safe, there are steps you can take to reduce the risk of injury or crimes abroad. We encourage all students to read the following safety guidelines in order to better prepare themselves for health or safety challenges abroad.

### Your Safety – Risk Factors & Strategies to Reduce Risk

In this section, you will find information on how to avoid being a target of crime. There are helpful tips on how non-verbal communication—like gestures or manner of dress—can help keep you safer. You will also learn how to become more aware of your surroundings.

Based on anecdotal information, most of the incidents resulting in injury or death of students while participating in study abroad involve:

- Travel/traffic accidents
- Use/abuse of alcohol or drugs
- Crimes/petty theft
- Mental health issues/stress
- Sexual harassment and assault
- Disease/illnesses existing in host country

Things to be aware of when preparing for your own health and safety abroad are as follows:

- **Precautions When Accepting Food and Drink:** Be cautious about accepting drinks from a stranger, alcoholic or non-alcoholic. Be cautious about accepting food from a stranger.
- **Risk Upon Arrival:** Travelers, especially those having just arrived abroad, are often targets of crime and at higher risk of harm, because they:
  1. Are often unfamiliar with their surroundings
  2. Might not speak the local language well
  3. Are clearly recognizable as foreigners
  4. Have not yet learned the social norms or unwritten rules of conduct

5. Are eager to get to know new people and the local culture
  6. Are naive to the intentions of people around them
  7. Are carrying all their valuables with them when they step off the plane, train, or boat
- **Keeping in Control:** In addition to the circumstances involved with being new in a foreign country, which are often beyond one's immediate control, there are many situations that students can control. Some controllable factors that place students at greatest risk include:
    1. Being out after midnight
    2. Being alone at night in an isolated area
    3. Being in a known high crime area
    4. Sleeping in an unlocked place
    5. Being out after a local curfew
    6. Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
  - **Non-verbal Communication:** Non-verbal communication (e.g. body language and gestures) considered harmless in the U.S. may be offensive to people in other countries. The list of gestures considered rude in other countries can go beyond the obvious.
  - **Sexually Transmitted Diseases:** Keep yourself free from sexually transmitted diseases by practicing abstinence or using protection (e.g. condoms). Also, remember that "no" may not always be interpreted as "no" in other countries. Inform yourself about the types of diseases prevalent in your host country.
  - **International Sources of Information:** Inform yourself as much as possible about your new environment, making use of as many different sources as possible—online, in the library, on television and radio news programs, and in the paper. Don't limit yourself to U.S. sources. Instead, contrast the U.S. information with that provided by other countries.
  - **Understanding Locals:** Beyond tuning into yourself, make it a point to try to understand what locals are communicating to you, how they feel about you and about U.S. citizens in general, how you are fitting with their values, and how well you understand them. Obviously a stronger grasp of the native language will help you with these things, but even knowing a few essential phrases can be immensely beneficial.
  - **How to Dress:** It is often best to dress according to local standards so you can't be identified on sight as a tourist or a U.S. citizen.
  - **Jewelry and Other Valuables:** Be cautious with how you display valuables. Leave your good jewelry at home, and keep money in a safe place like a money belt or hidden pouch under your clothes. Don't carry cash or your passport in a purse or belt

bag—these are big targets for thieves and pickpockets. Carry them in a neck pouch or money belt that goes under your clothing.

- **Be Aware of Your Surroundings:** Always be aware of your surroundings, remembering to:
  1. Pay attention to what people around you are saying
  2. Find out which areas of the city are less safe than others
  3. Know which hours of night are considered more dangerous
  4. Stay and walk only in well-lit areas
  5. Avoid being alone in unfamiliar neighborhoods
  6. Know where to get help (police and fire stations, phones, stores, etc.)
  7. Not touch suspicious items like letters or packages mailed to you from someone you don't know
  8. Be wary of unexpected packages and stay clear of unattended luggage or parcels in airports, train stations, or other public areas
  9. Report to the responsible authority any suspicious persons loitering around residential or instructional facilities, or following you; keep your residence area locked; use common sense in divulging information to strangers about your study program and your fellow students
  10. Know what is “normal” and “not normal” to see every day in your area
  11. Not respond to explosions or gunfire by going to a window; seek cover away from windows and exterior walls
- **Make a Plan:** Make sure the study abroad staff, host family, or foreign university official who is assigned the responsibility for your welfare always knows where and how to contact you in an emergency and your schedule and itinerary of where you are traveling, even if only overnight. Develop a plan with your family at home for regular (although not too regular) phone or email contact, so that, in times of heightened political tension, you will be able to communicate with your parents directly about your safety and well-being. However, be wary of planning calls at times you're likely to still be out (e.g. Sunday evenings when you may still be returning from travels) because it will unnecessarily alarm friends and family at home if you do not call.
- **Road Safety:** Road accidents cause far more deaths and injuries abroad than terrorists, plane crashes, natural disasters, etc. For this reason, you need to make it your business to know about road safety where you are traveling. See “Road Safety” later in this section.
- **Identity:** Identity can also influence how safe we feel in a space. Refer to the OIP [Identity-Based Resources](#) and do your own independent research predeparture.
- **Effects of U.S. Foreign Policy:** The foreign policy of the U.S. does not always sit well with citizens of foreign countries. In some cases, travelers from the US can be



targets of the frustrations of these individuals. Consider the nature of the political climate and relations between the U.S. and the countries you plan to visit.

- **Crimes Against U.S. Citizens:** There are some steps you can take to avoid being targeted for politically motivated crime or anti-U.S. crime in general. Try to assimilate your style of dress and mannerisms as much as possible into the local norms.
- **Political Rallies:** Avoid political rallies, which can increase tensions and emotions or breed angry mobs for which a U.S. citizen may serve as a scapegoat.
- **Political Conversations:** Try not to engage in conversations about contentious political issues with host nationals and avoid retaliating against hostile or bigoted remarks about Americans.

**Note:** This is not a complete list of safety tips. Please exercise caution when traveling, use common sense, and check with the local staff on safety issues.

Source: **The Study Abroad Student Handbook**, <http://www.studentsabroad.com>

## Cultural Understanding & Personal Safety

In virtually every aspect of your time abroad, personal safety and security are affected by cultural perceptions and actions. Your actions and responses are finely tuned to life in your familiar environment. You know what is normal and what is different in your neighborhood and on campus. You are perceptive to “clues” from your environment to determine your level of comfort with people whom you encounter. You know when and where you can go at certain times of day and how to act. When overseas, these clues and knowledge will be replaced by different elements and norms.

In general, people will look, dress, and act differently from in the U.S. A normal response to difference is apprehension and suspicion, which can readily produce misguided reactions in a foreign environment. On the other hand, lack of familiarity with another culture can also result in an inability to identify these security “clues.” Observing behavior patterns, listening to program staff and locals, and paying attention to local media, will help you learn “normal” behavior for the local culture. By better understanding the local norms and situation, you will not only gain valuable cultural insights, but enhance your own personal security as well.

## Road Safety

Remember what we too often forget. Road accidents cause far more deaths and injuries abroad than do terrorists, plane crashes, natural disasters, etc. For this reason, you need to make it your business to know about the road safety records of the countries to which you are traveling. Excellent road maintenance, consistent traffic rules, rigorous automobile inspections, regulated licensing of drivers, and strict law enforcement are all things we can count on in the U.S. In much of the world, however, these norms are not as strict. These problems are not just for drivers, but are also for pedestrians crossing the road. Whether you are negotiating automobile traffic coming at you from the left in the U.K., dodging Vespa drivers who do not stop for traffic lights in Italy, or encountering cows crossing the road in rural Ireland, you need to be alerted and informed. Ask about road safety before you travel by road—regardless of your mode of transport—car, bus, tuk-tuk, or tonga!

# ***BE A ROAD SCHOLAR—GLOBAL ROAD SAFETY FOR U.S. STUDENTS ABROAD***

## **Communication Technique: Speak Up! Your Safety Depends on It**

- Road safety abroad requires you to speak up, ask questions, and say STOP if you are concerned about your personal safety.
- You are your own best advocate. No one will speak up for you. Just do it!
- Learn the road safety and emergency language of your host country.
- If communication is difficult, enlist the communication assistance of a willing native speaker.
- Ask for the safest modes of transportation.
- Ask for the safest routes to a destination.
- As a pedestrian, inquire about traffic patterns and driver behaviors.
- Carry with you emergency phone numbers and addresses
- When renting a car, ask specific questions about the car's safety features.

## **Speak Up!**

- Please slow down.
- Please stop. I need to get out now.
- Let me off at the next stop.
- Does this taxi/car have a seat belt?
- Call for help!
- Is it safe to travel at night?

## **Travel Safe, Travel Smart**

- Choose the safest form of transportation in each country.
- Avoid night travel in countries with poor safety records and/or mountainous terrain.

## **Walk Safe**

- Understand “road culture”.
- Be aware of traffic patterns.
- Be alert to reckless driver behaviors.

## **Ride Safe (Bus/Taxi):**

- Avoid overcrowded buses and minivans.
- Be alert for reckless driving.
- Insist that the driver be responsible or get off at the first possible opportunity.
- Report reckless driving to bus or taxi company, American Embassy, and ASIRT.
- Avoid motorcycle travel.
- Insist upon a helmet or bring your own.
- Avoid hitchhiking.

Before traveling, contact ASIRT for country-specific road safety information.

## **Worldwide Road Cautions**

- Animal drawn traffic sharing the roads
- Deteriorating, winding, narrow, roads
- Hairpin curves with no guardrails
- No traffic signals
- Poor/no lighting
- Unexpected animal crossings
- Aggressive driving
- Disregard for pedestrian safety
- Disregard for traffic laws
- Driving while intoxicated
- Failure to use headlights at night
- Little or no driver training
- Poorly maintained vehicles
- Overcrowded vehicles

Source: ASIRT—Association for Safe International Road Travel, [www.asirt.org](http://www.asirt.org)

# **STANDARDS OF STUDENT CONDUCT**

## **Foreign Laws, Regulations, and Standards**

Each foreign country has its own laws and regulations and generally has standards of acceptable conduct in the areas of dress, manners, morals, religion, social customs, politics, alcohol use, drug use, and behavior. Conduct that violates those laws or standards could harm the program's effectiveness, the College's relations with those countries in which the program is located, your own health and safety or the health and safety of other participants in the program. Therefore it is important for you to become informed on the laws and standards of behavior for the countries you will be visiting while abroad.

Note that contrary to popular belief, the U.S. Embassy cannot get you out of jail if you are arrested. While this is not a typical problem we have had with Meredith students abroad, it is still important that you understand that U.S. laws or constitutional rights do not protect you once you leave the country. Many practices that are illegal or grounds for a mistrial in the U.S., e.g. extraction of a confession, entrapment, police searches without a warrant, are admissible in courts in other countries. You are subject to the laws of the host country.

### **A U.S. Consular Officer can:**

- Visit you in jail after being notified of your arrest.
- Notify your family and friends (including your program) and relay requests for aid with your authorization.
- Intercede with local authorities to ensure that you are treated humanely and that your rights under local law are fully observed.
- A U.S. Consular Officer cannot:
- Get you out of jail.
- Represent you at trial or give legal counsel.
- Pay legal fees or fines with U.S. government funds.

See the U.S. Department of State website for more information about the arrest of U.S. citizens abroad: <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/emergencies/arrest.html>.

In addition to emergency assistance for American citizens and their families abroad, such as cases of serious medical emergency and legal difficulties, the U.S. Embassy personnel also provide routine citizenship services such as passport replacement. The Meredith CISI insurance also provides many of these types of services.

## Alcohol Consumption and Study Abroad

While studying abroad, you will most likely be going to a country where you will be of legal drinking age and where alcohol may be more a part of the everyday culture. In addition, distance from home may lessen your inhibitions. However, you are strongly encouraged to use good judgment if you choose to consume alcoholic beverages while studying abroad.

### *MEREDITH STUDY ABROAD ALCOHOL POLICY*

While students participating in any Meredith or Affiliate study abroad program may be of legal drinking age in their host countries, they are still expected to abide by the Meredith Alcohol and Drug policy. We expect students to follow the laws of the host country and host institution, to drink responsibly (if at all), and represent the College with dignity at all times.

*The College strongly discourages illegal and irresponsible use of alcoholic beverages by Meredith students. North Carolina State law prohibits the use or possession of alcoholic beverages for persons who are under twenty-one years of age. The possession and/or consumption of alcoholic beverages on campus or in any College building is prohibited except by those of legal age in individual on-campus apartments. Any amount of alcohol possessed or consumed by persons under the age of twenty-one shall be considered "possession." Memento bottles are not allowed in residence halls. Providing alcohol to any person who is under the age of twenty-one is illegal. A student may not attend class while under the influence of alcohol. Inappropriate or illegal behavior related to alcohol use will result in disciplinary action. Meredith students are expected to represent the College with dignity at all times. Students who choose to possess and consume alcohol are encouraged to do so responsibly and not in a manner that would disrupt the living community or endanger themselves or others. Students shall not possess or consume intoxicants at any College-sponsored functions sponsored by Meredith students or any Meredith student organization. Students participating in any Meredith or Meredith-affiliated study abroad program are expected to follow the laws of the host country and host institution during any study abroad program.*

Source: Meredith College Student Handbook

<https://www.meredith.edu/dean-of-students/student-handbook>

**A Word to the Wise:** Successful and safe living and studying abroad require that you keep your wits about you. Consumption of alcohol increases your confidence and decreases your competence. For your health and safety, consume alcohol in moderation if at all. Do not allow virtual absence of age restrictions to cloud your own good judgment about what is good for you. Always ensure that whenever some Meredith students are drinking, designated others are not. Be aware that European beer has roughly twice the alcohol content of American beer (which is why Europeans often mix beer and lemonade).

## Drugs Abroad

Contrary to what you may have heard, the rest of the world does not have looser drug laws than the U.S. and being a traveler from the U.S. does not exempt you from being put in jail for carrying drugs. In fact, in some places, being from the U.S. may mean that you are more likely to be suspected of carrying drugs. You are responsible for abiding by the laws of the country you are in and for knowing those laws. As explained above, the program and the U.S. Embassy can do very little legally if you are caught in possession of illegal drugs.

Do not, under any circumstances, use, purchase or travel with illegal drugs. Possession would result in your immediate expulsion from the program, but could also result in your arrest.

## Study Abroad Standards of Conduct

As a Meredith student abroad, you are expected to take responsibility for your own actions, or your failure to act, at all times while studying abroad. You will be held accountable for your behavior and are expected to abide by the Meredith Code of Student Conduct, all Office of International Programs policies, your program provider's instructions, and the laws and customs governing the host country while you are abroad. Additionally, it is expected that you will demonstrate respect for yourself and others at all times. As a reminder of your responsibilities, the Standards of Conduct as outlined in the Meredith Assumption of Risk, Health Disclosure and Release Agreement forms are listed below. You have signed and agreed to the following statements.

- a. I understand that each foreign country has its own laws and standards of acceptable conduct, including dress, manners, morals, politics, drug use and behavior. I recognize that behavior which violates those laws or standards could harm the relations of those countries and the institutions therein with Meredith or the host institution, as well as my own health and safety. I will become informed of, and will abide by, all such laws and standards for each country to or through which I will travel during the summer abroad program.
- b. I will comply with Meredith's rules, standards and instructions for student behavior at all times during the study abroad program as outlined in the Meredith Student Handbook and related orientation information.
- c. I pledge to conduct myself in a manner that reflects favorably on Meredith. I further understand and agree that Meredith may dismiss me from the study abroad program for behavior detrimental to Meredith. I further understand that inappropriate behavior on my part may also be addressed in student disciplinary proceedings.
- d. I agree to abide by all safety rules and advisories that may be established by Meredith for my selected study abroad program. These include but are not limited to: a) being in regular contact with Meredith staff and program leaders; b) requesting from program leaders a briefing upon my arrival about local security concerns; c) notifying the program leaders and Meredith upon my departure and return if I will be traveling where I cannot be reached by email, phone or fax; and d) notifying the program leaders and the Meredith College Office of International Programs immediately if there are any significant professional or personal concerns that develop. I understand that I am required, and I agree, to report immediately to Meredith administration or staff and the program leaders all accidents, serious illnesses, and any other incidents that I consider to be threats to

my safety or the safety of others while I am involved in the study abroad program, including travel to, from and during the course of the program.

- e. I agree to abide by any guidelines provided by Meredith and/or the local host institution and to conduct myself in a sensitive and productive manner.
- f. I understand that I am fully responsible for any and all travel and activities in which I may choose to engage before or after the inclusive dates of the study abroad program. I further understand that Meredith is not responsible for any injury or loss I may suffer when I am traveling independently or otherwise separate or absent from any Meredith or host institution-supervised activities. I acknowledge and understand that I am solely responsible for obtaining and keeping safe my passport, money, credit cards, ATM cards, laptop computers, cameras, traveler's checks, tickets, jewelry and other property and that Meredith assumes no liability whatsoever for any loss, damage, destruction, theft or the like to my luggage or personal belongings. I acknowledge that I have obtained adequate insurance for my belongings or that I have sufficient funds to replace such belongings.
- g. I acknowledge and understand that, if I should encounter or cause any legal problems with any foreign nationals or with the government of a host country, I shall be personally and financially responsible for their resolution and that neither Meredith nor the host institution is responsible for assisting and may not be able to assist me under these circumstances.
- h. Operation of Motor Vehicle Prohibition: I understand and acknowledge that I am prohibited by Meredith College from maintaining or operating a motor vehicle in a foreign country during the inclusive dates of the program. Any choice I make to operate a motor vehicle violates this express prohibition by the College, and I agree to indemnify and hold harmless Meredith, its Board of Directors, trustees, officers, agents and employees from any loss, liability, damage or cost, including court costs and attorneys' fees arising out of my driving activity, including but not limited to, any personal bodily injury to myself or others or damage to my property or the property of others or to any vehicle that I may am operating.





# U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE RESOURCES

*Important Contact Information*

*Traveler's Checklist*

*Drinking & Drugs*

# U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION & TELEPHONE NUMBERS

## **LOST OR STOLEN PASSPORT:**

**1-877-487-2778**

Also visit the U.S. Department of State website to learn more:

<http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports/lost-stolen.html>

## **OVERSEAS CITIZENS SERVICES:**

**1-888-407-4747**

**from overseas: 1-202-501-4444**

*Death of an American citizen abroad, arrest/detention of an American citizen abroad, robbery of an American citizen abroad, American citizens missing abroad, crisis abroad involving American citizens abroad*

## **OFFICE OF CHILDREN'S ISSUES:**

**1-888-407-4747**

**from overseas: 1-202-501-4444**

*International parental child abduction, international adoption, recorded information on custody and adoptions, denial of passports to minors in certain circumstances such as abductions*

## **U.S. EMBASSIES ABROAD**

For U.S. Embassy websites, please see <http://www.usembassy.gov/>

## State Department Travel Advisories

Overseas study abroad programs recognize their responsibility to do their utmost to provide a secure and non-threatening environment in which you can safely live and learn. Responsible campuses like Meredith and our approved affiliate program providers consult regularly with colleagues around the country who are involved in the administration of study abroad programs; with on-site program directors; with host university officials; with contacts in the U.S. Department of State and other governmental and non-governmental agencies; and with other experts who are well-informed on international issues and events. It is in no one's interest to risk your safety and well-being.

With regard to potential threats to travelers abroad, in those few sites where even remote danger might occasionally exist, program staff work with local police and U.S. consular personnel and local university officials in setting up whatever practical security measures are deemed prudent. In such places, you will be briefed during orientation programs and reminded at any times of heightened political tension about being security conscious in your daily activities.

The U.S. government monitors the political conditions in every country across the globe. The State Department in recent years has revised its system for assessing risk around the world and will no longer be issuing regional travel warnings or alerts. Instead, travel advisory levels are assigned to every country and country profiles on <https://travel.state.gov> will include specific action steps for U.S. citizens to take when traveling to a destination and a rationale for why a certain level is assigned.

### **U.S. Department of State Advisory Levels**

Level 1 = exercise normal precaution

Level 2 = increased caution

Level 3 = reconsider travel to this country

Level 4 = do not travel to this country

As a general rule, Meredith College approves travel to areas designated as Level 1 or Level 2. Travel to a Level 3 or Level 4 region/state/country is not permitted on College-sponsored travel unless first approved by the Director of International Programs.

# TRAVELER'S CHECKLIST

<https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/go/checklist.html>

## GET INFORMED

- **Destination Information** – Research entry/exit requirements, visas, laws, customs, medical care, road safety, etc. in the countries you will be visiting at [travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov). Write down contact details for the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate to carry with you in case of emergency while traveling.
- **Safety and Security Information** – Assess the risks of traveling abroad. Read about [Travel Advisories](#) for your destination and check the [U.S. embassy or consulate](#) website for the latest **security messages**.
- **Crisis Planning** – Read [What the Department of State Can and Can't Do in a Crisis](#). Make an evacuation plan that does not rely on the U.S. government, and consider purchasing emergency evacuation insurance.
- **Health Precautions** – Read [Your Health Abroad](#) and check out recommendations for vaccinations and other health considerations from the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#) and [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#).
- **Money Matters** – Before going abroad, notify your bank and credit card companies of your travel, and check exchange rates. For information about using cash, debit/credit cards, and ATMs overseas, read information about your [destination](#).
- **Special Considerations** – Some U.S. citizens may face additional challenges when abroad:
  - [Women travelers](#)
  - [LGBT travelers](#)
  - [Older travelers](#)
  - [Cruise ship passengers](#)
  - [Travelers with disabilities](#)
  - [Students](#)
  - [Volunteers abroad](#)
  - [Faith-based travelers](#)
  - [Journalists](#)

## GET REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

**Safeguard Your Documents!** Make two copies of all your travel documents in case of emergency. Leave one copy with a trusted friend or relative at home and carry the other separately from your original documents. To help prevent theft, do not carry your passport in your back pocket, and keep it separate from your money.

- **Passport** – [Apply](#) several months in advance for a new passport. If you already have one, it should be valid for at least six months after you return home and have two or more blank pages, depending on your [destination](#). Otherwise, some countries may not let you enter.
  - **Children's passports** – Passports issued for children under age 16 are valid for only five years, not 10 years like adult passports. Check passport expiration dates carefully and renew early.
  - **Europe Travel via Canada and UK** – Europe's 26 Schengen countries strictly enforce the six-month validity rule. If you are transiting through Canada or the UK – which do not have that requirement – your passport must be valid at least six months or airlines may not let you board your onward flight to Europe.
- **Visas** – You may need to get a visa before you travel to a foreign [destination](#). Contact the embassy of the countries you will be visiting for more information.
- **Prescriptions** – Get a letter from your doctor for medications you are bringing. Some countries have strict laws, even against over-the-counter medications, so check with the embassy of your destination before traveling.
- **Consent for Travel with Minors** – If you are traveling alone with children, foreign border officials may require custody documents or notarized written consent from the other parent. Check with the embassy of your foreign destination before traveling.
- **International Driving Permit** – Many countries do not recognize a U.S. driver's license, but most accept an [International Driving Permit](#) (IDP). You may also need supplemental auto insurance. Read more about [driving and road safety abroad](#) before you go.

## GET ENROLLED

- [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) – Enroll for free at [STEP.state.gov](http://STEP.state.gov) to receive travel and security updates about your destination, and to help us reach you in an emergency. Groups or organizations can create an account and upload a spreadsheet with contact details for multiple travelers.
- **Twitter and Facebook** – Follow **TravelGov** on [Instagram](#) or [Facebook](#) to stay connected with us and get important safety and security messages.

## GET INSURED

- **Health Insurance** – Many foreign medical facilities and providers require cash payment up front and do not accept U.S. insurance plans. Medicare does not provide coverage outside of the United States. Check your U.S. health care policy to see if it will cover you overseas. If not, consider buying supplemental insurance. Make sure the insurance you purchase covers any special medical needs or risks you anticipate on your trip.
- **Emergency Evacuation** – Evacuation for medical treatment or to leave a crisis area in another country can cost more than \$100,000. You should strongly consider purchasing evacuation insurance in case of emergency overseas.
- **Unexpected Expenses** – Trip interruption or cancellation, flight delays, lost or stolen luggage, and other unexpected travel costs can add up. Check with your credit card and homeowners insurance companies to see if they provide coverage. If not, consider additional insurance.

## Other Information for U.S. Citizen Travelers

- [Travel to High-Risk Areas](#)
- [Traveling with a pet](#)
- [FBI Safety and Security Information for U.S. Students Traveling Abroad](#)
- [Customs and import restrictions](#)
- [Global Entry](#)
- [TSA Pre-check](#)

## Emergency Assistance

Sometimes, in spite of careful planning, things still go wrong during a trip abroad. We provide [help for emergencies](#) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Contact the nearest [U.S. embassy or consulate](#) overseas or our Washington, D.C. office (888-407-4747 or 202-501-4444).

## *Disclaimer*

*The Department of State assumes no responsibility or liability for the professional ability or reputation of, or the quality of services provided by, the entities or individuals whose names appear on or are linked to the above page. Inclusion of private groups on this page is in no way an endorsement by the Department or the U.S. government. The order in which names appear has no significance. The Department is not in a position to vouch for the information.*

## **Students Abroad**

### **U.S. Department of State – Bureau of Consular Affairs**

Visit this website for comprehensive resources for study abroad students.

<https://travel.state.gov/content/studentsabroad/en.html>

## DRINKING & DRUGS ABROAD

When traveling overseas, it's important to obey the laws and regulations of the country you're visiting, especially those pertaining to drug and alcohol use. Every year, many U.S. citizen students are arrested abroad on drug charges or because of their behavior under the influence. Ignorance of the law is no excuse, so be informed.

Avoid underage and excessive alcohol consumption. While abroad, driving under the influence and drinking on the street or on public transportation may be considered criminal activities by local authorities, as they would be in many places in the United States.

Make sure your prescription medication is not considered an illegal narcotic. If you are going abroad with a preexisting medical condition, you should carry a letter from your doctor describing your condition and medications, including the generic names of prescribed drugs. Any medications carried overseas should be in their original containers and clearly labeled. Check with the foreign country's embassy here in the U.S. to make sure your medications are not considered illegal narcotics. [A listing of foreign embassies and consulates in the U.S.](#) is available on the Department of State's website.

Don't accept packages from anyone. Some U.S. citizens think it's a good idea to take advantage of an offer for an all-expense paid vacation abroad in exchange for carrying a small package in their luggage. This is often a scam to trick you into smuggling drugs or contraband. If the package contains illegal drugs or substances, the fact that you didn't know that you were carrying it will not reduce the charges. You could miss your flight, your exams, or the rest of your life during a stay behind bars.

Don't import, purchase, use, or have drugs in your possession. Drug charges can carry severe consequences, including imprisonment without bail for up to a year before a case is tried and sentences ranging from fines and jail time to years of hard labor. Some crimes even carry the penalty of death. Contraband or paraphernalia associated with illegal drug use can also get you in trouble.

*Source: U.S. Department of State, 2024*



# NAVIGATING IDENTITY & DIVERSITY ABROAD

When we go abroad, the first thing we unpack is ourselves. Doing research prior to departure about how our complex identities might be impacted abroad is an important form of self-care.

Resources in this section come from a variety of places, including peer institutions and leaders in the field of international education, like IES Abroad and Diversity Abroad, as well as the Office of International Programs website for Identity Based Resources.



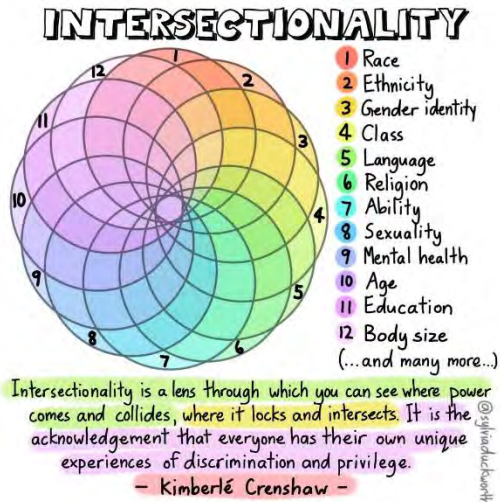
Diversity Abroad and Be Globalii by DA Global is a leading international organization dedicated to ensuring that students from diverse economic, educational, ethnic, and social backgrounds have equal access and opportunity to participate in global education. **The Office of International Programs is a proud member of Diversity Abroad.** Because of our membership, we have access to wealth of resources about identity and diversity abroad—and we want to share them with you. Just ask!

# NAVIGATING IDENTITY & DIVERSITY ABROAD

## INTERSECTIONALITY

Kimberlé Crenshaw, Professor of Law at Columbia Law School and legal scholar of critical race theory, coined the term “intersectionality” in 1989. The Oxford Dictionary defines the concept of intersectionality as “the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.”

To study the concept of intersectionality in greater depth, we invite you to explore the resources provided by the Syracuse University Libraries regarding [Intersectionality](#).



### From IES Abroad:

“Consider all of the different aspects of your identity and imagine them as streets—simply put, intersectionality is the place where all of your identities meet. What are your identities? Take into account nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, religious affiliation, etc.

Think of study abroad as a formative space where every term a new group of distinct identities intersect in a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to explore a different country and culture.

Image from Duckworth, 2020

We’ve seen a positive trend of rising student diversity in U.S. study abroad for more than a decade. As more students of different backgrounds and identities choose to study abroad from U.S. schools, we invite you and other students on our programs to be aware of how important it is for all of us—students, faculty and staff—to participate in creating an environment where all students can thrive while abroad.

All in all, for the purposes of true inclusivity, thinking about identity abroad and its complexities in the context of another culture is something we hope you’ll embrace in advance of boarding your flight for your study abroad journey. So, understanding how your own identity may play into your host culture experience abroad can help smooth how you acclimate and enable you to engage more easily and authentically with other students’ and host country residents’ personalities, ideas, perspectives, forms of expression and backgrounds.”



*Graphic Source:*

*Source: Misty McPhetridge, BSSW*

[Intersectional Self - FYS 101 - Research Guides at Syracuse University Libraries](#)

### **Why is intersectionality relevant to your study abroad experience?**

“Identity is a factor for every individual in your cohort. Whether you are part of a majority at home or belong to an underrepresented community, your study abroad experience is a chance to become part of an inclusive group made up of diverse individuals. A helpful way to begin thinking about this is by “exploring the world between the hyphen.” For example, identifying as Afro-Dominican or Irish-American suggests that two different worlds are colliding. This may present you with a unique perspective when it comes to issues of race, immigration, or religion and a unique opportunity to learn from others’ hyphenated lived experiences.

Likewise, even if you are part of a majority, acknowledging positions of power and privilege is helpful when interacting with students and others who may find themselves in the minority, whether while in the U.S. or abroad. Ultimately, when you consciously navigate your study abroad experience with identity and inclusiveness in mind, you’ll likely expand your intercultural competency, a 21st Century skill that can benefit you significantly, both personally and professionally. In simpler terms, study abroad offers opportunities for students to hone competencies like this that empower you with greater savvy across different cultural contexts. Study abroad can indeed be an important point along your lifelong continuum toward intercultural competence – if you embrace this aspect of the experience as you do others.”

### **Identity Dynamics in Your Host Country**

“For those of us who identify as American while living in America, we know that when it comes to identifying ourselves, we often consider our ethnicity, our gender, our sexuality, our religious affiliation, etc. Chances are most of us rarely think about our nationality while we’re in the U.S. However, when preparing to study abroad, it’s important to note that, often, those we meet while abroad will view us through the lens of our nationality

first. Other aspects of our identities, though, may factor into how we are perceived or treated while abroad, as well.

So, before leaving the U.S., it's important to take into account how identity dynamics may, in part, shape your study abroad experience in your host country. We highly encourage you and other students to learn as much as you can about how your personal identity(ies) are perceived in your host country. Social and intercultural dynamics in your host country may be shaped by global or local media images, host country experiences with immigration, the after effects of war or relations with other countries, and/or religious norms. The more you know about these factors, the better idea you'll have of how you and other U.S. student peers may be perceived in your host country. For instance, a Muslim student in Morocco may have a different experience in the host culture, and may have different resources available to them than perhaps a Muslim student studying in Italy or in Japan.

No matter who you are or how you identify, please know that understanding the identity dynamics in your host country ahead of departing merely provides you with valuable contextual information. Knowing more before you go is useful since there's no way to be certain as to how your identity will factor into your experience abroad positively, negatively or impartially. In a nutshell, we believe knowledge is power and can give you tools to navigate whatever experiences you'll have.

For some students who may share some physical characteristics with locals in their host country, it's important to know that locals may not always assume you're from the U.S. On occasion, some students report instances when local residents perceive or behave toward them differently than toward other members of their cohort. Members of the local community may expect you to understand the language or certain cultural behaviors or nuances, when their expectations of other students may be more lenient.

It's also important for all students to familiarize themselves with the sociopolitical climate of their host countries before arriving, because it may affect not only how you are perceived or treated, but the events and activities that you may choose to attend or participate in once you are on-site, possibly even on your host campus! Students should also note local attitudes regarding immigration in your host country, especially if you share some physical traits with the immigrant community.”

### **Things to Think About Before You Study Abroad**

The predeparture stage of study abroad is a critical time to begin familiarizing yourself with your host country and culture. In other words, even before arriving on-site, we encourage you to begin the process of acclimating yourself to a new environment. You may find it helpful to answer these questions before arriving in your host country:

- *What is intersectionality and how might different aspects of your identity intersect/play out during your time abroad?*
- *How will local legislation affect how you might express your identity in your host country? (i.e., any laws affecting the LGBTQ+ community in countries like Morocco)*
- *What is the perception of U.S. citizens in your host country?*
- *What is the historical relationship between your host country and the United States?*
- *How is race/ethnicity viewed differently in your host country than at home in the U.S.?*
- *Are there any contemporary issues relating to immigration in your host country? If so, how are these viewed by the local population? Might those issues regarding how you or other students on your program identify? How?*

### **Things to Think About Before You Head Home**

Before you return to the United States, there are a few things we encourage you to think about:

- *How have you changed?*  
Studying abroad is a life-changing experience that is full of personal growth. It's not uncommon for students to find their perception of themselves and their place in the world changed in various ways during their study abroad experience. Has that been the case for you too?
- *What is the current sociopolitical climate of your home country?*  
This is a tumultuous time in U.S. history, and while you have been a bit removed from much of it while abroad, you are about to return to the fray. Before leaving your host country, we encourage you to briefly catch up on what's happening in U.S. national and local news.
- *How will you keep in contact with the variety of friends you made while abroad?*  
Studying abroad can be a rare opportunity to develop meaningful relationships, sometimes for the first time, with people of other cultures, linguistic backgrounds, or religions. We know that it can be difficult to keep up with long distance friends once you get back into the swing of your 'normal' life. Before you leave your host country, you should not only come up with a plan on how you'll maintain contact (email, social media, skype, etc.) but you should also consider how these new friendships can positively influence your desire to develop more friendships across difference as well, once you are back home in the U.S.

**Sources:** [IES Abroad—Navigating Identity and Diversity Abroad](#); [Intersectional Self - FYS 101 - Research Guides at Syracuse University Libraries](#)

## **IDENTITY-BASED RESOURCES FOR STUDY ABROAD**

*Meredith College's Office of International Programs (OIP) is committed to providing safe, enriching, and inclusive study abroad experiences for all students.*

*On the pages below and on our Identity-Based Resources web [pages](#), you will find resources designed to help students prepare for study abroad based on their intersecting identities. Visit each page to explore the OIP's advice, questions to consider as you're preparing to study abroad, and links to online resources that can get you started on your journey.*

*The OIP encourages all study abroad students to read each page, regardless of whether you hold that identity or not. Doing so will help you gain empathy for and understanding of the potential challenges and joys your peers may encounter and will help you contribute to an inclusive environment on your Meredith Abroad or affiliate program.*

*Please remember that these web pages and resources are just a starting point and are not meant to be exhaustive; the OIP suggests you also conduct your own research to find additional resources during your pre-departure preparations.*

*Find a resource you think we should add or want to share feedback on these pages? Please feel free to connect with the OIP at [internationalprograms@meredith.edu](mailto:internationalprograms@meredith.edu).*

### **Gender**

Gender roles, expectations, and expression may differ between countries and cultures. In some cases, the gender roles or customs you encounter abroad may not align with your own views on gender. In particular, women, transgender, gender nonconforming, gender-queer, or non-binary people may have a different experience with their gender abroad than at home. This could impact your decisions about where you travel, how you dress, or what precautions you take while abroad.

For example, you may find that standards for modesty in other countries are different than in the United States. By researching these differences before you depart for your program, you can understand what cultural signals your choices about dress or modesty may send and how those could impact your time or safety in your host country.

Unfortunately, sexism, toxic masculinity, homophobia, and transphobia exist not only in the United States but around the world. Have you considered how you want to navigate these issues in order to keep yourself safe while having a fulfilling study abroad experience?

Becoming informed about how your gender identity may impact your time on a study abroad program will allow you to be prepared for your travel, stay safe, maintain positive levels of self-care, and still express yourself and your gender in a way that makes you feel authentic and comfortable.

**Questions to consider:**

- What are typical gender roles, customs, or laws in my host country? Are there differences in political or social power or privilege based on gender?
- How do various gender identities interact in my host country, both platonically and romantically? Are there typical social patterns or customary gender relations?
- How are gender nonconforming people viewed in my host country?
- How do my views on gender compare with the majority of those in my host country?
- Are there any safety concerns or issues related to my gender in my host country? How are issues of gender-based violence viewed and addressed in my host country?
- How will I continue to nurture forms of self-care, self-affirmation, and connection while abroad? Do I need to seek out communities or support within my study abroad program?

Our challenge to each of you is to address these gender issues with an open mind and to examine the differing patterns of gender roles in a spirit of learning. Try to alleviate some potential misunderstandings and frustrations in this area by learning in advance as much as you can about the norms of friendships and dating in your host country. Ask yourself how gender roles and relations might help illustrate deeper cultural values and ideologies. Observing and understanding gender interaction can provide a revealing view into the heart of another culture.

That said, Meredith does not expect a student to remain in a housing situation or classroom setting that they feel is truly uncomfortable, hostile or threatening. Talk with a local staff member from your program if you need help evaluating or resolving such a situation. If you feel that this step does not rectify the situation, then contact Liz Yaros or Dr. Brooke Shurer directly.

**Resources:**

For additional resources, student testimonies, videos, blogs, and more, visit the [OIP website](#).

Author: Olivia Slack, OIP Staff

## Race & Ethnicity

Racial and ethnic relations and perceptions often vary by culture and country. As you prepare to study abroad, researching your host country will be one of the best ways to understand attitudes toward people of different races and ethnicities. For some, you may find yourself in the racial or ethnic majority for the first time. For others, you may find yourself in the minority for the first time while studying abroad.

One commonly surprising aspect of study abroad is that, while in the U.S. you are likely categorized by your race or ethnicity first, while in your host country you will likely be seen as an American first. People may make assumptions about you based on your physical appearance, attempt to touch your skin or hair, ask to take photos with you, make offensive or insensitive comments or ask questions about your culture, physical features, or national origin. People may also show a sincere interest in your culture, but these questions, even when “well-meaning,” may still be unwelcome and uncomfortable. Depending on where you study abroad, you may also feel a new sense of belonging, joy, or cultural understanding, and students sometimes discover a deeper connection with their identities during these experiences.

As a student preparing to study abroad, it is important to know that while prejudices and racism may look different abroad than in the U.S., their impact can be just as harmful. The OIP aims to help students who are concerned about this possibility prepare for study abroad experiences that may be both challenging and rewarding.

Understanding how your race and ethnicity may impact your experience in your host country is an important step toward being safe on your program. If you have more questions about these issues, ask the OIP or your program staff for contact information for a BIPOC student who has returned from the program. And do not hesitate for a *nanosecond* to contact the OIP if you experience racism or microaggressions in your host country or within your study abroad group.

### **Questions to consider:**

- How do I decide which study abroad location is best?
- Am I prepared to do pre-departure research before traveling abroad?
- Which ethnic and racial groups do I identify with and how are they perceived in my host country?
- What are the dominant racial and ethnic groups in my host country? Will I be in the majority or minority? How will this affect how I am treated?
- What is the history of the host country in regard to race and ethnicity? How does it currently affect the climate in the host country today?
- How might other parts of my identity in addition to my race and ethnicity affect my experience abroad?



- What are the forms of self-care, joy, and belonging that support my well-being at home? Can I cultivate those same strategies or connections abroad?

**Resources:**

For additional resources, student testimonies, videos, blogs, and more, visit the [OIP website](#).

**Sources:**

[OIP Identity-Based Resources Web Pages](#)

[Michigan State University](#); [Diversity Abroad](#); [NC State University](#)

## LGBTQIA+

As a Meredith College student considering study abroad, you may already identify as LGBTQIA+ or you may still be exploring your identity. Whatever the case may be, it is important to recognize that cultural norms, laws, and local attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ people differ widely around the world. LGBTQIA+ students at Meredith have had success studying abroad safely for generations and the OIP is here to help future students prepare.

While many countries and societies accept and celebrate LGBTQIA+ culture and individuals, homophobia and transphobia exist abroad just as they do in the United States. Laws, customs, and social attitudes regarding sexual orientation, identity, and gender expression may differ from country to country, and these factors may impact LGBTQIA+ students' safety and decisions as they travel abroad.

LGBTQIA+ students preparing to study abroad should do research on their host country's laws and/or protections for LGBTQIA+ individuals. While some countries protect the LGBTQIA+ community's rights by law, other countries have laws that make it a crime to openly identify as LGBTQIA+. In other countries, there are no laws meant to protect individuals from gender- or sexuality-based hate crimes.

Researching the general attitudes of your host country toward LGBTQIA+ individuals can help you prepare to study abroad. You may find that you can be just as open, or more so, about your identity abroad as you are in the United States, or you may find that laws or customs in your host country warrant more caution. With this knowledge, you will be better equipped to make decisions about which countries are the best fit for your study abroad experience.

Understanding how your sexuality or gender identity may impact your time on a study abroad program will allow you to be prepared for your travel, stay safe, and remain authentic to yourself and your identity.

In addition to safety concerns originating from the host culture, it is also important to consider how you may react if homophobia, transphobia, or heteronormativity come from within your study abroad group. You have the agency to decide how you'd like to approach these situations while maintaining your mental well-being throughout your program. If you ever encounter homophobia, transphobia, or other threats to your safety from the outside community or within your group, please do not hesitate to connect with your study abroad faculty or the OIP directly.

### **Questions to consider:**

- Are there any laws regarding sexuality or gender identity in my host country? If so, are these laws beneficial to the LGBTQIA+ community or do they put LGBTQIA+ individuals in danger?
- What are typical attitudes toward the LGBTQIA+ community in my host country? Do these attitudes, along with any laws in the country, make this a safe location to study abroad?
- While it's important to research potential challenges, have I considered how studying abroad may provide the opportunity to affirm my identities? Are there opportunities to patronize local LGBTQIA+-owned businesses or connect with the local community?
- In what ways do I nurture joy and pride here at home (i.e. artistic expression, writing, connection with local communities, etc.)? Is there a way for me to continue those forms of self-care abroad?
- How visible and/or large is the LGBTQIA+ community in my host country?
- Are there resources available for members of the LGBTQIA+ community in my host country?
- Is it safe to be out in my host country? Are there any cultural or behavioral norms for individuals within the LGBTQIA+ community that are different from those in the U.S.?
- What are the cultural norms for dating and friendship?

### **Additional considerations:**

Before you depart, it will be vital to research what kind of legal rights LGBTQIA+ people have in your host country. As mentioned above, in some countries homosexuality is illegal or there are strict societal standards for showing affection in public. Always put your safety first and familiarize yourself with the laws and customs of your host country.

It may also be useful to research your host country's terms or definitions used to talk about LGBTQIA+ issues and find in-country resources and support networks for

LGBTQIA+ people. IES Abroad, Diversity Abroad, and Northwestern University have excellent destination guides that can help you learn more about your host country.

Additionally, regardless of your identity, understand that there may be LGBTQIA+ students in your study abroad group and among the local people you interact with abroad. While some may be “out” and some may not be, all individuals deserve the same respect. Understanding the diversity of experiences that there will be within your own group and the local population will only enhance your time abroad.

Whatever your own sexual orientation, please keep in mind that there may be gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and/or queer students in your program group as well as the various groups of individuals you encounter in the host country environment. Some will be “out,” some not, and some may just be coming to terms with their sexual identity. Sensitivity to this diversity within your own group as well as the diversity of the host culture can further enrich your overall study abroad experience.

**Resources:**

For additional considerations for LGBTQIA+ folks, as well as resources, videos, blogs, and more - visit the OIP [website!](#)

**Sources:**

Author: Olivia Slack, OIP Staff; [Diversity Abroad](#)

## First Generation College Students

As a first-generation student, you may have the opportunity, while at Meredith, to be the first person in your family to study abroad or travel internationally! At the same time, embarking on study abroad can seem daunting and the application process may bring up questions. For first-generation students, it is important to do research on what study abroad programs are available and which may work best for you, your major, your budget, your long-term career goals, and any other considerations you have.

For students who may have familial or work commitments at home, short-term programs like Meredith’s spring break or summer programs may be a good fit.

Studying abroad can have many benefits, including cultivating skills like adaptability and planning, adding an interesting and relevant experience to your resume, and furthering your education in either general education or major-specific classes. While study abroad is an extracurricular, it can become a vital part of your undergraduate or graduate educational experience, and there are many resources to help make study abroad attainable.

**Questions to consider:**

- What are some aspects of study abroad you are most excited to experience and share with family and friends?
- Have I spoken to the OIP, my academic advisor, and the Office of Financial Assistance about study abroad?
- Have I talked to my family or support system about my plans to study abroad?
- What is my budget for a study abroad program?
- Is the cost of living higher or lower in my prospective host country?
- Would I like to be connected with a fellow first-generation study abroad alumni?

**Resources:**

For additional resources, student testimonies, videos, blogs, and more, visit the OIP [website](#).

Diversity Abroad's page for [first generation students abroad Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship](#)

**Sources:**

Author: Olivia Slack, OIP Staff; [The University of Chicago](#); [NC State University](#)

## Mobility, Accessibility, and Neurodiversity

Members of Meredith's disability community and students with other accessibility, mobility, or neurodiversity considerations have had successful and fun study abroad experiences on Meredith Abroad and affiliate programs every year. While perceptions, attitudes, and infrastructure concerning accessibility and accommodations differ around the world, the OIP is here to advise and support you throughout the study abroad process.

It is important for all students to start the study abroad advising process early to ensure you choose the program that best suits your academic interests and your goals. When preparing for study abroad, it is important to research cultural norms and behaviors in your host country that may relate to your identities. For example, in the U.S. and in American culture, independence may be highly valued, but in other countries, people may assume a person needs or wants help. Additionally, here in the U.S., the process for seeking accommodations in an academic setting might be familiar to you, but the process may look different in countries with diverse academic systems and cultures. You may also find that resources available to you abroad regarding accessibility and accommodations differ dramatically from those available in the U.S. For example, in the U.S. the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects disabled people from discrimination and applies accessibility standards to public, commercial, and government spaces. In your host country, you may, unfortunately, encounter microaggressions or discrimination and find at least some accessibility barriers that you generally do not encounter in the U.S.

Prior to departure, conduct independent research, make use of the resources below to hear directly from student voices, and ask your program faculty or affiliate provider for more information so you can be prepared for what to expect in your host country. Speaking with Meredith's [Disability Services](#) office can also be a helpful step.

While study abroad programs and universities abroad are becoming more inclusive of students' accommodations, you may still face challenges regarding the extent to which accommodations can be put into place abroad, particularly on direct enrollment affiliate programs. For this reason, it is important to disclose to the OIP and/or your provider any accommodations you may have upfront.

If you have more questions about these issues, ask the OIP or the program staff for contact information for a student with a shared experience who has returned from study abroad. Do not hesitate to contact the OIP if you experience microaggressions or discrimination in your host country or within your study abroad group.

**Questions to consider:**

- Have I discussed my plans to study abroad with my academic advisor and Disability Services at Meredith?
- Do I need to communicate any accommodations to the OIP and the study abroad program directors or affiliate program?
- How might my accessibility considerations impact which program I choose?
- What kind of academic learning environment is best for me?
- How are people with my disability or with neurodiversity viewed in my host country?
- How do I want to respond if people give me unsolicited help?
- How generally accessible are places in my host country?
- How will I plan ahead to manage my condition when abroad? If I utilize academic, medical, psychological, or other resources at Meredith, how can I utilize resources abroad?
- Will my disability pose challenges to participating in certain excursions because of inaccessibility abroad?

**Resources:**

For additional resources, student testimonies, videos, blogs, and more, visit the OIP [website](#).

**Sources:**

Author, Olivia Slack, OIP Staff with advice, input, and feedback from Meredith College Angels for Disability Advocacy (ADA)

## International Students

Students at Meredith who come from international backgrounds are an integral part of our community and can bring many wonderful perspectives to study abroad. At Meredith College, international students can and have studied abroad on short-term and semester programs. This page mainly discusses considerations for F-1 visa holders.

*Students in other immigration statuses who are interested in studying abroad should connect with a study abroad and international student advisor in the OIP directly to discuss any potential visa requirements for international travel.*

International students at Meredith may already be completing a “study abroad” experience by studying in the U.S. However, taking advantage of study abroad opportunities through the OIP can be yet another way to enrich your educational experience.

During the study abroad planning phase, F-1 international students should research visa entry requirements for their travel destinations. It is important to communicate with the OIP about your study abroad plans so that we can assist with travel documentation and F1 visa requirements. Additional points to consider:

- You may be required to obtain a visa to enter your host country.
- You may need to travel to and appear in person at a U.S.-based consulate or embassy to apply for a visa to your host country.
- In some cases, international students may have to return to their country of citizenship in order to apply for a visa to study abroad.
- If your F-1 visa is set to expire while you are abroad, you will want to speak with an advisor in the OIP about the necessary steps for renewal.
- In addition to an entry visa to your host country, you will need to travel with a valid passport that expires at least six months after you return from study abroad, a valid U.S. visa, and your most recent I-20 with a valid travel signature from a DSO for re-entry into the U.S.
- Before studying abroad, make photocopies of all your documents, including passport, I-20, visa stamp, and I-94 record. The OIP recommends saving digital copies of these documents, as well. You may also choose to leave a set of copies at home or with a friend and carry a copy with you separate from your originals.
- It is recommended that you speak with an international student advisor about requirements for maintaining your F-1 visa while abroad.

As you prepare to go abroad, think about researching your host country. It will be beneficial to understand the relationship between your home country and host country as well as the U.S. and host country. It's also important to think about how different racial and ethnic groups are perceived in your host country, and how that may be different or similar to what you've experienced studying in the U.S. or at home. Take a look at the resources for your other intersecting identities before you depart in addition to considering the points and questions brought up in this section to ensure you are as well-prepared as possible for your study abroad experience.

### **Questions to consider:**

- What is the relationship between my home country and host country?
- Does my host country have any visa requirements for travelers from my home country?
- What immigration documents will I need to carry with me when I travel?
- Have I communicated with the OIP about my plans to study abroad?
- Do I need to speak with an international student advisor about my plans to study abroad?

- What steps do I need to take to stay in compliance with my F-1 student visa while studying abroad?

**Resources:**

- For additional resources, student testimonies, videos, blogs, and more, visit the OIP [website](#).

## Religious & Spiritual Identity

Religion is an important part of many cultures around the world. During your study abroad experience, you will likely encounter a variety of religious practices and history. It's important to be open-minded about the religions you encounter while abroad, and also to be informed about how your religious background may be viewed in your host country.

Students who are used to being in either the religious majority or minority at home may find that role reversed while abroad. Understanding levels of religious tolerance in your host country and how to worship safely abroad, if you wish to do so, will be vital parts of your pre-departure preparation. In some countries, there may be cultural or political contexts that impact some religious practices.

If you have religion-based dietary restrictions, communicate this to the OIP in your post-acceptance forms and mention it to your program faculty or study abroad provider to ensure your dietary needs are met.

If you are not religious or if you will find yourself in the religious minority while abroad, be sure to keep an open mind when exploring the intersections of your host country's cultural and religious history. In many cases, art and politics were interwoven with religious practices in the past and you may learn about this in your courses while abroad. There may also be standards of dress required when visiting religious sites on group excursions such as cathedrals or temples.

Our hope for you is that by going abroad, you'll gain a new perspective on religions as they are practiced around the world. You'll return home with an increased familiarity with other belief systems and a greater respect for them.

**Questions to consider:**

- What is the dominant religion in my host country?
- Will I be part of the religious majority or minority abroad?



- Are there any laws regarding religion in my host country? Is there a separation between religion and government?
- How tolerant is my host country of other religions? What about atheists and agnostics?
- Is it safe for me to wear religious symbols or clothing and/or worship while abroad?
- How can I respect the religion in my host country and participate in cultural events, even if I don't practice that religion?

During the course of your program, you may encounter people who ascribe to a variety of faiths and belief systems. The manner in which particular individuals or groups interpret their respective beliefs may differ from what you are accustomed to in your home country, and you may encounter religious practices that are unfamiliar or more private. Try to consider this experience a learning opportunity in which you can come to more fully understand spiritual or faith-based issues contributing to the complex history and diverse worldviews comprising the local culture.

**Resources:**

- For additional resources, student testimonies, videos, blogs, and more, visit the OIP [website](#).

Wings or Nontraditional Students

Nontraditional students may have different responsibilities or considerations than traditional-aged students, including obligations related to family or profession. Wings students at Meredith have consistently had success studying abroad, and taking time to understand program options can help nontraditional students have fulfilling study abroad experiences.

For Wings students who may have work, home, or family commitments, program length can be an important consideration. Meredith Abroad and affiliate program lengths can vary from an entire semester to just a couple of weeks. Researching what program length will work for you, your academic and experiential goals, and your personal commitments can help narrow down program options when preparing to apply for study abroad. For some nontraditional students, studying abroad may mean missing work. If this is the case for you, connecting with OIP and Office of Financial Assistance and applying for scholarships can help ease some financial burden.

Nontraditional students may bring additional life experiences to study abroad compared to traditional-aged college students. These experiences often allow for enhanced cultural

exploration and may further enrich not only their own study abroad experience but the experiences of their fellow participants. Understanding how study abroad can fit into your pre-existing set of responsibilities during the inquiry, advising, and application phases and before departure can help facilitate a valuable experience.

**Questions to consider:**

- What resources does my host country have for nontraditional students?
- Do I have responsibilities at work or home that may affect study abroad program length?
- What types of housing accommodations will make me most comfortable? Which programs or host countries offer these options?
- Have I connected with the OIP and program faculty to discuss my anticipated needs while abroad?
- What opportunities will there be to connect with other program participants or people from the host country? Will there be other adult students on this program?
- What are the cultural connotations of adult students in my host country?

**Resources:**

- For additional resources, student testimonies, videos, blogs, and more, visit the OIP [website](#).

Author: Olivia Slack, OIP Staff

## Heritage Seekers

Heritage seeking through study abroad can be a powerful experience for many students. If you are interested in traveling to a country where you have roots or ties, you may have the opportunity to learn more about your family’s ancestry, language, culture, and history. Heritage seeking can be a complex journey filled with opportunities for community-building and cultural connection. Still, you may experience unexpected moments of culture shock or dissonance as you encounter cultural nuances in your host country. For many heritage seekers, these experiences often foster a new sense of belonging and understanding of themselves.

Although you may already have a good amount of knowledge about your host country, consider doing further research on other heritage seekers’ experiences in the country.

Your host country may have varying opinions of Americans or the U.S., and despite your cultural heritage, you may be perceived by some as American first.

Some heritage seekers may also feel pressure to be “experts” on their host country’s culture, language, or traditions. Consider how you may feel if you find you are not as confident with the language as some expect you to be or as you thought you were. Additionally, consider how your cultural background and identity shifts while abroad may impact your experience.

Even if you do research ahead of time and consider yourself to be very familiar with your host culture, traveling to a new place may still feel unfamiliar to you. You may find it useful to brainstorm how you want to react if you’re asked uncomfortable or unexpected questions by locals. Study abroad alums have also emphasized the importance of self-care and understanding that if you need to take a day to rest, you aren’t “failing” your experience. Similarly, it may be helpful to speak to another student who has studied abroad in your host country or who has studied abroad from a heritage-seeking perspective.

**Questions to consider:**

- What aspects of my cultural, religious, or ethnic heritage am I most excited to explore in my host country?
- How will my cultural background or identity impact my experience abroad?
- How will I feel if someone in my host country assumes I can speak or write a language based on my visible racial or ethnic identity?
- How will I react if I encounter parts of my host country’s culture that I disagree with or am surprised by?
- How are people from the United States perceived in my host country? Will I be treated differently because I am a study abroad student coming from the U.S.?

**Resources:**

- For additional resources, student testimonies, videos, blogs, and more, visit the OIP [website](#).

Author: Olivia Slack, OIP Staff

## Student Athletes

Many student athletes may believe that studying abroad won't work for them because of intense schedules and training during the semester. However, Meredith offers many short-term programs that can work well for student athletes' schedules and give them the opportunity to embark on an international educational experience. Summer or spring break programs may be especially good fits for student athletes, but with some advance planning a semester-long experience may be possible as well.

Studying abroad can provide opportunities for student athletes to engage with the world and learn more about sports, sports medicine, and exercise science in other countries. Additionally, many student athletes may find internships abroad to be an attractive option to maximize their time.

If you are a student athlete interested in studying abroad, be sure to connect with the OIP and with your coach or mentor to discuss any questions you may have. We are excited to help you find a program that will work with your schedule, interests, and needs. While abroad, there may also be opportunities to continue playing a sport, whether that's the one you play at Meredith or another you're interested in learning about. There may be local clubs or associations that you can join while you're abroad or other ways to stay on track with your sport.

### **Questions to consider:**

- When would be the best time to participate in study abroad based on my training and playing schedule?
- Do I have any pre- or post-season obligations to my team or sport?
- Do I need to continue training while I'm abroad? If so, what facilities will I have access to in my host country? Can my specific dietary or nutritional requirements be met while abroad?
- Are there options to play my sport or others in my host country?

### **Resources:**

- For additional resources, student testimonies, videos, blogs, and more, visit the OIP [website](#).

## Military-Connected Students

As a military-connected student, you may already be familiar with some of the challenges and rewards of traveling abroad or other experiences requiring cross-cultural adjustment. Study abroad can be a rewarding experience for many military-connected students who have already cultivated skills like adaptability and perseverance. However, there are also some questions to consider as you prepare for study abroad as a military-connected student.

If you are currently serving in the military, be sure to confirm with your unit that you are eligible to study abroad. Additionally, look into potentially using your GI Bill benefits to help fund your study abroad experience. You may be eligible to use these benefits for Meredith College faculty-led programs or at approved foreign institutions, but they may only apply toward educational expenses such as tuition, not lodging, airfare, or third-party fees.

It is also important to research your host country before you depart. Some foreign cultures have different perspectives on the U.S. military or have rules about wearing camouflage clothing if you aren't a local active military personnel. Understanding these cultural contexts can help you have a successful experience abroad.

### **Questions to consider:**

- How is the U.S. military and the military in general viewed in my host country? How might that affect my experience?
- What military assistance and benefits can I use towards my study abroad program? Have I talked to my local veteran resource office or Meredith's Office of Financial Assistance?
- What military, work, family, or home responsibilities do I need to take into consideration when choosing a program? Will program length factor into my decision?

### **Resources:**

- For additional resources, student testimonies, videos, blogs, and more, visit the OIP [website](#).

Author, Olivia Slack, OIP Staff

## Mental Health & Self Care

When you study or travel abroad, the first thing you unpack is yourself. Many students may go into the study abroad process believing that going to another country can help them “escape” problems they have at home. However, research shows that study and travel abroad can often exacerbate pre-existing mental health issues or cause stress to show up in new ways.

Traveling abroad can be an amazing opportunity to learn more about the world and yourself. But it’s important to recognize that you are bringing your lived experiences with you to your host country while also adjusting to a new culture, schedule, and peer group. The OIP is here to help you be successful in your study abroad experience and proactively prepare for different sources of stress you may encounter.

Time and time again, experience has shown that students who share mental health struggles and concerns with the OIP and their program faculty have high rates of success while abroad. Please consider connecting with our office to discuss your plan to exercise good mental health habits and self-care while abroad. We are happy to share resources and support you as you prepare for your study abroad experience.

If you see a therapist or psychiatrist regularly, connect with them early on in your study abroad process to ask if they are able to continue seeing you virtually while you’re abroad or if you will need to explore other options. Additionally, it is important to disclose prescribed medications to the OIP in the post-acceptance process so that we may advise you appropriately about traveling with these medications.

Doing research on your own prior to departure is another important step in your mental health and study abroad journey. The resources shared here are only a sample of the many wonderful stories, tips, and articles about mental health and study abroad that exist and can be found with a quick Google search.

### **Questions to consider:**

- How do I react to and cope with stress?
- How do I manage discomfort?
- What strategies can I use to cope with the challenges and stress during my program?
- What forms of self-care keep me grounded here at home? How might I continue those habits abroad?
- If I have an existing relationship with a counselor or therapist, can they continue to counsel me abroad? If not, what is my plan while abroad?
- What steps can I take prior to departure to support my mental health?

- How might traveling abroad exacerbate my existing mental health challenges or stress?
- What predominant opinions or stigmas exist around mental health in my host country?

**Resources:**

- For additional resources, student testimonies, videos, blogs, and more, visit the OIP [website](#).

Author, Olivia Slack, OIP Staff

## Diversity and Identity: Additional Resources

### **Diversity Abroad & Be Globalii by DA Global**

Diversity Abroad and Be Globalii by DA Global is a leading international organization dedicated to ensuring that students from diverse economic, educational, ethnic, and social backgrounds have equal access and opportunity to participate in global education. The Office of International Programs is a proud member of Diversity Abroad. Because of our membership, we have access to wealth of resources about identity and diversity abroad—and we want to share them with you. Just ask!

- [Diversity Abroad Articles and Student Resources](#): Helpful stories written by diversity abroad students from different backgrounds.

### **IES Abroad**

A leading study abroad affiliate provider, IES Abroad provides students of diverse backgrounds with important predeparture resources.

- [Diversity-Related Study Abroad Resources](#)

### **Black & Abroad**

“Black & Abroad is a cultural collective dedicated to redefining world experiences for the modern black traveler. Seeing a need to elevate the community through world exploration, Black & Abroad was founded to fulfill that very purpose. We serve as a resource for travel related media to inspire the explorer within. Our collective of influencers have come together to share their travel experiences to assist us in showing familiar faces in unfamiliar places.”

*After doing research in this handbook and on our Identity-Based Resource pages, do you know of other resources we can include? Please share them with us at [internationalprograms@meredith.edu](mailto:internationalprograms@meredith.edu).*



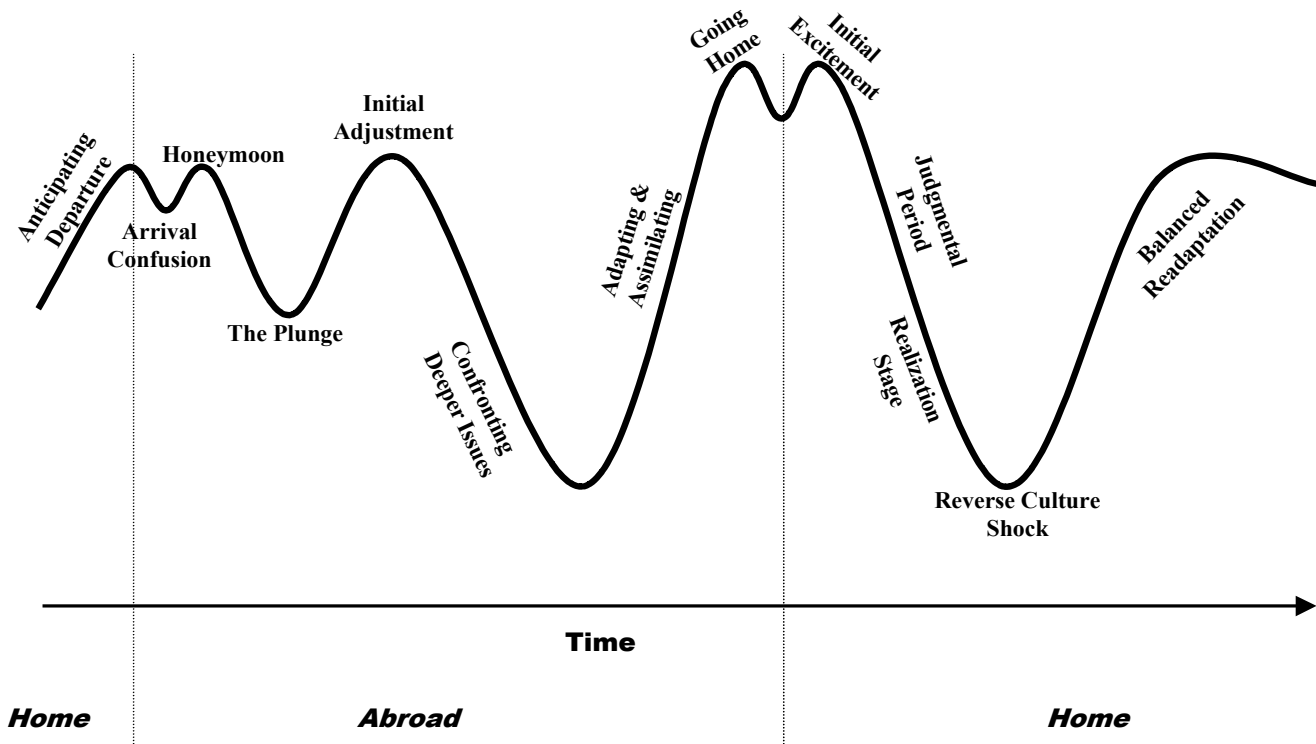
## PREPARING FOR CULTURE SHOCK

You are embarking on a journey and adventure that will have lasting effects on the rest of your life. Though all the clichés associated with the study abroad experience usually end up being true—“enriching,” “exhilarating,” even “life-changing”—the experience can also be a difficult one, jarring you from the lifestyle and norms to which you are accustomed. Of course, culture shock manifests itself differently in different people, but research has detected general patterns of emotional highs and lows experienced by international travelers. These phases vary in duration and severity, and are not necessarily linear.

- **Euphoria**—The first few hours, days or weeks abroad are often characterized by the excitement of sensory overload. Both adrenaline and expectations are running high, and everything seems new and intriguing.
- **Irritability & Hostility**—Once the initial “honeymoon” phase subsides, dissonances between native and host cultures begin to seem more pronounced, and a sense of alienation can set in. Curiosity and enthusiasm about-face, transforming into frustration, insecurity, negativity toward local culture, glorification of home culture, exaggerated responses to minor problems, withdrawal and/or depression.
- **Gradual Adjustment**—With time, you’ll begin to orient yourself to a different set of cultural practices and feel increasingly comfortable and confident in your new surroundings. Your sense of humor, which may have been lying dormant for a while, will reemerge.
- **Re-entry or Reverse Culture Shock**—Upon returning home, you will be faced with integrating your abroad experience with life in the United States, where you might feel disoriented, out of place or changed by your experience in a way that makes relating to family and friends difficult.

While studying abroad you will most likely experience these ups and downs. You may sometimes feel as if you are on a big roller coaster ride. While you cannot prevent these emotions, it is helpful to know what to expect. Please see the *Cross-Cultural Transitions* diagram on the following page.

## Cross-Cultural Transitions: An Emotional Roller Coaster



The above graph was adapted from works by Margaret Pusch and others.

While some degree of culture shock is virtually inevitable, there are things you can do to help yourself overcome it before you begin your journey:

- **Research Your Host Country Prior to Departure.** Read up on your host country's history, religion, art, politics, and natural resources. Become well-versed in its politics and current affairs—not only will this give you something to talk about with locals, it will help to dispel the stereotype of the “ignorant American.” Read novels and watch movies from your host country, if available—they can provide insight into nuances of humor and social interactions, which can be very different from those at home.
- **Talk to Students Who Studied in the Same Region.** They are the best way to find out about the etiquette, social norms, unspoken rules and idiosyncrasies of your host culture. If you know international students from your host country, talk to them about the challenges they encountered in coming to the U.S. This “reverse perspective” can give you valuable insights into the differences between the two countries.
- **Read The Materials Provided to You by Your Program.** It can be tempting to skip these, but past students stressed the importance of paying attention to such

materials. Many have been painstakingly researched and prepared specifically to help you!

- **Keep An Open Mind.** While pre-departure “research” is essential, mentally prepare yourself for surprises. No matter how much you think you know about your host country, not everything is going to match up to your expectations. Keep your preconceptions flexible!

While abroad you will also have to manage without many of the everyday support systems you’ve grown accustomed to and worked hard to establish, like family, friends, and most of your personal belongings. Yet the way you react to culture shock is up to you—you can respond to the differences you find in the day-to-day life, values, customs and social cues of your host country with judgment and rejection, or you can broaden your frame of reference to recognize that other ways of doing things are often as valid as the ones to which you are accustomed. Of course, no matter how tolerant you are on an intellectual level, psychological responses such as those listed above can still be very powerful. However, there are also a few tips to help you manage culture shock once you are abroad.

- **This is Normal!** Recognizing the normal symptoms of culture shock, and acknowledging that they are common and not at all abnormal, can preclude further anxiety and frustration.
- **Settle into your Living Space as Much as Possible.** This can make you feel more grounded and less like an outsider.
- **Get Involved.** Sign up for extracurricular activities and/or volunteer work. Not only is it a great way to meet people, but you avoid the stagnant stretches of time when homesickness can creep up on you.

Facing the challenges, adapting to a new environment and new ways of doing things, and taking responsibility for yourself will give you a tremendous sense of accomplishment and self-confidence. If you can navigate the train system in Italy or swim with sea lions in the Galapagos, you can do anything!

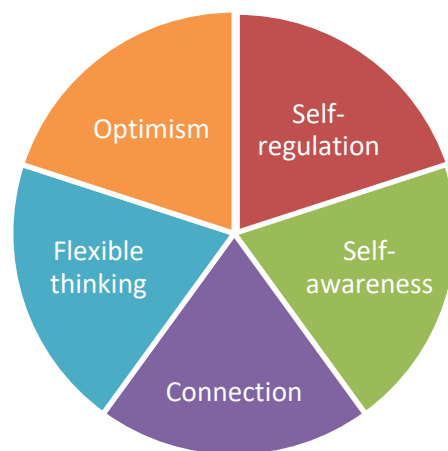
Source: **Glimpse Culture Shock Acclimation Guide.**

## Resilient Traveling

As we've mentioned before, study abroad can be stressful. Students will have a variety of new challenges and stresses to navigate including:

- Loneliness
- Culture Shock
- Group Conflict
- Personal Struggles

Resiliency refers to our ability to bounce back and adapt when challenges arise or after we have negative experiences. There are five key characteristics of a resilient traveler:



**Self-awareness:** How familiar we are with our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

**Connection:** Engaging with others so that we can feel less alone.

**Flexible thinking:** Rigid ways of thinking limit our options, while flexible thinking allows for more balance and perspective.

**Self-regulation:** The ability to express distress in ways that promote well-being.

**Optimism:** By promoting psychological well-being, optimism helps us challenge unproductive ways of thinking, improves our attitude, and encourages us to let go of things we can't control.

**Source:** University of Michigan, Resilient Traveling

<https://resilient-traveling.umich.edu/>

## Culture – The Hidden Dimension

So you've thought about culture shock, but what is the main underlying root of culture shock—culture? One of the first things you will encounter when you go abroad is something you can't really see, but which, if you don't understand what it is and how it works, can seriously affect how you adjust to and enjoy your time overseas. That "thing" is CULTURE. We are not referring to being a "cultured person" or possessing a taste for modern art and opera. Culture is a neutral term, neither good nor bad, and refers to the broadest notion of the learned knowledge that humans use to fulfill their needs and wants. It refers to the collective historically-based patterns, values, ideas, and ways of living that people have learned within their own society. It is comprised of all those things we learn as part of growing up including language, religion, beliefs about economic and social relations, political organization and legitimacy, and the thousands of "Do's and Don'ts" society deems important that we know to become a functioning member of that group.

When you go abroad you immediately meet individuals, perhaps a bewildering variety of them, but you also enter another "culture." The behaviors and attitudes you can observe in others are molded and motivated by their prior cultural learning, just as you have been molded by yours. You can't see a person's culture directly because feelings, judgments, and mental constructs are not always on display. They do, however, become evident through what people say or do. Culture has been defined in literally hundreds of ways for different reasons. For study abroad purposes, we define culture as the shared sets of values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors which are widely held by members of the host culture. A sojourner will not only need to be aware of these cultural patterns (her own and those of others) but will have to realize that culture exists in every interaction and she must learn to respond to it appropriately.

To understand why people behave the way they do means learning about values and beliefs. While the behavior of people from another culture may seem strange to you, it probably makes sense to them. The reason any behavior makes sense is simply because it is consistent with what a person believes or holds dear. Conversely, when we say that what someone has done "makes no sense," what we mean is that the action contradicts what we think that person feels or wants.

Going abroad without understanding the likely points of confusion across cultures, and why they tend to occur, is a sure recipe for problems. The bad news is that crossing cultural boundaries often produces its share of stress and anxiety. The good news is that overcoming such obstacles makes one wiser and more knowledgeable.

Making mistakes is inevitable. Things are not always what you think they are and the most ordinary interactions may occasionally take on a surreal quality. Why? Because the simplest things matter and mistakes will most likely happen.

A good start towards figuring this all out begins by acknowledging that:

- they have a culture
- you have a culture
- some things in their culture will be (or may seem) similar to yours
- some things will be or may seem different (in ways you may not imagine!)

One of your main jobs while abroad is to figure out for the new culture: what those differences are, where they come from, what they mean, and how you are going to respond when misunderstandings arise.

## Approaching Culture

It is also useful to know how people respond to, and the beliefs they may hold towards, difference. Any cross-cultural journey is going quickly to put you in touch with those attitudes. However, you want to be careful and look out for:

- **Ethnocentrism:** An ethnocentric attitude means that folks believe their culture is the best, superior to all others.
- **Naïve Realism:** People that believe that everyone else sees the world (or should!) as they do and interpret events as they do. For them there is only one reasonable explanation for everything. When they discover that others do NOT share those views, they tend to denigrate those who are different. Implicit in this approach is their belief that if one culture (their own) is inherently better, then all others must be inferior or lack some essential quality that one's own culture possesses.
- **Stereotyping:** a strong tendency to characterize people of other cultures unfairly, collectively, and often negatively. This generalization is applied to every member of a culture ("All Americans are naïve " or "All British are reserved"), or used to generalize based on experience with only a few people from the group ("All Americans must be naïve like Nancy"). Stereotypes can be negative ("They" are never on time) or positive ("X" are all hard workers). Often employed by a dominant group to denigrate or stigmatize less powerful groups, stereotyping substitutes "a prejudiced attitude" for "an objective analysis."

Fortunately most ethnocentric folks stay at home—but occasionally all of us find ourselves having ethnocentric moments when we are abroad. When the train is so late leaving Arezzo that we miss our connection in Bologna, we might say, "The Italians are so disorganized! Their trains are always late. In America, we would never tolerate this kind of inefficiency!" While we fume, Italians shrug their shoulders and head for an

espresso to pass the time until the next train. The actual fact of the matter is that during the previous travel break, the trains ran like clockwork. And the further fact of the matter is that Italian trains are clean and they are cheap, enabling tens of thousands of Italians (and the likes of us) to move about their country efficiently and effectively every day. And then there is the issue of trains in the USA!!! What we could/should have said is “This train is late,” not “Italians are late.”

What we could have reflected on is how nice it is that most of the time we can pop on a train mid-day in Arezzo and be in Rome in time for dinner. We might further ponder the challenges that Italy faces in getting people from one point to another. For starters Italy is not a rich country. And to compound matters, there is a mountain range running from north to south throughout most of the country. Strikes occur with little warning, disrupting schedules. Furthermore, we might reflect, it is simply not possible (to say nothing of desirable) for all Italians to drive to work because most city centers have their origin in centuries past—and are full of palazzos and piazzas, not parking decks. In other words, the very reason we love to be in Italy is that we can be in touch with an ancient civilization even as we are in the midst of a modern one. We can eat a pizza in Verona while we gaze out on the Roman Forum. Do you get the drift? Rather than being hasty to pronounce, we can use points of differences in cultures as an occasion to reflect on the origins and implications of those differences.

And if we can't figure out what we have observed, we can ask a local and make a friend!

Throughout the process of preparing and studying abroad, it is important to guard against the natural tendency of humans to be critical of cultural practices and attitudes which are different from their own, especially in the early stages of adaptation. It is equally easy to make snap judgments about groups or individuals if things are not going well. While stereotyping may be temporarily satisfying to someone in the throes of culture shock, it is destructive and alienating in the long run.

There are three approaches that can help you avoid ethnocentrism and stereotyping, and which will prove beneficial to your adaptation. They are **cultural humility**, **ethno-relativism**, and using a “**cultural generalization**” as a step toward understanding the individuals you meet abroad.

- **Cultural Humility:** When we have cultural humility, we understand that cultural learning is a life-long process (with no fixed endpoint) that requires flexibility, self-reflection, and self-critique as well as the ability to let go of our long-held beliefs/stereotypes about certain groups of people (Tervalon, Murray-Garcia, 1998).
- **Ethno-relativism**, unlike ethnocentrism, assumes that cultures can only be understood relative to one another, and that a particular behavior can only be understood within a cultural context. Instead of the “Golden Rule” (treat others as

you would like to be treated), study abroad students should use the “**Platinum Rule**” (treat others as they would treat themselves).

- A **cultural hypothesis**, unlike a stereotype, is a noting of the predominant tendencies in a cultural group; in other words, the tendency of the majority of people to hold certain values and beliefs and engage in certain patterns of behavior. This can be a useful way of managing information and anticipating how people will think and behave. However, not everyone you meet in a particular culture will always fit these generalizations, or they may fit some but not others. Just as within your own culture, there are individual differences and you should remind yourself of this any time you want to categorize the people you are meeting and interacting with.

Good travelers are inclined toward the cultural hypotheses and tourists are inclined toward the stereotype. What’s the difference? Remember your study abroad orientation session: “When they travel, tourists seek as much of their own ways and culture as possible; world travelers try to leave their own culture behind and adapt to the new culture around them.”

Meredith students are travelers!

Sources: What’s Up With Culture? <http://www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/>

Melanie Tervalon & Jann Murray-Garcia. “Cultural Humility Versus Cultural Competence: A Critical Distinction in Defining Physician Training Outcomes in Multicultural Education.” 1998.

## Trying to Figure it Out – What is Cultural?

### ***What Is Culturally Determined? What Is Universal? What Is Personal***

What is *culture*? That is not a question easily answered. For our purposes, culture is defined as “**a people’s design for living as encoded in their language, and seen in the physical artifacts, beliefs, values, customs, and activities that have been passed down from one generation to the next.**”

Let’s try again: culture is what a group of people have in common with each other and how they together differ from other groups of people. Let’s look for a minute at what culture is *not*. It is not *universal*. The *universal* is what all people share, the ways in which we are all the same.

And it is not *personal*. *Personal* is how each one of us is different from everyone else, including those in our group.



So each of us is composed of 1) things that are **universal** (i.e., likely to be common to all human beings), 2) things that **reflect our culture** (likely to be true of others with our same background), and 3) things that are **personal** (i.e., likely to be uniquely our own). It is interesting and fun to try to tease out which of these factors is responsible for certain aspects of who we and others are.

*For Example: In order to begin to understand the cultures you encounter when you travel, you must begin to formulate cultural hypotheses. Let's try an example. Our Italian teacher is always late. She walks in late to our class, where we have all been sitting for 10 minutes, and greets us but does not apologize. Is Manuela disorganized, rude, oblivious, or something we don't understand? It has to be the latter because she organizes many things for our program and does so splendidly. She is not only not rude, but she is also extremely polite and kind. Maybe she is oblivious—but that doesn't seem likely because we are all sitting there, looking, I confess, rather disapproving, when she arrives. When we have a good-bye dinner for our Italian families, at least 25% of them come at least 15 minutes late and 10% come 30 minutes late. We are puzzled.*

*Out of our puzzlement we begin to formulate a cultural hypothesis. Italians do not think about deadlines in the same way that Americans do. (Back to those trains again.) If you really get interested in this subject, you can read around in cross-cultural literature and learn that there are, according to the experts, two ways of looking at time—monochronic and polychronic. Most Americans subscribe to the former way of looking at time: schedules and deadlines are givens and people must adjust to meet their demands. We measure time and are always aware that it is limited.*

Those cultures with a polychronic view of time see time as a tool. They control it; it does not control them. It is not necessary to adhere to a schedule. Something might come up that is more important than the schedule you agreed to. Your baby, for instance, may be crying and you don't want to leave him until he stops. Or you may run into an old friend on the way and it would be rude not to stop and chat. Other Italians would understand that and would not mind if you were late. Once we understand this, we can begin to see our teacher's behavior—and that of many Italians whom we have come to know—as a cultural matter. And we can reflect on our own time driven culture and begin to ask ourselves about how we live. Does it *really* matter if we have to shift the rest of the day by 10 minutes or take 5 minutes off our other two classes or end Italian 10 minutes early?

*A few things to think about before you begin thinking about culture:*

- 1.) Don't assume that because one or two people you meet are a certain way, all people from that culture are. Look for things that many (if not most) people do, believe, own, think, etc.

*Because you meet a French student who angrily criticizes the US government's policy in the Middle East and dismisses your efforts to carry on a conversation about it, do not assume that all French either feel or would behave the same. If this becomes a recurring interaction, then you might begin to formulate a cultural hypothesis to account for it, but not until it happens repeatedly. It probably won't.*

2.) And when you generalize, do not generalize too widely.

*Because people in the small rural town where you are living in Chile go to mass every Sunday morning and to traditional indigenous religious meetings (which are not Christian) every Sunday afternoon, you cannot assume that all Chileans do so. But you can compare small town American life with small town Chilean life. And you can wonder about the capacity of these Chileans to embrace two different religions—and reflect on how in our own culture that would not be common. Then you can ask the interesting question, “Why?” of both cultures.*

3.) And be certain you understand the context before you begin to generalize about the people in it.

*Don't assume that because you observe a behavior in London or Paris, it is true of the English or French. Ask yourself how many of the people you are seeing are English or French—and ask yourself who the English and the French are these days. London and Paris are vast, multi-cultural cities. When you make a hypothesis, you will want to talk about the context in which you are observing the culture.*

## Understanding Your Own Culture

### *UNDERSTANDING YOUR OWN CULTURE*

So in trying to understand other cultures, it is important to understand your own as well as the fact that people from other countries will have preconceived notions of what American culture is like. People in your host country may already have ideas about you through the media, tourists, or co-workers. Following is a list of common stereotypes past students have encountered about the U.S.:

Others often see people from the United States as:

- hard working
- wealthy
- aggressive
- optimistic
- extravagant, wasteful
- disrespectful of authority
- outgoing, friendly
- loud, rude, boastful
- racially prejudiced
- informal
- naïve
- superficial

- always in a hurry
- ignorant of other countries
- generous

After reading this list, what cultural assumptions do you anticipate encountering in your host country? Why do you think these stereotypes exist? What image do you project as an American, and what image do you want to project? While others may have ideas about you as an American, it is also important to analyze how you perceive yourself. Dr. L. Robert Kohls, in his book *Survival Kit for Overseas Living*, composed a list of ten values to which, he believes, most Americans adhere. His use of the word “American” refers to people from the United States.

Many Americans believe the following statements:

1. There is no such thing as “fate”; everyone has control over what happens in their lives.
2. Change is good, leading to development, improvement, and progress.
3. Time is of the utmost importance and needs to be used productively.
4. The individual is the main unit of society and expressing one’s individuality is positive.
5. Competition brings out the best in any individual in any system.
6. “Keeping busy,” even for recreation, is highly valued in our society.
7. Informality is to be preferred over stuffy formality in all aspects of life.
8. The direct approach is the best, most open, and most honest approach.
9. Decisions need to be made efficiently and should be based on practical, realistic considerations, not sentimentality.
10. Buying new things—cars, electronic equipment, houses, etc.—is desirable, and the bigger, often, the better.

Source: Robert Kohls, *Survival Kit for Overseas Living*, 1996.

What people from the U.S. view as positive characteristics might be viewed as negative by other cultures. Americans who have grown up outside of the U.S., or non-Americans studying in the U.S. may also hold different values. With which of these values do you agree? How do these ideas shape you as an American and as a person in general? Which of these values do you anticipate may conflict with the values of your host country?

In turn, you should consider the cultural assumptions that you have about people from other countries. How do you think people will act in your host country? Where have your stereotypes come from? A great benefit from studying abroad is experiencing different values, norms, and customs and learning to see life through different lenses. Different cultures have fundamentally different ways of approaching life and its problems. By

better understanding both your own culture and the new culture, these differences can begin to make more sense.

### **Suggestions for dealing with such stereotypes about travelers from the U.S.:**

- Try not to get defensive or take it personally if people make generalizations that you see as negative.
- Be careful not to stereotype others as well, thinking other cultures are ignorant about the United States, or that they do things “backwards.”
- Be aware of your surroundings and observant of the host culture. Respect the differences in culture.
- Engage in dialogue to explore where certain stereotypes come from.
- Share your insights and experiences. Bring something from home that represents your values or those of your culture.
- Be familiar with U.S. policies and values as well as learning about those of your host country. (Start with the Internet and listening to the news.)
- Do not be afraid to ask questions, especially from faculty and local staff.

Study abroad alumni consistently say that their time abroad was a highlight of their college education, and that it has enhanced their careers and personal lives. **Students who build their own experience, explore the positive aspects of differences, and take responsibility for their own development stand to get the most out of their experience abroad.** Learning how you respond to different people and challenging situations, as well as gaining new ways to approach people, problems, and issues, will be invaluable to your future. From day one make the most of your time abroad; it will be over before you know it. *Carpe Diem!*

Source: IES Pre-departure Guides

### *PREPARING TO BE “THE AMERICAN” ABROAD*

As you continue to learn more about your new cultural environment abroad, you will occasionally be put in the position of being a spokesperson about the U.S. and American culture. News accounts of U.S. policies and their effects on countries around the world will often cause some of your foreign friends and acquaintances to ask you questions about why Americans do certain things and follow certain foreign policies. Do you feel comfortable that you know enough about your own country and its politics to answer these questions? Study abroad alumni often remark on how they sometimes had a difficult time explaining the history, politics, and culture of the U.S. when pressed by their friends, much less in an academic setting. They say they wish they had done more research on American history and looked at their own cultural values more critically before they went abroad. Some of what we’ve already discussed here talks about what

are American values, but you should realize that you will probably be ready to discuss more than just cultural issues. You should also have a good basic knowledge of American politics and policies, being ready to answer questions about your own country as you search for answers on those of the country you are going to.

Source: Rick Steves, **Europe Through the Back Door**

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Advice from noted travel writer Rick Steves

***Travel like Gandhi** – with simple clothes, open eyes and an uncluttered mind. It's a gift to be simple. If things aren't to your liking, don't change the things, change your liking.*

\*

## ACADEMIC INFORMATION FOR AFFILIATE STUDENTS

### Transferring Credits Back to Meredith

Make sure you have turned in your *Application for Off-Campus Credit* form with the appropriate approval signatures from your advisor and relevant department heads to the Office of International Programs. The office staff will endorse the form and deliver it to the Office of the Registrar.

To ensure your courses taken abroad transfer back into your major and general credits, make sure you have extra courses approved before you leave.

**Semester Programs:** You must have at least 12 hours of credit signed off on in order to get financial aid. However, we recommend that you get at least 7–8 courses approved, in order to give yourself some flexibility once you arrive. This will allow for scheduling conflicts, issues with pre-requisites, and lecturers who you may not care for (remember, this may just be a straight lecture course).

**Summer Programs:** You must earn at least 6 hours of credit in order to qualify for financial aid for the summer.

**It is your responsibility to ensure that your program provides a transcript of your work directly to the Registrar's Office in accordance with transfer credit policy. You should then monitor your transcript and credits to ensure they have been properly applied.**

However, if you do get abroad and find a new course that you want to take but did not get pre-approved, you should email a description and what you would like the course to count for (e.g. your major/minor or general education) back to a member of the International Programs staff. They will work with the acting Director of General Education or the appropriate department head for approvals and let you know what course equivalency is approved for that particular course or courses. Because this process typically takes at least a week and specific approvals cannot be guaranteed, we recommend having several extra courses approved before you leave.

Other important issues to note for credit transfers are:

- **Four Year Course Plan:** Review your graduation plan with your advisor to ensure that you will graduate on time. Take a copy of your Off-Campus Credit form and your transcript abroad so you know what classes you already have approved and can show your pre-requisites clearly to advisors abroad. Make sure you are also

aware of the courses you need to pre-register for the following semester as well, as semester students will do this abroad.

- **Seniors:** Meredith requires that you complete 24 of your last 30 hours of credit at Meredith. However, you may apply for the study abroad exception (requiring 15 of your last 30 hours to be taken at Meredith) by submitting an *Application for Seniors to Study Abroad* to the International Programs Committee. Should you desire to study abroad for your entire senior year, your application will require further approval of the Provost. For the application and instructions, please see Liz or Brooke.
- **Course equivalents:** Make certain that you check carefully both course equivalents and course credit hours. For example, if your major requires a 3-hour seminar you do not want to take a 2-hour one abroad. It is your responsibility to check on course credit issues—both before and after you arrive—with your advisor.
- **C or better:** Meredith requires at least a “C” or better for credits to transfer back into Meredith. Courses where a student receives a D or F grade are not accepted for transfer credit at Meredith. If you are repeating a course for a better grade, transfer credit cannot replace a grade earned at Meredith. The only courses abroad that receive Meredith credit are those taught by Meredith faculty on specific Meredith summer programs.
- **Foreign Language credit hours:** If you are studying a foreign language abroad, please note the following:
  - You may not get credit for a course abroad that you have already taken at Meredith or elsewhere.
  - For semester programs, you are strongly advised to take a literature course in the foreign language.
  - You should take language courses at the highest level at which you place. You will not receive credit for courses taken at a lower level than approved by the chair of the Dept. of Foreign Languages.
- **Auditing a course:** You may find that you want to sit in on a local university course or take over the typical course load abroad without affecting your grades. Auditing a course is often a simple solution to such a situation. However, audited courses abroad will not transfer back to Meredith College.



## Grades Abroad and Meredith Transcripts

So how will your grades transfer back to your Meredith College transcript? Course titles and grades from studying abroad coursework will show on your Meredith transcript as "study away" transfer credit. While these grades are not calculated into your GPA, they will appear on your transcript. The Office of International Programs feels (and research has shown) that it is better for the integrity of the program and your commitment to your academic experience abroad to have your program as part of your Meredith academic record.

## What if My Class Schedule Changes While I Am Abroad?!

**The Off-Campus Credit Form:** You must file an off-campus credit form with the Meredith College Registrar in order to receive credit for the courses you will take abroad. You can find this form on the Meredith College – Office of the Registrar website.

This form should be completed pre-departure, but what happens if your courses change unexpectedly after you arrive OR what if you won't be able to register for classes until you arrive in country?

**Be Prepared for Change:** When you're studying abroad on an affiliate program, registering for classes with a study abroad organization or at a foreign institution requires some **flexibility** and **patience** on your part. So, what do you do in the following scenarios?

- Your program informs you that you won't be able to register for courses until you arrive on campus.
- The courses you originally registered for are no longer available.
- The courses changed unexpectedly.
- You decide you want to drop a course that was on your original list and add a different one that is more interesting/applicable to you.

## Affiliate Course Changes: Follow These Steps

### **Step 1: Download a new Off-Campus Credit Form**

Navigate to the Office of the Registrar page on the Meredith website and download the off campus credit form. Read the instructions carefully.

### **Step 2: Obtain Course Descriptions & Syllabi for New Courses**

You'll need to provide course descriptions and syllabi for your new courses.

### **Step 3: Email Your Faculty Advisor and the Office of International Programs**

Notify your faculty advisor and the OIP that your courses have changed. Engage in an email exchange with your faculty advisor about how the new courses will count towards your degree, major, minor or general education requirements. Send the course descriptions and syllabi to your faculty advisor and to the OIP.

### **Step 4: Contact Relevant Department Heads**

Once you and your faculty advisor have come to a mutual agreement about how these new courses will count, you need to start making contact with relevant department heads or directors.

- If you're hoping the course will fulfill a General Education requirement, then contact the Director of General Education; if you hope the course will count towards your major, contact your discipline's Department Head.
- Send course descriptions and syllabi.
- The OIP can help you with this process—just email them and ask!

### **Step 5: Contact the Office of the Registrar**

Make contact with the Registrar's Office ([registrar@meredith.edu](mailto:registrar@meredith.edu)) and send the new off-campus credit form and all relevant documentation (including emails) proving that you are authorized to transfer these courses back to Meredith for credit.