

April 28, 2009

**Re: Safety and health considerations for study abroad students
at Western Michigan University**

Dear parents, colleagues, students, and friends of study abroad at Western Michigan University,

An increasing number of WMU students are choosing to undertake learning opportunities abroad through exchange programs, faculty-led study abroad programs, internships, field work, etc. Recent health concerns have left some students and their families worried about overseas travel. I am writing today to respond to these concerns and to update you on the procedures WMU has in place to monitor the health and safety of our students overseas.

How does the Haenicke Institute monitor and assess health and safety issues?

Health and safety issues are assessed at the development stage of each program sponsored by WMU. We also select directors of faculty-led programs based on their knowledge of the region(s) they teach in, work closely with our exchange partners to ensure optimal conditions for students, and evaluate the history of success and professional administration of organizations providing international study programs before entering into agreements. In times of heightened security and/or health concerns, such as now, a final assessment may be conducted before the program begins. There are a number of sources of information we use for this purpose, including services provided through governments, such as the travel information from the U.S. State Department online at <<http://travel.state.gov>> and other countries; travel intelligence services; contacts within the country, when appropriate; and, input from faculty and staff with expertise in the appropriate countries.

This ongoing monitoring of health and security issues by the study abroad staff may lead to review by a larger WMU committee to explore additional actions if situations warrant. Potential actions include modifying the planned itinerary of a program, granting final approval for a program conditional to modification of contingency plans, changing the site and/or dates of a program, or even suspending or canceling a program. Decisions about whether to take such actions are usually made on a case-by-case basis using all the information available to us. The formal membership of the WMU Study Abroad Security/Health Review Council is as follows:

VP Student Affairs, Exec. Dir. International Programs, Deputy General Counsel, Executive Director Sindecuse Health Center, Provost & VP Academic Affairs, Director of Environmental Safety and Emergency Management, VP Legal Affairs and General Counsel, Manager Business Services, Medical Director Sindecuse Health Center, Dean HIGE, Assoc Dean of Students, VP Business and Finance & CFO, Exec. Dir. University

Relations, Assoc. VP Business and Finance & Controller, Assoc. Dean HIGE. Other university faculty and staff are invited as needed.

The university's pandemic planning committee is chaired by Patricia Holton, Director of Environmental Safety and Emergency Management. WMU Study Abroad is represented on this committee: http://www.obf.wmich.edu/safety/pandemic_preparedness.html. The university also maintains other committees for emergency management that meet regularly to review procedures. An emergency situation involving our students overseas would be addressed through existing university structures and procedures.

Dr. Lisa Marshall, Medical Director at Sindecuse Health Center, serves on the study abroad review council and provides expert medical advice on health concerns for overseas study. Sindecuse Health Center is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays to assist you with your medical needs. For additional questions regarding health care services at Sindecuse Health Center call (269) 387-3287 or visit: <http://www.wmich.edu/shc/>.

Please refer to the following Web sites for additional information regarding swine flu and traveling from an area with confirmed swine flu cases:

<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/content/SwineFluMexico.aspx>

http://www.who.int/csr/swine_flu/swine_flu_faq.pdf

http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/swineflu_you.htm

Students studying abroad through WMU are enrolled in appropriate health and emergency assistance insurance. Details are available from the Health and Safety link (left-hand menu) of the study abroad Web site: <http://www.wmich.edu/studyabroad>.

Should WMU decide to cancel a program prior to departure, or recall students currently abroad, every effort will be made to assist students in reintegrating their studies at home at the earliest possible time. In addition, given such exceptional circumstances, the normal refund policy may be modified to help students recover as many of their expenses as possible. However, students will remain responsible for any expenditures made on their behalf that cannot be recovered by the University.

What are the student's responsibilities for safety while studying abroad?

Above all, personal safety at home and abroad is primarily the student's responsibility. We ask students to take a number of steps to increase their preparation for and confidence in their program. These steps concern their connection with WMU, their local arrangements, and communication with their family.

Research destination and program

1. iJET travel intelligence database

The study abroad staff enrolls all study abroad students in WorldCue Traveler, one of the leading sources of travel intelligence available today. You will receive an e-mail

with instructions for logging on to the database. You should spend some time researching information on your chosen destination, particularly regarding health and security concerns. Please share this information with your family. From the time of your enrollment, the database will send you any appropriate alerts via e-mail. You may add two additional e-mail addresses under the tab “user management” on the log-in page of WorldCue Traveler. We encourage you to add the e-mail addresses of two family members so that they will receive e-mail updates at the same time. Much of the information presented in the travel intelligence database as well as in government publications may seem alarming at first. As you prepare for your trip and do further research, you will learn to put the information into context. We’ve never heard a student return to complain that they had spent too much time preparing for their study abroad project.

Maintain communication with WMU – HIGE

2. Provide up-to-date contact information.

It is very important that we have up-to-date contact information for you on file. As part of the pre-departure contract, every study abroad student agrees to fill out the Contact Verification Form accessible from the Resources link (left-hand menu) on the study abroad Web site at: <http://www.wmich.edu/studyabroad>. This should include a street address, phone number, and current e-mail, if available. Maintain and routinely check a primary email address that will be used by the Haenicke Study Abroad office to maintain contact with you while overseas.

3. Inform study abroad of your travel itinerary.

Please provide us with a written copy of your travel itinerary, via e-mail, letter, or fax. This will be particularly useful at the beginning and end of your program. Should you decide to travel prior to or following your program, such travel would be under your own responsibility, of course, as it would not be part of the study abroad program. Nonetheless, please let us know if you do not plan to return home immediately upon conclusion of your official program. In addition, if you plan a trip during your program, please inform your local host contact of your plans, particularly your expected return date.

4. Confirm safe arrival after travel.

Please send us a brief e-mail or fax to confirm your safe arrival at the beginning of your program, as well as your safe return home at the end of your program. For faculty-led WMU programs, this will be done by the program director, when appropriate.

5. Contact WMU immediately in the event of an emergency.

In the event of a safety or medical emergency, please phone the WMU Department of Public Safety at (269) 387-5555. DPS staff will know how to contact the appropriate person from our office and activate our emergency response procedures. WMU has an established emergency response system that allows us to call on qualified colleagues from various units across the University, as necessary.

Local communication abroad

6. Register with the U.S. Embassy.

WMU formally requires all students to register with the U.S. State Department before departure. There is a simple form to complete at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/>

7. Monitor travel alerts.

Please maintain your registration with iJET's WorldCue Traveler. If you lose or misplace your login information, contact the study abroad office and we will send you a new welcome message for your login.

You should actively seek information to help you make informed choices concerning your personal safety. While study abroad staff will respond to any questions and concerns that you may have, the best source for local information is often an international education professional at your site.

8. Confirm contingency plan with local contact.

If an emergency situation developed, who would be your main contact at your host organization? This resource should be available 24/7. Note this contact information and carry it with you along with contact information for WMU on your orange emergency assistance card provided at your pre-departure meeting. Also, familiarize yourself with local emergency numbers and the most appropriate choices for medical care. Should you experience difficulty in obtaining this information, please contact us for assistance.

9. Increase your personal awareness of your safety.

Just as it is important to be aware of your surroundings and personal affairs when traveling in the United States, it is even more so when traveling in a different culture. Many suggestions are covered in the pre-departure orientation session on safety and health. In addition, in the current situation, it is important not to draw undue attention to your nationality by your clothing and actions. You should try to blend in with the local population as much as possible. Avoid locations where large groups of tourists and Americans gather, as well as public demonstrations.

A good comprehensive online resource for safety considerations during study abroad is the SAFETI Clearinghouse at: <http://www.globaled.us/safeti/>

Communication with family

10. Discuss these issues with the people who care about you.

You may grow quickly in your knowledge of and comfort in the local culture. Ideally, your preparation will begin long before you leave. As you become more comfortable, it may be more difficult for you to remember any initial apprehension at a time when you were less familiar with this culture. Please consider the concerns that those who care about you may have. Discuss these issues with them before you leave and keep them updated as your sojourn progresses. Per University policy, study abroad staff

will discuss your situation only with the two emergency contacts you have authorized. Please inform your family and loved ones of this information. We have a Web page with useful information for parents under the Parent Information link (left-hand menu) at: www.wmich.edu/studyabroad. Parents are welcome to attend pre-departure sessions for your program. Please check with your faculty director and/or the study abroad office for the date and time.

11. Agree on means and frequency of communication with family.

It is often very difficult for the people who care about you to put the local situation into proper perspective from a distance. It is important your family understands that you might not have the same access to modern communication tools, such as the Internet, with the same frequency as at home. The routine of your life abroad may be very different from what you were accustomed to at home. Discuss means of communication—phone, e-mail, fax, etc.—with your family and agree on how often you will be in contact. A set routine for communicating with your family will go far in reassuring your loved ones. Particularly in the case of a local emergency, even if it is distant from your location, it is useful to let your family know that you are fine as soon as possible.

Further communication

A small number of WMU students choose a program through another organization, e.g. another university or a program provider. For questions regarding safety protocols, feel free to directly contact the program provider for non-WMU programs. Many organizations provide such information on their Web sites.

WMU security protocols are reviewed during mandatory pre-departure orientation sessions. For further questions regarding WMU study abroad programs, please contact our office at (269) 387-5890.

Recent events reinforce the awareness of the need to promote knowledge and understanding of other cultures in our increasingly interdependent world. We commend you for exploring ways to increase your potential for contribution to international understanding and we hope all our study abroad students have an experience that is educational, enriching, and as safe as possible. Western Michigan University and the professional staff at the Haenicke Institute for Global Education are pleased to provide you continuing support to this end.

Sincerely,

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