

Safety Guidelines for SIUE Study Abroad Student Participants

These safety guidelines have been developed to provide useful practical information for students studying abroad. The health and safety of study abroad participants is a primary concern at SIUE. Although no set of guidelines can guarantee the health and safety of each individual going on a study abroad program, these guidelines address issues that merit attention and thoughtful judgment. As a study abroad student, you should exercise the same personal safety precautions overseas as you would at home, and even more. Be aware that you will stand out overseas, possibly making you an easy target. At times, people you meet may see you with stereotypical eyes. “Americans” tend to carry backpacks, dress differently, speak loudly and have distinct accents. Meeting people and making new friends is an important part of studying abroad but be mindful. It is possible that an occasion may arise when someone may want to become your friend in order to take your money or your passport. It is important to use common sense at all times.

Protect Yourself:

- Know the basic “help” phrases in the native language.
- If you go out alone, always tell someone where you are going.
- Always report your travel plans to someone at your host institution, whether it is another student, professor, or on-site advisor. Be sure to register your trip with the U.S. Dept. of State prior to your departure from the U.S. You can do this online at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/>
- Do not give your home phone number or address to someone you have just met.
- Do not hitchhike.
- Be familiar with procedures for obtaining health and law enforcement services in the host country.
- Participate fully in all orientations before departure and on site. Read carefully and consider all information provided by the SIUE Office of Study Abroad, the program provider and/or the host institution that relates to safety and health conditions in the host country.

Protect Your Possessions:

- Wear a concealed money belt or neck pouch.
- Keep your money in two places. If you are robbed or lose some money, you will have a backup.
- Do not leave bags unattended.
- Do not accept packages from strangers.
- Leave copies of all important documents (passport, travel itinerary, insurance policies, medical record, etc.) in more than one place (e.g., at home in the U.S. and in your bags or room in the host country).
- Leave your passport and other valuables in your dorm, apartment, or room in a safe place. Do not carry your passport on a daily basis, unless you are going to cash traveler’s checks.

Be Vigilant:

- Do not stand out as a group or individual. Try to blend with your surroundings the best you can.
- Adopt an attitude of watchfulness and notice the people in your proximity. If someone seems to be following you, vary your route. Go to a store or a populated place or flag down a taxi.
- Do not go out alone with someone you have just met. Try to meet in a public place.
- Know the local laws: laws and systems of justice are not universal. You are subject to the laws of the host country while abroad.

Situations to Avoid:

- Avoid crowds, protest groups, or other potentially volatile situations.
- Avoid impairing your judgment due to excessive alcohol consumption.
- When using public transportation, avoid deserted trains, buses, and metros. Move to where other people are sitting.
- Avoid deserted streets and exercise caution in unfamiliar neighborhoods.
- Watch your alcohol consumption. Excessive drinking is neither appropriate nor safe in another culture and in unfamiliar surroundings. If you drink, know your limit.
- If you are sexually active, take proper precautions to avoid AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, or unwanted pregnancies.
- Do not resist the demands of a robber. Items are replaceable, you are not.

Especially for Women:

In certain locations women may have a difficult time adjusting to attitudes they encounter abroad, both in public and private interactions between men and women. Some men openly demonstrate their appraisal of women in ways that many women find offensive. It is not uncommon to be honked at, stared at, verbally and loudly approved of, and, in general, to be actively noticed simply for being a woman, and in particular, a U.S. American woman. Sometimes the attention can be flattering. Soon, it may become very annoying and potentially even angering. Local women, who often get the same sort of treatment, have learned through their culture how to ignore the attention. Many U.S. students find that difficult.

Eye contact with a stranger or a smile at someone passing in the street, which is not uncommon in the U.S., may result in totally unexpected invitations. Some women feel they are forced to stare intently at the ground when they walk down the street. You will have to learn the unwritten rules about what you can and cannot do. Women can provide support for each other; you may wish to get together several times early in your stay abroad to talk about what does and doesn't work for dealing with unwanted attention. U.S. women are seen as liberated in many ways and sometimes the cultural misunderstanding that comes out of that image can lead to difficult and unpleasant experiences. Needless to say, all of this may make male-female friendships more difficult to develop. Be careful about the implicit messages you are communicating, messages you may not intend in your own cultural context. Above all, try to maintain the perspective that these challenging and sometimes difficult experiences are part of the growth of cultural understanding, which is one of the important reasons you are studying abroad.

Uncomfortable situations may be avoided by taking the following precautions:

- Educate yourself beforehand about gender roles in the country you will be visiting.
- Dress conservatively. Clothing that is acceptable in the U.S. may be perceived as provocative in another country or disrespectful in a specific context (e.g., visiting a religious site)
- Do not overreact to stares, whistles or other forms of attention, as they may be intended to be compliments rather than harassment.
- Avoid walking alone at night or in questionable neighborhoods.
- Be aware that men from other cultures tend to mistake the friendliness of U.S. American women for romantic interest. Be aware of the implied messages you may be sending.
- If, after acknowledging cultural differences, you still feel uncomfortable with what you interpret as sexual harassment, you should talk with your resident director and/or contact SIUE's Study Abroad Coordinator.

Sexual Harassment

Study abroad participants, both women and men, should be aware that SIUE is committed to providing a living and study environment free from sexual harassment. The University encourages study abroad participants to report concerns and complaints so that prompt corrective measures can be taken to stop sexual harassment whenever it occurs.

What should you do if you experience sexual harassment while studying abroad?

- Be assertive and let the individual concerned know that his/her conduct is unwelcome and offensive to you.
- Document what has happened in writing.
- Report the situation to your on-site advisor, in-country contact, or your SIUE contact person in the US. If you are uncomfortable discussing the situation with your host in-country contact, contact the SIUE Study Abroad Coordinator directly. SIUE is committed to taking prompt and appropriate action in your support. If appropriate, an investigation will be conducted and kept as confidential as possible. Appropriate disciplinary action will be taken whether SIUE or foreign students and/or faculty are involved. If the evidence is inconclusive, some action may still be in order. You will be kept informed on the outcome of your complaint. If the individual who harassed you is not an employee of SIUE or host institution, you should still report the incident, because the University may be able to act on your behalf with regard to the situation.

Alcohol

Drinking alcohol can seem deceptively harmless, especially when you travel to countries where attitudes, customs, and drinking age may be different from the U.S. Nevertheless, excessive alcohol consumption impairs your judgment and can lead to disruptive behavior and risk of harm to yourself and to others, in addition to poor academic performance. If you choose to drink, be responsible and know your limit. You should never feel pressured to drink if you do not want to or feel embarrassed to order nonalcoholic beverages. Educate yourself by talking with your SIUE Study Abroad Coordinator about the customs, etiquette, and drinking age laws for your host country.

Drugs

Do not under any circumstances carry, use, buy, or sell illegal or controlled substances such as marijuana, hashish, mescaline, cocaine, heroin, Quaaludes, or designer drugs like ecstasy. It is also advisable that you do not associate with anyone engaged in such activities. If you are detained or caught with illegal substances overseas, you are subject to local, not U.S. laws. Being ignorant about drug laws of a country that you are visiting is not a defense. Penalties for possession of or trafficking in illegal drugs are often severe. In the event that a SIUE study abroad participant is detained or arrested by foreign officials for possession of an illegal substance, there is little that SIUE or the U.S. Embassy or Consulate can do to help you. Many countries do not accept bail, and pre-trial detention –often in solitary confinement – may last for months. Prisons lack even minimal comforts. Physical abuse, confiscation of personal property, degrading or inhumane treatment and extortion are not unknown. Trials can be lengthy, and few countries provide jury trials or require the presence of the accused at his/her trial. It is your responsibility to know the drug laws of a foreign country before you go. “I did not know it was illegal” will not get you out of jail. Some laws may be applied more strictly to foreigners than to local citizens; therefore, don’t assume that just because local people are using drugs, it’s acceptable for you to use drugs.

**For more information see the U.S. Department of State’s *Travel Warning on Drugs Abroad*:
http://travel.state.gov/travel/livingabroad_drugs.html**

HIV / AIDS

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is becoming an increasingly prevalent health problem worldwide. Although the risk of contracting HIV is more likely in certain countries, no country is completely risk-free. Contaminated blood and unprotected sexual contact remain the primary means by which HIV is transmitted. Acting responsibly and refraining from unprotected sex and high-risk activities can significantly reduce the possibility of AIDS. There is no foolproof list of guidelines which will protect you from the AIDS virus. However, while you travel and study abroad, there are things you can do to significantly decrease the risk of infection. Keep the following suggestions in mind:

- 1. Act responsibly.**
- 2. Some countries may not have the resources to adequately screen blood for HIV/AIDS or provide sterile needles. Avoid injections, IVs, or medical or dental treatments unless you are certain that needles and instruments are sterile.**
- 3. If you have a health condition that requires injections (e.g., diabetes), you should take along an adequate supply of syringes and needles. You will also need to take a note or prescription from your doctor if you carry syringes or needles with you.**
- 4. Avoid blood transfusions if at all possible.**
- 5. Refrain from high-risk activities, which involve the use of needles or syringes such as skin piercing, tattooing, acupuncture, or intravenous drug use.**

6. If you are sexually active, use latex condoms. It is advisable to take a supply of condoms with you since conditions of availability and purchase may be limited, and conditions of manufacture and storage may be questionable.

Some countries may require foreign visitors (usually those staying more than 3 months) to take an HIV test, a test for antibodies to HIV that causes AIDS. A few countries will accept medical documentation certifying that an individual is HIV negative. Before traveling abroad, you should check with the embassy of the host country to learn about entry requirements and specifically whether HIV testing is a requirement. You can do this by looking at the U.S. State Department information at <http://www.state.gov/travel>.

For more information about HIV and AIDS, contact:

SIUE Student Health Center (618) 650-2842

National AIDS Hotline 1-800-342-2437

Center for Disease Control <http://www.cdc.gov>

Safe Road Travel

Driving customs and etiquette vary from one country to the next. For example, driving on the left side of the road is the law in many countries, especially in the UK, Australia, and many countries in Africa and Asia. Unusual traffic patterns, traffic roundabouts, and laws regarding passing or right-of-way can seem confusing and disorienting for someone unfamiliar with the traffic laws and practices of the host country. Statistics indicate that road accidents are the single greatest cause of serious injury and death to U.S. citizens traveling abroad. Also, pedestrian rights vary widely from country to country and unfamiliarity with traffic patterns has occasionally resulted in accidents and serious injuries.

SIUE policy prohibits students from renting cars, motorcycles, or mopeds in the host country. Most countries have safe, convenient and reliable modes of public transportation.