Pointers for Parents:
Before, During, and After the Study Abroad Experience
(Inspired from a handout by Middlebury College Study Abroad)

Prior to Your Son or Daughter’s Departure – Please refer to the Pre-Departure Checklist:

- Familiarize yourself with the format, goals, and philosophy of the program on which your son or daughter is about to embark.
- Confirm as soon as possible that his/her passport is valid and extends at least six months beyond the end of the program.
- Before departure, your son or daughter should have a general physical and dental exam (Many programs require this anyway). Ask the doctor how best to handle on-going prescription medications.
- It’s a delicate balance: making sure your son or daughter is prepared for his or her time abroad, and letting him or her take the lead at the beginning of this new experience. While offering limited assistance, encourage your son or daughter to take responsibility for pre-departure logistics and paperwork.
- Talk about your son or daughter’s goals and expectations in studying abroad.
- Talk about any fears or apprehensions s/he may have.
- Ensure your son or daughter knows that s/he has your support.
- Make sure that your son or daughter has adequate health insurance coverage and knows how to access it. Be aware that in many countries the cost of medical services must be paid in advance by the patient (and then reimbursed by insurance). Insure valuables your son or daughter will take on the trip, such as a laptop computer, camera, or video recorder.
- Decide on a contact plan including how, how often and in an emergency.
- Gather all of the contact information in one place you and your student might need while he or she is away, including contact information for key people at home and abroad, make copies/scans of passport, bank, and insurance info, etc...
- Review the pre-departure information the program or university sends. Most off-campus study providers also have information for parents on their website (see below for some examples from some of our main providers).
- Make sure your student understands what home school policies apply to him or her while abroad.
- Help organize your son or daughter’s finances and how to access money while abroad. Contact your bank to notify them of use abroad and ask what the fees will be.
- Check in periodically with your son or daughter to confirm that s/he is gathering the necessary paperwork to secure a visa, if required.
- Investigate the possibility of securing a power of attorney on your son or daughter’s behalf so that the processing of documents in his/her absence will be easy
- Familiarize yourself with the common phenomenon of culture shock so you can support your son/daughter through it

The First Few Days/Weeks Upon Arrival:
- On arrival abroad most students are usually a little homesick, upset and disoriented from the stress of adjusting to a new location, culture and possible foreign language. We suggest they let you know they have arrived safely but not call home for at least a week, by which time they are usually euphoric, but if you get a tearful call 24 hours after departure, we suggest you remain calm. Expect to hear some tales of frustration, though your student will likely be experiencing many
wonderful things as well, even if you are not the first to hear about them. In most cases he or she won’t expect you to solve problems—as much as you may want to—and is just looking for an understanding ear.

• Most students experience culture shock to some degree. This results in a recognizable pattern of reaction which students tend to assume is a wholly individual, personal response. If your traveler experiences irritation and depression after a few weeks, it is perfectly normal and will probably go away—all the faster if you remain cheerful and breezy in response. We understand the desire to intervene to make things better but recognize that there is little you, or we, can do from a distance. The best thing you can do is to encourage them to reach out to people there and get out and explore their new environment.

• Your support and enthusiasm will help your daughter or son to embrace the experience.

**While Your Son or Daughter is Abroad:**

• Encourage independence and self-reliance. It is by overcoming any difficulties that your son or daughter will quickly rise to a new level of independence, so avoid the temptation to become too involved. Ultimately, this is his or her learning experience.

• Do not accompany your son or daughter to the host country at the start of the program.

• Understand that all students will experience culture shock and that this may have a significant impact on what your son or daughter is communicating to you about the experience.

• Allow your son or daughter the time and space to develop a support network abroad rather than relying totally on the one back home.

• Avoid too frequent e-mail or phone communication, which can interfere both with language learning and with integration into the host culture. Allow your son or daughter the time and space to develop a support network abroad rather than relying totally on the one back home.

• Avoid visiting while the academic program is in session. Also, it’s important to remember that study abroad students are not on vacation. Attending class with him or her—or taking your student out of class to sightsee—will interrupt the educational process and immersion experience. If you want to visit, it’s best to do so when the program has finished so you can travel together.

• Later in the semester, you may wish to again discuss health and safety information. There can be an increase in safety incidents and health-related problems toward the end of the semester, when students tend to let their guard down after becoming more familiar with their host country.

**When Your Son or Daughter Returns Home:**

• The return home, at the completion of the program can often be a very emotional and challenging time for your son or daughter.

• Recognize that your son or daughter has had a life-changing experience and that, while you may have remained more or less the same, s/he is probably not the same person s/he was before going abroad.

• Let your son or daughter share the experience with you as much as s/he wants.

• Understand that your son or daughter may experience re-entry culture shock and that this can be even more intense than the original culture shock on arrival abroad. Be prepared for him or her to experience some degree of reverse culture shock—most do—and need some time to fully readjust to living at home again. In some cases, he or she may even experience a period of depression or longing to return abroad. Once again, your support, interest, and understanding will help your son or daughter during this life-altering experience. Observing and discussing changes like these is an
excellent way to share in your son or daughter’s international experience, and you will probably want to hear more than most other people, which will be satisfying to your son or daughter.

- Educate yourself regarding the re-entry experience. The SIT Study Abroad’s *Surviving Re-Entry: A Handbook for Parents of Study Abroad Students Returning Home* was written for parents of students who studied on SIT programs but has useful information applicable to any program.

**Resources for Parents from some of our Study Abroad Provider Organizations:**

- IFSA-Butler information for parents & Families
- CIEE’s A Parent’s Guide to Study Abroad
- CIEE Parent Brochure
- DIS information for Parents
- IES Abroad information for Parents
- SIT Reentry Information for Parents

Advice for Parents from [The Center for Global Education at Studentsabroad.com](http://studentsabroad.com), a general study abroad resource