Parent/Guardian Handbook for Study Abroad
A Resource Guide
Contents
WELCOME FROM VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY’S GLOBAL EDUCATION OFFICE ......v
ABOUT VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY’S GLOBAL EDUCATION OFFICE (GEO) ...... 1
MISSION .................................................................................................................... 1
RELATED OFFICES .................................................................................................. 1
REQUEST INFORMATION ......................................................................................... 1
MEET THE STAFF .................................................................................................... 1
ACADEMIC & UNIVERSITY MATTERS ..................................................................... 2
ACADEMICS ............................................................................................................. 2
Program-Specific Policies ......................................................................................... 2
Academic Credit ....................................................................................................... 2
Special Academic Needs .......................................................................................... 2
UNDERSTANDING THE ACADEMIC CREDIT PROCESS ...................................... 3
Vanderbilt Study Abroad Programs: Direct Credit .................................................... 3
Non-Vanderbilt Study Abroad Programs: Indirect Credit ........................................... 3
BILLING AND FINANCIAL AID .............................................................................. 3
MISCELLANEOUS UNIVERSITY MATTERS ............................................................ 4
Station B Mail ........................................................................................................... 4
Commodore Card .................................................................................................... 4
On-Campus Housing .............................................................................................. 4
Career Development ............................................................................................... 4
Vanderbilt Email Address ......................................................................................... 5
Useful Vanderbilt Resources ................................................................................... 5
UNIVERSITY POLICIES ........................................................................................... 5
Study Abroad as per Vanderbilt University’s Student Handbook .............................. 6
Program Withdrawal Policy ..................................................................................... 6
PREPARING FOR DEPARTURE ................................................................................. 6
On-Campus Pre-Departure Orientation Sessions ...................................................... 6
Online “Study Abroad Survival Training” .................................................................. 7
Preliminary Country Research .................................................................................. 7
DOCUMENTS ............................................................................................................. 7
Passports .................................................................................................................. 7
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Entry Visas</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Document Tips</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS &amp; INDEPENDENT TRAVEL</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booking Flights</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trip Cancellation Insurance</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrival</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packing</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Travel while Abroad</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostels</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINANCIAL MATTERS</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUDGETING</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCESSING CURRENCY</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNICATION</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHONES</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL NETWORKS AND E-MAIL</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAIL &amp; SHIPPING</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEALTH &amp; SAFETY</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEALTH</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check-Ups</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medications</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immunizations</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centers for Disease Control (CDC)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAFETY</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Department of State</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety and Governmental Resources</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street Smarts: Avoiding Theft</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When in Public Places</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traveling</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating in the Native Language</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WELCOME FROM VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY’S GLOBAL EDUCATION OFFICE

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Hello and greetings from GEO! We are pleased that your student has chosen to study abroad through Vanderbilt University’s Global Education Office. Spending a term or longer abroad is often one of the most valuable experiences of an undergraduate student’s academic career at Vanderbilt.

Students gain a number of skills from study abroad which will be useful in their personal and professional lives. Adaptability and flexibility, greater independence and self-confidence, cultural sensitivity, open-mindedness, and communication skills are just some of the benefits of becoming deeply acquainted with another country and culture. In today’s increasingly global economy, leaders in business, government, and academia are recognizing the importance of U.S. students gaining international experience, and becoming globally competent citizens and employees.

In order to ensure a more enriching time abroad, we have prepared a general guide that highlights important topics of interest before, during, and after the study abroad experience. We encourage you to review this resource guide with your student and to discuss together your questions about studying abroad. Talking about various issues such as health and safety, academic credit, financial aid, living accommodations, travel, emergency procedures, and cultural adjustment are important in truly facilitating a rewarding overseas experience for your student.

We recognize that study abroad often involves a delicate balance from families: making sure your student is prepared for his or her time abroad while also letting him or her take the lead at the beginning of this new experience. Suggestions as to how you can best provide support to your student during various phases of the study abroad experience have also been included. As with all valuable endeavors, study abroad has both great challenges and rewards, but we believe that your patient support during the entire experience will ultimately enrich your student’s time overseas.

If, at any time, you have more specific questions that are not addressed in this resource guide, please feel free to contact our office. We look forward to working with your student in this exciting time during their academic career!

Sincerely,

The Global Education Office
ABOUT VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY’S GLOBAL EDUCATION OFFICE (GEO)

MISSION

To address the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, the Global Education Office (GEO) is committed to preparing global citizens by providing innovative and high quality international learning experiences that build on Vanderbilt University’s commitment to academic excellence, global engagement and community service.

Services Offered:

- Personal advising and assistance to any interested student, faculty, or staff member
- Assistance with access to course information and other specific details of study abroad programs, application requirements and deadlines, costs and related issues
- Resources and information for countries where Vanderbilt-approved programs are held

RELATED OFFICES

The Global Education Office works cooperatively with other Vanderbilt departments related to international education in addition to those offices which make Study Abroad possible for our students: College of Arts & Sciences; Peabody College; School of Engineering; Blair School of Music; Student Accounts; Financial Aid; and International Student & Scholar Services.

Global Education Office Hours & Location:

Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
(Summer Hours: 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.)
Student Life Center, Suite 115; 310 25th Avenue South; Nashville, TN 37240-1573
(P) 615-343-3139; (F) 615-343-5774
www.vanderbilt.edu/geo

REQUEST INFORMATION

We are happy to answer any and all questions related to the programs of GEO. Please don’t hesitate to contact a staff member or e-mail our general account at geo@vanderbilt.edu.

MEET THE STAFF

The Global Education Office is pleased to have a staff with a wide range of interests and skills. Each staff member advises for specific countries and takes on specific projects to support student development before, during, and after study abroad. To find an advisor based on a specific program, or to learn about each advisor’s availability, visit the “Advising” section on the GEO website. To learn more about each staff member, feel free to explore their online bios!
ACADEMIC & UNIVERSITY MATTERS

This section is intended to give you a better understanding of how study abroad will affect various aspects of your student’s Vanderbilt academic career. You will learn how academic credits will be earned while your student is abroad. Important differences will be highlighted for Vanderbilt and non-Vanderbilt study abroad programs. Additionally, you will understand how study abroad participation will affect your student’s billing and tuition, transfer of financial aid, on-campus housing, and other pertinent information to ensure a smooth transition from Vanderbilt to the overseas program. At the end of this section, we have included contact information for various university offices that may be helpful for you and your student as you both begin preparing for the journey ahead. Finally, important university policies have also been included for your reference so that you can discuss with your student the consequences of going against these policies.

ACADEMICS

Program-Specific Policies
Make sure your student understands which academic policies apply to him or her while abroad, including issues such as course load, changes to academic programs, grade reporting, fees, and refunds. Students must also abide by academic policies of the Vanderbilt Student Handbook which is accessible by clicking on the following link: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/

Academic Credit
First, it is important to note that all classes your student plans on taking must have a course evaluation result on file with GEO. This will be reviewed in program-specific pre-departure orientation sessions. Your student may not take classes Pass/Fail and he or she also cannot retake a class abroad that he or she has previously taken, nor retake a class on campus that he or she has taken abroad. Exception: One class may be taken Pass/Fail for the Vanderbilt-in-France program only upon approval of the Resident Director.

Semester study abroad students must take the equivalent of at least 12 U.S. hours per semester and can receive no more than 18 hours of credit per semester from abroad. Exception: The Dresden, Germany Engineering program is worth 20 credits. The Global Education Office will register your student for “place holder” courses during his/her time abroad. This will be replaced by your student’s actual credits and grades (which may differ from the amount of “place holder” credits) after the Office of the University Registrar processes his/her official transcript.

Transcripts can take up to four months or longer to arrive to the Registrar’s Office after the end of the programs. Feel free to inquire with our office in regards to their status, but please be patient in recognizing the variability in transcript arrival. When corresponding with GEO, we recommend that you always include your student’s name, host program, and term abroad. Also include course titles when following up on a course evaluation request. See Appendix II for specific information about FERPA and the amount of information that our office can legally provide.

Special Academic Needs
If your student works with the Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action, and Disability Services office (EAD) while on campus, we may be able to make similar arrangements in overseas courses. To do so, we will need written confirmation from the EAD detailing his or her needs. Please contact the EAD office for more information: www.vanderbilt.edu/ead
UNDERSTANDING THE ACADEMIC CREDIT PROCESS

Vanderbilt Study Abroad Programs: Direct Credit
The Office of the University Registrar has an International Curriculum and Credentials team dedicated to study abroad credits and course equivalencies; their International Curriculum and Credentials Analyst works with academic departments through the course evaluation process to determine how courses taken abroad will count at Vanderbilt. Approval of new or other courses not on file begins with students submitting course descriptions and/or syllabi from the study abroad courses to the Office of the University Registrar in their “Study Abroad Course Review” system. The International Curriculum and Credentials Analyst then forwards this course information to the Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) of the appropriate department for review. The DUS decides if the foreign course has a direct equivalent to a course at Vanderbilt, if it has no direct equivalent but will count as credit towards that department’s major or minor, or if the course will simply count as general credit towards graduation. This result is returned to the Registrar and is valid and available to all students for 5 years.

Non-Vanderbilt Study Abroad Programs: Indirect Credit
Non-Vanderbilt study abroad programs are not coordinated through the Global Education Office, but through the specific college of the student. The Deans of A&S, Engineering and Blair, and the Office of Academic Services of Peabody will request that students submit a proposal for ‘Study Elsewhere.’ Petition forms for Study Elsewhere can be downloaded off of the specific college’s website.

In the instance that a student requests to attend a non-Vanderbilt study abroad program, the faculty advisor or Dean/Registrar will become the default study abroad advisor for the student. Non-Vanderbilt programs are not direct-credit, meaning that credit-hours transfer back to the student’s transcript but grades do not transfer. Vanderbilt Financial aid cannot be transferred to non-Vanderbilt study abroad programs, though federal aid may still apply.

BILLING AND FINANCIAL AID

Your student will be billed by Vanderbilt Student Accounts for the following:
- Vanderbilt tuition
- Program Fee where assessed
- Study Abroad Fee

*Note: beginning Fall 2015, students participating in a semester or academic year program will also be charged a $500 Study Abroad Fee. This fee will be billed by the Vanderbilt Office of Student Accounts. This is not applicable to summer 2015 or Maymester 2015

Your bill and fees for study abroad will not include out-of-pocket expenses including but not limited to airfare, academic or personal supplies, personal travel, passport and visa fees, meals, and potentially housing (dependent on the program), among other items.

Financial aid does apply (including HOPE scholarships) for GEO/Vanderbilt study abroad programs during the semester or full academic year; however NO financial aid transfers during Maymester or summer terms unless students have remaining funds from the previous academic year, so students may need to look outside of Vanderbilt for scholarships and other grants.
In the case of students studying during the summer, GEO offers competitive summer scholarships for students with demonstrated financial need. Students may find application requirements and materials on our website at [http://www.vanderbilt.edu/geo/scholarships.html](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/geo/scholarships.html).

*All fees are billed through Vanderbilt’s Office of Student Accounts to the same address and at the same time as if your student were studying in Nashville. Housing is not covered for the exchange programs. Additional costs may be billed directly by the program provider.*

We recommend that your student promptly contact a financial aid officer and scholarship administrators for further assistance and to ensure transition of funds. We also recommend that your student check our website for information about different scholarship opportunities: [http://www.vanderbilt.edu/geo/scholarships.html](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/geo/scholarships.html).

Also note that tuition management payments may need to be adjusted and in this case, it is best to directly contact the Tuition Management Company.

**MISCELLANEOUS UNIVERSITY MATTERS**

**Station B Mail**
Remind your student to have mail forwarded while studying abroad or he or she may lose a mailbox. Your student should contact Vanderbilt Mail Services directly for instructions regarding mail forwarding.

**Commodore Card**
Your student may log into his or her card account and deselect any meal plans or Commodore cash. Deadlines to deselect will be available in the student’s GEO account through the “Study Abroad Survival Training” and from the Card Office. Questions about this process should be directed to the Card Office. **Note:** *If your student does not deselect by the specified deadline, he or she will be charged accordingly.*

**On-Campus Housing**
For fall, spring, and academic year program participants, the Global Education Office will inform The Office of Residential Education and Housing that your student is studying abroad the following term and Housing will review this information. Remind your student NOT to participate in the housing lottery if he or she is planning to study abroad in the fall. In addition, your student should follow any instructions provided by the Housing Office regarding his or her housing contract. **Note:** *Your student will be contacted by the Housing Office via his or her @vanderbilt.edu email address about securing on-campus housing for the semester he or she returns to campus.*

**Career Development**
Encourage your student to further explore career options before going abroad. We recommend that he or she begins thinking about marketable skills that can be developed overseas (such as foreign language abilities and universal cross-cultural competencies) that are valued by employers. Furthermore, your student should seek out important contacts and consider independent field studies or research that may enrich his or her overall academic experience at Vanderbilt. Students may also want to explore international post-graduation scholarships prior to studying abroad.
The GEO staff is happy to provide general career assistance to students interested in exploring how study abroad can benefit their future career paths. Additionally, your student may wish to schedule an appointment with Vanderbilt’s Center for Student Professional Development in order to more fully leverage his or her international experience as a future employee.

**Vanderbilt Email Address**
Please note that ALL official university communications will go through your student’s @vanderbilt.edu email address. Please make sure he or she adjusts account settings accordingly.

**Useful Vanderbilt Resources**

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<tr>
<th>Center for Student Professional Development</th>
<th>Student Accounts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>615-322-2750</td>
<td>615-322-6693</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.vanderbilt.edu/career">www.vanderbilt.edu/career</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.vanderbilt.edu/stuaccts">www.vanderbilt.edu/stuaccts</a></td>
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<th>Financial Aid</th>
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<tr>
<td>615-322-3591</td>
<td>615-322-2273</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.vanderbilt.edu/financialaid">www.vanderbilt.edu/financialaid</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.thecard.vanderbilt.edu">www.thecard.vanderbilt.edu</a></td>
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</tbody>
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<th>Housing Office</th>
<th>Psychological and Counseling Center</th>
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<tr>
<td>615-322-2591</td>
<td>615-322-2571</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.vanderbilt.edu/resed">www.vanderbilt.edu/resed</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.vanderbilt.edu/pcc">www.vanderbilt.edu/pcc</a></td>
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<th>Office of Honors Scholarships</th>
<th>Office of the University Registrar</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>615-322-6329</td>
<td>615-322-7701</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.ohs.vanderbilt.edu">www.ohs.vanderbilt.edu</a></td>
<td><a href="http://registrar.vanderbilt.edu/study-abroad-course-review/">http://registrar.vanderbilt.edu/study-abroad-course-review/</a></td>
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**UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

Vanderbilt believes that each student is ultimately responsible for his or her experience abroad. This responsibility embraces a wide range of tasks, from understanding university policies and securing passports to recognizing that living abroad requires one to get along with people who may have differing cultural values and backgrounds.

It is your student’s responsibility to be aware of Vanderbilt University’s policies, which can be found in the *Student Handbook*. This useful resource designed to acquaint students with the specifics of the standards expected of them as members of university community. The policies and regulations delineated in the handbook apply to *all* students enrolled at Vanderbilt, including those abroad. The handbook is accessible at the following web address: [http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook). Ignorance of a policy or regulation will not be considered an excuse for failure to observe it.

Members of the university enjoy the rights and privileges associated with their status and are bound by the laws of the surrounding community. Student status does not protect a Vanderbilt student from arrest or prosecution for violation of local, state, or federal laws. A student who violates certain regulations can be held accountable by the public courts as well as by the university. A student’s standing before the courts in and of itself, however, does not necessarily affect his or her standing within the university at any time.
The information provided and the regulations and policies outlined in this handbook are not intended to be all-inclusive and do not constitute a contract. The university reserves the right at any time to add to, modify, or revoke any of the regulations and policies contained in this handbook without notice.

**Study Abroad as per Vanderbilt University’s Student Handbook**

The policies and regulations in the Student Handbook apply to students registered for the Vanderbilt study abroad programs, although some additional regulations may apply. Students on academic or disciplinary probation, or those with a financial hold, may be prohibited from participating in study abroad programs. Specific regulations for students enrolled in study abroad programs are available from the program directors, from the Global Education Office, or from the offices of the deans of the undergraduate colleges and schools.

The resident directors and/or faculty in residence of Vanderbilt study abroad programs (Vanderbilt "Ins") are responsible for academic matters and for co-curricular and disciplinary matters, within the limits of the policies established by the university.

Students are required to abide by the laws of the particular country with respect to the age at which alcoholic beverages may be consumed. Otherwise, all of the policies with respect to alcoholic beverages and illicit drugs included in this Handbook apply. Students are subject to disciplinary action including expulsion and referral for prosecution for violation of these policies.

**Program Withdrawal Policy**

If you must withdraw from your selected study abroad program after you have been accepted, you must do so by the stated withdrawal deadline given in your approval email to avoid any charges.

Here are the steps to take to withdraw from a study abroad program:

- Inform the Global Education Office IN WRITING. This can be done via email or by written letter.
  - If you DO NOT inform us in writing of your withdrawal, we will assume that you WILL participate in the program. If you fail to notify our office of your withdrawal, you will be responsible for any funds paid out by the university on your behalf.
- If you withdraw from the program after the stated deadline given in your approval email, then you will be charged a $500 late withdrawal fee.
- If you do not receive an email confirmation about your withdrawal request, please assume that we have not received it.
- Follow up with the office to make sure your withdrawal is complete.

**PREPARING FOR DEPARTURE**

This section touches upon general information prior to your student’s departure including: obtaining necessary documentation and forms, making appropriate travel arrangements, packing, financial/budget planning, and communication methods. As a reminder, we have attempted to address issues that are common to all of our programs and most frequently asked about by parents. We hope that the following information and suggestions provide you with a better idea of how you can support your student prior to his or her experience abroad.

**On-Campus Pre-Departure Orientation Sessions**

All students studying abroad are required to attend pre-departure orientation sessions to prepare them for the journey ahead. Program-specific orientation sessions will give your student greater
detail regarding their upcoming overseas experience. Students are notified of these meetings in their study abroad approval e-mail.

**Online “Study Abroad Survival Training”**
All students studying abroad are required to complete the “Study Abroad Survival Training” specific to the type of program in which they will participate and the term during which they will be abroad. They will have access to the “Survival Training” in their online GEO account after they have been accepted into the program.

**Preliminary Country Research**
Before seriously considering all of the logistical issues involved in studying abroad, you and your student may first wish to do some preliminary research about the country in which he or she will be living. Topics of interest may include: history, weather, politics, major cultural issues and differences, religion, noteworthy figures and places of interest. Remind your student to become familiar with the country’s local laws and customs. Remember that while in a foreign country, your student is subject to its laws.

**DOCUMENTS**

One of the initial steps in preparing to study abroad is to obtain necessary documents and forms. Obtaining certain documents can be a time consuming process; therefore, students should submit all documents in accordance with application deadlines in a timely manner.

**Passports**
If your student has not already done so, he or she must immediately apply for a passport. U.S. citizens can apply at the nearest Passport Agency of the U.S. Department of State or at some post offices. The U.S. Department of State’s travel website, [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov), provides instructions on how to obtain a passport, and a printable application can be found at: [http://travel.state.gov/passport/forms/ds11/ds11_842.html](http://travel.state.gov/passport/forms/ds11/ds11_842.html). Passports are mailed to the applicant two to four weeks after the application is received, and are valid for ten years.

If your student has a current passport that will expire within six months of the end of the program, it must be renewed at this time. Otherwise, it might be difficult to enter the country, your student may be unable to apply for any necessary visas, and he or she may have to briefly surrender the passport while abroad, during which freedom to travel may be restricted.

**Student Entry Visas**
If your student plans to study abroad in a country that requires a student visa, he or she will be guided through the application process by the GEO staff or the program provider. *(Please see Appendix III for further details regarding the visa application process)*

**Additional Document Tips**
Remember to retain several copies of the first page of your student’s passport as well as his or her visa in the case that the originals are lost overseas. Also have your student make photocopies of his or her passport, visa, ID cards, front and back of credit and debit cards to keep separate from originals while abroad. You should also scan copies of these documents and email a copy to yourself. As a parent or guardian, you should also have a valid passport in the unlikely event of an emergency.

**TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS & INDEPENDENT TRAVEL**

**Booking Flights**
Unless specifically stated, students are responsible for making their own travel arrangements to and from their program site. Your student should research travel costs and book their own
flights. Learn regulations regarding the type and size of luggage that can be carried; then encourage your student to pack lightly. If he or she exceeds the airline’s limit, extra fees may be incurred. Finally, be aware of any restrictions the purchased tickets may have (i.e. change policy).

It is often best to try student travel agencies, as they often are most familiar with student rates. The International Student Travel Confederation’s website is www.istcorg/sisp/index.htm. They offer advice on student travel and provide contact information for major student travel agencies across the country. You may also wish to consult www.statravel.com or www.studentuniverse.com as additional resources.

Trip Cancellation Insurance
As the costs of a study abroad program are rather significant, it may be beneficial to purchase trip cancellation insurance. This type of insurance is designed for reimbursement of financial losses incurred when it is necessary to cancel a trip prior to departure or during a trip and is effective in the case of sudden illness or injury. Most policies also provide coverage due to a variety of unforeseen events.

Companies that offer Trip Cancellation Insurance:
- AccessAmerica (www.accessamerica.com)
- HTH Worldwide (www.hthworldwide.com)
- Travel Insured (www.travelinsured.com)

Arrival
It is crucial for all students to make every effort to arrive on the date and time indicated by the program. The arrival of a program typically involves getting settled into housing, meeting other students/professors, and student orientation activities. Since these activities are usually scheduled well in advance, they usually cannot be made-up at a later date. Students will most likely not have access to program housing prior to the program start date. Students often also have limited access to phones and e-mail immediately after arrival and all programs encourage students to call home as soon as possible.

Packing
U.S. students tend to bring more luggage than they will actually need. A good rule of thumb for prospective students abroad is to pack “only the bare minimum” of what they think they will need and then to remove about half of what’s there. Some study abroad advisors suggest that student pack their bags, then walk around the block with them to see how it feels to carry them (keeping in mind they will also want to purchase souvenirs, clothing, gifts, etc. while abroad). Also remember that closet and storage space are significantly less than in the U.S., so think about ways to layer different articles of clothing in the packing process.

Remind your student to pack what he or she can’t get along without (i.e., prescription medications, extra eyeglasses or contact lenses, sunscreen, textbooks, etc.) in his or her carry-on luggage. The type of clothing and incidental items your student needs to pack will depend a great deal on his or her study abroad location. He or she may get good advice about this from returned students or can independently research the climate in the chosen destination.

As your student begins to make the appropriate packing preparations for his/her time abroad, there are a few items that should definitely be left home since they can take up considerable luggage space. These include: any small appliance (flat irons, hair dryers as they typically do not work well with voltage converters), generic toiletries (i.e. large quantities of shampoo & conditioner), and linens.
The following link will help your student determine what kinds of voltage converters and adaptors might be necessary for his or her study abroad location: [www.voltageconverters.com/voltageguide.htm](http://www.voltageconverters.com/voltageguide.htm)

**Additional packing tip:** Remember that your student will most likely need to save some room in his/her suitcase for souvenirs purchased while abroad as shipping gifts back to the U.S. is very expensive.

**A note about women’s clothing abroad:**
In many parts of the world, the standards for proper dress in public (especially for women) are more conservative. Your student can avoid a lot of undesirable attention by not bringing provocative clothing and dressing more modestly while she is abroad, taking cues from the way in which local female students dress.

**Independent Travel while Abroad**
Many students take the opportunity to do additional traveling while studying abroad. Have an open discussion with your student to explore possible travel destinations that fit within an agreed-upon budget. Further your research together by checking out travel guides/books such as *Lonely Planet*, *Frommer’s*, and *Fodor’s*. These guides will often make recommendations in terms of accommodations, notable places of interest, restaurants, and general transportation issues. Considering possible destinations can be an important way for you to support your student during his or her study abroad experience.

**A note about ISOS for independent travel:**
Vanderbilt University and the Global Education Office have been involved in responding to natural disasters, political unrest, and medical situations that require special treatment or even evacuation for the safety of the student. Vanderbilt has contracted with International SOS (ISOS) to provide travel assistance and evacuation services for all students traveling internationally on Vanderbilt related activities (see the ISOS section on page 16 for more information). ISOS assists Vanderbilt in managing the health and safety risks that could face VU travelers. **Students are strongly encouraged to register their independent travel with ISOS** so that they may receive the travel assistance and evacuation services if necessary even when undertaking personal travel outside their study abroad location. For further information, visit [www.vanderbilt.edu/gss](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/gss) and click on International Travel Registration.

**Recommended online guidebook resources:**
- *Fodor’s* [www.fodors.com/](http://www.fodors.com/)
- *Frommer’s* [www.frommers.com](http://www.frommers.com)
- *Let’s Go* [www.letsgo.com](http://www.letsgo.com)
- *Lonely Planet* [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)
- *Moon Travel Guides* [www.moon.com](http://www.moon.com)

**Additional independent travel tips:**
- Ask your student to notify you of his or her itinerary, including expected days of departure and return.
- Rail passes like the Eurail can often be bought for various combinations of countries and amounts of travel time, but they are typically only economical if traveling for large blocks of time (i.e. 2 weeks or longer). Make sure to purchase the pass in the U.S., as it is not possible to do so once in Europe.
- Most national train companies offer youth rail discounts which make travel within the country less expensive without a Eurail.
• Encourage your student to purchase an International Student Identity Card (ISIC) which may provide some student travel discounts. The ISSS Office in the international suite with GEO actually sells ISIC cards.

Hostels
Many students opt for staying in hostels while traveling abroad. Hostels provide budget-oriented accommodation where guests can rent a bed, sometimes a bunk bed in a dormitory and share a bathroom, lounge and sometimes a kitchen. Rooms can be mixed or single-sex, although private rooms may also be available. Hostels are generally cheaper for both the operator and the occupant; many hostels employ their long-term residents as desk clerks or housekeeping staff in exchange for free accommodation.

*Remember that theft is always a possibility when traveling and your student should always secure his/her luggage by locking zippers or by renting a locker.

FINANCIAL MATTERS

BUDGETING
You should discuss with your student the budget he or she will have to live within, and/or to what degree you may be able to help with his or her expenses. Talking about how to best manage spending habits (whether it is your student’s money or yours) is probably a very important discussion to have before he or she leaves. When estimating an approximate budget, two detailed areas should be considered: Pre-departure and Post-arrival.

Pre-departure costs may include the following: passport fees, direct consular fees for visa, airfare, local transportation, independent travel expenses (i.e. Eurail passes, etc.), luggage, and appropriate clothing if necessary.

Upon arrival, a student usually spends more money the first few weeks while becoming acquainted with his or her new surroundings. You and your student should consider the following expenses when estimating a budget: weekend travel, local transportation, daily meals and dining out, entertainment, museum fees, laundry, postage, telephone costs, and personal items.

Budgeting tip: Remember to research student discounts (i.e. national rail passes, public transportation, etc.) and the current exchange rate as you and your student prepare a realistic budget for his or her time abroad. Have your student contact returned students to find out about their recommendations.

ACCESSING CURRENCY
In the vast majority of places, students will access money through an ATM. It’s important to ask your bank how (or if) its ATM card will function while abroad and what extra fees might be incurred. It is important to note that some U.S. banks have relationships with foreign banks which may also reduce fees while your student is abroad.

If accessing a U.S. bank account through an ATM card, we recommend the following:
• Contact your bank about special procedures such as an international PIN number (i.e. 4-digit numbers only)
• Designate a family member to have access to the account from the U.S. in case of access problems.
- Link ATM cards to checking (and not savings) accounts.
- Remind your student to bring a duplicate card along with them in case the card is lost.
- Contact your bank to notify them that the card will be used internationally.

Credit cards with cash advances and traveler’s checks are additional ways of obtaining money abroad, but it usually occurs with a fee. If this is the case, make arrangements to pay any monthly bills and, if necessary, to file your student’s income taxes. If using a credit card abroad, remember to have your student call the credit card company to notify them that he or she will be out of the country. Also be sure to make copies of all your debit/credit cards and bank information that will use abroad, including phone numbers and email addresses of your bank.

Finally, all students should bring some money for emergencies in the form of traveler’s checks or foreign currency. It is also a good idea to bring some money in foreign currency in order to cover basic expenses the first few days in case they have difficulties withdrawing cash. American Banks will require some weeks to procure foreign currency, so have your student plan accordingly.

COMMUNICATION

Prior to departure, you’ll need to talk with your student about how (and how often) you plan to stay connected using the communication tools abroad. Things you take for granted in the U.S. like unrestricted, affordable internet and telephone access may be more difficult to come by in your student’s study abroad destination.

Keeping in touch using an established method can give you a good perspective on your student’s local host culture and ease your mind while he or she is overseas. While your first instinct may be to call when you sense your student is experiencing frustrations/difficulties away from home, be sure to recognize how constant communication may actually not be beneficial in facilitating intercultural competency.

PHONES

Incoming calls to your student’s mobile phone will usually be free, particularly if he or she has local cell service in his or her host country. However, it is often much more expensive to place international calls to mobile phones than to landlines, and it is also expensive to call internationally from a cell phone. For example, a recent check of costs for calling France from the US showed that it was 5 to 15 times more expensive to call a mobile phone than a landline, depending on the mobile provider. Minimize the cost of staying in touch by establishing methods in advance. For example, contact your phone service provider to arrange for a calling card, an international calling plan, or learn the most inexpensive way for your student to call collect or wirelessly from the destination country. Make sure that you have a telephone number where you can reach your student and know the times of day when he or she is most likely to be available.

Given the cost of telephone calls, it might be better to investigate tools such as Skype or to set up a regular schedule for emailing or instant messaging instead of calling. Also keep these other tips about international calling over landlines in mind:

- Long distance calls are generally less expensive over a fixed line.
- Host families may not be amenable to your student using their home phone.
- Calling centers (often found near internet cafés) generally offer land lines at low rates which students can use to place calls home.
- Pay phones work for incoming and outgoing calls and are much more prevalent in foreign countries than in the US.
Cell phones may not always be the best option for international calling, but they are very useful in day-to-day living abroad, as well as in ensuring individual safety. GEO recommends that all students have a cell phone to use abroad, and some of our program partners require it. While it is often possible to place and receive calls overseas using a US phone and calling plan, roaming fees or international calling plans often make doing so very expensive. It is nearly always better to purchase a cheap cell phone abroad for use with a local provider's pay-as-you-go calling plan.

For students with standard cell phones or "unlocked" GSM smart phones, it may be possible to swap the SIM card for a card from a provider in the host country, often saving 50-90% over international roaming fees. Students with smart phones may also want to consider turning off phone/messaging functionality and using apps only while connected to wifi. More information on SIM cards and international use of smart phones can be found online, for example: [http://www.brightroam.com/How-To-Choose-an-International-SIM-Card.aspx](http://www.brightroam.com/How-To-Choose-an-International-SIM-Card.aspx)

**Dialing an international number:** The following is the usual dialing procedure for international calls from the U.S.:

011 (international access code) + country code (usually 2-3 digits) + city code (usually 1-5 digits) + local number

Typically the "0" that must be dialed at the beginning of a city code from within a country is dropped when dialing from outside the country.

**SOCIAL NETWORKS AND E-MAIL**

As with access to telephones while abroad, internet access varies by program. Generally, students do have access to the internet, but rarely to the degree that they are accustomed to at Vanderbilt. In addition to access at your student’s university or learning center, many overseas cities often have Internet cafés that provide web access. This may be costly; have your student consider purchasing a pass for a certain number of hours that makes using the computer/internet less expensive.

Access to social networks and email is certainly an important way for students to keep in touch with family and friends, but too much time online may actually interfere with their cultural integration.

**A note about laptops:**

While a laptop is by no means required to study abroad, many students find it to be very advantageous. First, he or she will not need to spend money at an internet café to do simple word processing (i.e. for school papers, assignments, etc.). Additionally, it is an excellent way to upload and store digital pictures without having to worry about storing them on an internet site or deleting them from a memory card.

It is not necessary that your student purchase a new laptop immediately before studying abroad, but bringing a slightly older model may be useful. Discuss the pros and cons of bringing a laptop with your student in order to determine whether it would be beneficial during his or her time abroad.
MAIL & SHIPPING

Students should not plan to have items shipped to them. Packages are often lost or held up in customs which requires students to pay significant taxes on their items. NEVER ship medication to students as this is highly suspicious to customs officials.

HEALTH & SAFETY

This section highlights important health and safety issues that should be addressed prior to your student’s departure. Talk to him or her about any specific concerns you may have about health and safety and give him or her chance to openly discuss these issues with you. If there are specific concerns you have about the country in which he or she will be traveling, talk about them with the program provider or GEO.

Although we cannot completely guarantee your student’s safety, in most cases we will be able to give you a good sense of what the real risks are, how to minimize any dangers, and what he or she can do to keep him/herself safe and healthy while abroad.

HEALTH

Check-Ups

Before departure, we recommend that your student have a general physical, dental exam, and vision check-up; women should also have a gynecological checkup. Remind your student to schedule these appointments at least four weeks prior to his or her departure in case there is a need for follow-up (e.g., a cavity that needs to be filled).

Resources

Vanderbilt Student Health Center
615.322.2427 (tel)
615.343.0047 (fax)
www.vanderbilt.edu/student_health

Vanderbilt International Travel Medicine Clinic
615.936.1174 (tel)
615.343.1691 (fax)
www.vanderbilttravelclinic.com

Centers for Disease Control
www.cdc.gov/travel

Travel Health Online
www.tripprep.com

Insurance

Your student will be covered either through our mandatory HTH insurance plan or through one offered by their program’s provider. Continue carrying your student as a dependent on your health insurance policy, even if he or she will have other coverage while studying abroad. 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 student will take on the trip, such as a laptop computer, camera, or video recorder. Advise him or her not to bring irreplaceable objects such as family jewelry.

Medications

Make sure that your student brings enough medication (prescription or over-the-counter) for the entire study abroad duration since medications cannot be sent through the mail. Also remind him or her to bring copies of prescription documentation. If it is not possible to secure enough medication to last the entire time abroad, have your student talk to his or her doctor ahead of time. It may be necessary to visit a doctor in his or her host country to get a new prescription written (foreign countries cannot honor American doctors’ prescriptions) and this may be facilitated with information from your regular doctor.
Before leaving the United States, check whether or not your prescription or other drugs are categorized as controlled substances in your student’s study abroad country. Students enrolled in HTH can do this by accessing an online database of drug information once they have registered on the HTHStudents website.

It’s also a good idea to know the generic names of common over-the-counter medications. Often, brand names are not international (for example, Tylenol is known as acetaminophen outside the U.S.). This information can typically be accessed through a doctor or pharmacist. We recommend not taking any drugs out of their original packaging. Combining many types of pills into plastic bags or one bottle may also look suspicious to security and customs officials.

Long term health care needs such as physical therapy or counseling can often be met overseas with careful planning. Please notify our office with further questions.

**Travel health tip:**
Pack a “mini” first aid kit that includes Band-Aids, Tylenol/ibuprofen, an Ace bandage, Neosporin, and mole skin (for blisters).

**Immunizations**
Only a health care professional can advise certain immunizations or precautions for your student. Talk to your doctor about your student’s destination as well as places where he or she is likely to travel.

**Centers for Disease Control (CDC)**
This is a government website which issues information valuable to travelers regarding the health considerations of world regions. You can find information regarding common travel ailments and area-specific advice. While this site will recommend vaccinations based on destination, your student should talk to your health care professional about what is best for his or her time overseas. [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel)

**SAFETY**

At home, your student probably has a natural understanding of how to keep him/herself safe. Abroad, he or she will be in an unfamiliar environment, far away from people who typically can provide guidance and support when difficulties arise. That throws the idea of “safety” into a whole new light. However, there is no evidence that a study abroad experience poses any greater risk to your student than a semester on a U.S. college campus.

Helping your student to stay safe in both day-to-day and emergency situations is something all study abroad providers work hard at achieving. No provider, however, can completely guarantee your student’s safety; ultimately, that’s his or her responsibility. In fact, the single most important factor that affects your student’s personal risk may be his or her own behavior—the one thing completely in his or her control. Read on to learn more about what you can do to help maximize your student’s safety.

**U.S. Department of State**
This government website issues consular info for every country with specific information regarding the political and safety considerations. The Department of State will also issue travel advisories and warnings in the event of a heightened security situation. Finally, the Department of State offers a number of publications for students traveling abroad.

Your student may want to consider registering with the local U.S. Embassy. By registering with the embassy, you (as a parent) can be more easily contacted in the event of an emergency at home.
or assisted in case of an emergency abroad. Registering also facilitates the replacement of your student passport if it is lost or stolen.

In addition to these general suggestions, we’ve also included several websites that can provide more detailed country-specific safety and governmental information.

**Safety and Governmental Resources**

- **Department of State – A Safe Trip Abroad:**  
- **Department of State – Safety Issues:**  
- **Department of State – Country Specific Information:**  
  [http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country.html](http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country.html)
- **Department of State – Travel Warnings:**  
- **Department of State for Study Abroad:**  
  [http://studentsabroad.state.gov/](http://studentsabroad.state.gov/)
- **Department of State Travel:**  
  [http://www.travel.state.gov/](http://www.travel.state.gov/)
- **CIA World Factbook:**  

**Street Smarts: Avoiding Theft**

While it is impossible to completely guarantee your student’s safety, we have provided a general list of “street smarts” that may be useful for avoiding theft in public and traveling independently.

**When in Public Places**

- Be wary of how you hold your purse or handbag! Keep it in front of you and make sure that your purse or bag is fully zipped.
- Avoid placing your purse or bag on the back of your chair or at your feet while in a public place as this is an easy target for robbers.
- Be mindful of where you keep your wallet – a back pocket is exactly where thieves expect it to be.
- Avoid wearing conspicuous clothing and expensive jewelry. Do not become an easy target for thieves!
- Take extra caution while using internet cafes. Since these places are frequented by Americans and tourists, robbery is also more common.
- Many students invest in money belts to wear under their clothes as a hard-to-reach place for larger amounts of cash and their passport.
- When in your host city, leave your passport at home in a safe place rather than carrying it with you.
- Avoid demonstrations and other situations that may become unruly or where anti-American sentiments may be expressed.

**Traveling**

- Do **not** leave your luggage unattended in public areas or on any forms of public transportation.
- Keep a close eye on luggage while on a train, especially overnight trips. Try to keep your bag with you at all times (even in bed).
- Tell a friend what your plans are, let people know when they should expect you back.

**Communicating in the Native Language**

It is often helpful and courteous to know basic conversational phrases in the language of the country you are in (especially when traveling). Consider learning the following to make your time abroad more fulfilling if you do not already speak the native language:

Hello/goodbye  
Yes/No
Please
Thank you
Do you speak English?
I don’t speak ________ (language of the country you are in) / I don’t understand.

* Remember that most guidebooks include basic phrases in various languages.

Emergency Planning
Make sure you can be notified if your student experiences any major difficulty overseas. Since students are almost always adults (over 18 years of age), you will not receive that information unless you are designated as his or her emergency contact.

*In some cases, even that is not sufficient, so you may want to have him or her sign a release form as a precaution.

Discuss how you will handle any family emergencies that may arise. It’s best to have a written emergency communication plan listing the methods of communication to use and the order in which to use them. Give your student a copy of the plan, which should include: all family telephone numbers; access codes for messages on family answering machines; phone numbers for out-of-state relatives; and e-mail addresses.

Gather all of the information you and your student might need while he or she is away, including contact information and general information for:
- Your student (if housing has been assigned)
- On-site Resident Director
- Home office of the program provider (ask if they have a 24-hour emergency number)
- Vanderbilt Global Education Office
- Doctors who have treated your student in the past
- Citizen assistance section of the embassy or consulate nearest your student’s program
- U.S. State Dept. Office of Overseas Citizen Services
- Insurance policy numbers and how to submit claims
- Your student’s credit card numbers (copies of both the front and back)
- Your student’s passport number
- Duplicate lost passport kit (your student should take one abroad as well) containing:
  - Two passport-style photos
  - Official copy of his or her birth certificate
  - Photocopy of passport’s photo, signature, and visa pages
  - Program calendar

International SOS
Vanderbilt University and the Global Education Office have been involved in responding to natural disasters, political unrest, and medical situations that require special treatment or even evacuation for the safety of the student. Vanderbilt University has a process to handle these situations should they arise. Vanderbilt has contracted with International SOS (ISOS) to provide travel assistance and evacuation services for all students traveling internationally on Vanderbilt related activities. ISOS is the world’s largest medical and security assistance company. Operating in over 70 countries, ISOS assists Vanderbilt in managing the health and safety risks that could face VU travelers.

Prior to studying abroad, all VU students must register their travel with ISOS. This ensures coverage and provides the contact information needed by ISOS and Vanderbilt to locate student in the event of a crisis or emergency. For further information, visit www.vanderbilt.edu/gss and click on International Travel Registration.
Drugs, Alcohol, and Tobacco
While overseas, students are subject to the policies stated in the Vanderbilt University Student Handbook as well as to the local laws of the host country.

Alcohol is a serious issue for American students both at home and abroad. Students who are not of legal drinking age in the U.S. sometimes adjust poorly to the general availability of alcoholic beverages while abroad. Wine and beer are a regular part of social discourse and meals in the households of most host countries, restaurants, and campuses. “Responsible” drinking practices vary considerably from country to country. We trust that Vanderbilt students will behave responsibly and will remember that, as foreigners, they can be more vulnerable to problems if they have had too much to drink. Students should act responsibly when choosing whether or not to drink.

Drug penalties in countries outside of the U.S. are generally much more severe than those in the U.S. In some countries, simple acquisition of prohibited drugs (including marijuana and other controlled substances) can result in heavy fines, deportation, and prison sentences. U.S. students are expected to abide by all local laws, including drug laws.

It is important to note that health insurers may be able to deny coverage for injuries or incidents that occur while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, so the consequences of drinking may go beyond immediate safety concerns.

Emotional Well-Being
Even under the most optimal conditions, adjusting to life in a different culture can be a stressful transition. Occasionally, this stress may trigger or exacerbate more serious emotional conditions. Adjusting to another culture is a higher risk for a student who is currently under treatment for depression, an eating disorder, or any other serious condition. In these cases, study abroad should be postponed or planned very carefully in conjunction with GEO and other healthcare professionals. Students are also advised to contact their healthcare professional when considering studying abroad.

Remember that typical reactions to cultural transitions may include homesickness, boredom or fatigue, physical complaints, feelings of depression or helplessness, and/or hostility toward the host culture. However, these reactions are typically short-lived when the student is encouraged to test new problem-solving methods that enhance their sense of mastery in dealing with a new culture.

Above all, trust your instincts. If, after an initial transition period of two-three weeks, your student demonstrates unusual or prolonged distress, you should refer (or have him/her contact) him/her to the on-site director as well as one of the GEO staff.

Keep Up-to-Date Stateside
You may have to help handle some things for your student while he or she is abroad, such as:

- Renewing a driver’s license
- Registering to vote or requesting an absentee ballot
- Filing income taxes
- Paying monthly credit card bills
- Preparing for the next semester at Vanderbilt (you may have to open mail from the university and remind your student about deadlines, etc.)
- Selecting a housing option
- Preparing forms to continue financial aid
Again, discussing these issues with your student prior to departure will ultimately facilitate a more enriching and hassle-free study abroad experience.

CROSSING CULTURES: PREPARING FOR THE TRANSFORMATION

Studying abroad will almost certainly be a defining period in your student’s educational experience — a psychological journey that will transform him or her into a global thinker with international perspectives and put him/her a step ahead of the competition in the eyes of prospective employers. In spite of this, you — and your student — may have a wide range of feelings about the upcoming experience, from excitement to stress about the idea of being far apart.

This section of the resource guide is designed to help you as a parent or guardian understand the adjustments that your student will need to make it through the study abroad experience, and to offer suggestions as to how you can support him or her in these efforts.

How easily a student adjusts overseas depends on numerous factors including a student’s personality, level of maturity, travel experience, and foreign language skills. The Global Education Office attempts to provide the appropriate level of support for students while also strongly encouraging them to independently make decisions.

By understanding each other’s feelings and supporting decisions before, during, and after the period of overseas study, you can help maximize this opportunity. Here is some advice on what to expect.

ADDITIONAL ADVICE

Encourage, but Don’t Push

Before your student leaves, offer your full support. Let him or her know that you will be there throughout the experience if needed, including that you can still be reached from overseas.

Time abroad often begins with a honeymoon period during which students are excited to finally be in the setting that they have dreamed of. After facing realities such as unfamiliar university procedures, unexpected difficulty with the local language, commuting woes, and the absence of usual support groups, culture shock can set in. At the same time, the student is away from on-campus medical, psychological and advisory services they may have come to rely on.

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 and is just looking for an understanding ear.

If studying abroad was your idea to begin with, be sure not to push too hard. Every year, program directors hear complaints from students who claim that they didn’t want to come in the first place—and those students experience more difficulty than others adjusting to the new environment.

Maintain a Level of Distance

It is by overcoming any difficulties that your student will quickly rise to a new level of independence, so avoid the temptation to become too involved. Remember that this is a learning experience.

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. And it’s not usually wise to try to obtain permission for your student to return home early; the end of the semester is the most important part of his or her academic experience.

**Prepare for the Transformation and Re-Entry**

After living abroad for as long as study abroad students do, they can’t help but be changed by the experience. This can take many forms, from new ways of dressing to cravings for different kinds of food to new political perspectives. Don’t worry too much: negative feelings usually last for a very short time, while a realistic view of America and its place in the world remains with most students for life.

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 student during this life-altering experience. Observing and discussing changes like these is an excellent way to share in your student’s international experience, and you will probably want to hear more than most other people, which will be satisfying to your student. Most study abroad participants report years later that the time they spent overseas was the best part of their college years—and that it changed them for life.

**Re-entry Issues Further Considered**

Re-entry experiences are as different and unique as study abroad experiences. Some students return home and slip easily back into their school and family life. Others experience a degree of reverse culture shock (a phenomenon common among returning study abroad students), which can last for days, weeks, or months. Some common signs of reverse culture shock include:

- Frustration
- Anxiousness
- Boredom
- A sense of not belonging
- Loneliness
- Missing people and places from abroad
- Need for excessive sleep
- Feelings of alienation or withdrawal
- Negativity towards American behavior
- Disappointment or annoyance with family and friends

You can help your student to proactively take steps to reverse the negative outcomes of this process. Encourage your student to not suppress his or her feelings, but to focus on how he or she can integrate “old” and “new” identities. Remind your student to be patient as this type of change does not occur overnight.

The following suggestions may help your student to better integrate the study abroad experience into his/her old identity:

- Seeking out new places, people, and experiences in the States
- Staying connected to study abroad friends
- Finding others who share similar experiences (i.e. study abroad alumni or international students)
- Using available study abroad and counseling services at home and Vanderbilt
- Volunteering with local international organizations
- Continuing to study the host language
- Talking to a career counselor if your student’s career goals have changed
- Reflecting on what the experience has meant to your student by writing, organizing a photo journal, or creating a scrapbook
You may also wish to brainstorm other ideas with your student upon re-entry to the U.S. Eventually a balance between the new and the old, the foreign and the familiar, will be reached. Your student will fully integrate life overseas with life at home, appreciating both cultures for their own inherent worth. In doing so, your student will be well on his or her way to the development of intercultural competence, one of the greatest rewards of studying abroad.

**Returning to Vanderbilt**

GEO realizes that returning 'home' after an experience abroad can be difficult even for the most seasoned student traveler. As a result, we sponsor and actively encourage student participation in international activities on campus and throughout our community.

In particular, re-entry workshops, campus organizations and numerous special events, presentations and fairs allow returned students to become better reintegrated into the campus culture. These activities also encourage students to share their experiences with others in the Vanderbilt community.

**NOT AN END, BUT A BEGINNING...**

Study abroad is one of the best ways young adults can engage in a lifelong process of better understanding the rich and complex diversity of our world and its people. By studying abroad, your student has not only taken an important step toward improving and preparing him/herself for a better future—he or she has prepared to become a better citizen of the Vanderbilt community, the U.S., and the world.

Your decision to support your student’s study abroad endeavor is highly commendable. By studying abroad, your student has chosen to enrich his or her own life. It is our hope that he or she will use what was learned during the international experience to also enrich the lives of others.
APPENDIX I: STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM PROVIDERS

CET Academic Programs
www.cetacademicprograms.com
E-mail: cet@academic-travel.com
Telephone: 1-800-225-4262

Council on International Education Exchange (CIEE)
www.ciee.org
E-mail: studyinfo@ciee.org
Telephone: 1-800-40-STUDY

Danish Institute for Study Abroad (DIS)
www.dis.dk
E-mail: dis@umn.edu
Telephone: 1-800-247-3477

IES Abroad
www.iesabroad.org
E-mail: info@IESabroad.org
Telephone: 1-800-953-0171

Institute for Study Abroad—Butler University (IFSA Butler)
www.ifsa-butler.org
E-mail: study-abroad@butler.edu
Telephone: 1-800-858-0229

School for International Training (SIT)
www.sit.edu/studyabroad
E-mail: studyabroad@sit.edu
Telephone: 1-800-257-7751
Vanderbilt University is subject to the provisions of federal law known as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (also referred to as the Buckley Amendment or FERPA). This act affords matriculated students certain rights with respect to their educational records. These rights include:

1. The right to inspect and review their education records within 45 days of the day the university receives a request for access: Students should submit to the University Registrar written requests that identify the record(s) they wish to inspect. The University Registrar will make arrangements for access and notify the student of the time and place where the records may be inspected. If the University Registrar does not maintain the records, the student will be directed to the university official to whom the request should be addressed.

2. The right to request the amendment of any part of their education records that a student believes is inaccurate or misleading: Students who wish to request an amendment to their educational record should write the university official responsible for the record, clearly identify the part of the record they want changed, and specify why it is inaccurate or misleading. If the university decides not to amend the record as requested by the student, the student will be notified of the decision and advised of his or her right to a hearing.

3. The right to consent to disclosures of personally identifiable information contained in the student’s education records to third parties, except in situations that FERPA allows disclosure without the student's consent: One such situation is disclosure to school officials with legitimate educational interests. A “school official” is a person employed by the university in an administrative, supervisory, academic or research, or support-staff position (including university law enforcement personnel and health staff); a person or company with whom the university has contracted; a member of the Board of Trust; or another student serving on an official university committee, such as the Honor Council, Student Conduct Council, or a grievance committee, or assisting another school official in performing his or her tasks. A school official has a legitimate educational interest if the official needs to review an education record in order to fulfill his or her professional responsibility.

The Buckley Amendment provides the university the ability to designate certain student information as "directory information." Directory information may be made available to any person without the student's consent unless the student gives notice as provided for, below. Vanderbuilt has designated the following as directory information: the student's name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, student ID photos, date and place of birth, major field of study, school, classification, participation in officially recognized activities and sports, weights and heights of members of athletic teams, dates of attendance, degrees and awards received, the most recent previous educational agency or institution attended by the student, and other similar information. Any new-entering or currently-enrolled student who does not wish disclosure of directory information should notify the University Registrar in writing. No element of directory information as defined above is released for students who request nondisclosure except in situations allowed by law. The request to withhold directory information will remain in effect as long as the student continues to be enrolled, or until the student files a written request with the University Registrar to discontinue the withholding. To continue nondisclosure of directory information after a student ceases to be enrolled, a written request for continuance must be filed with the University Registrar during the student's last term of attendance.

If a student believes the university has failed to comply with the Buckley Amendment, he or she may file a complaint using the Student Complaint and Grievance Procedures as outlined in the Student Handbook. If dissatisfied with the outcome of this procedure, students may file a written complaint with the Family Policy and Regulations Office, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC 20202.

Questions about the application of the provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act should be directed to the University Registrar or to the Office of General Counsel.
APPENDIX III: Student Visas

Foreign governments often require students involved in study abroad activities to possess a student visa during their stay abroad, which is a special endorsement added to a passport that provides certain legal rights and a status under local law. Requirements and procedures for student visas vary by country; the U.S. Department of State maintains a site with up-to-date information on these requirements on their travel page: http://travel.state.gov.

While the Global Education Office and providers of programs approved for direct credit will advise and assist participants about procedures and requirements, students and their parents need to be aware that securing a visa is an individual responsibility, and not one that GEO or Vanderbilt University can or will assume. Procedures and requirements vary according to individual circumstance, citizenship, legal status and travel plans. Procedures may also vary between a nation’s consulates abroad.

Many governments require visa applicants to drop off passports and application materials in person at embassies or consular offices. Some host governments require application fees, medical records, photographs, police reports, or even FBI background reports. Some governments require no student visas at all, while still others offer tourist visas at ports of entry but require students to apply for special visas later in their stay. Foreign governments may require students to submit application materials in person on a particular date in a particular consulate, regardless of the convenience or cost. Others accept applications by mail, or by proxy.

Consular officials in charge of visas are notoriously slow about answering inquiries about the status of an application, and consulates are occasionally closed for holidays not recognized in the United States. The application process occasionally grows tense when travel dates approach and passports and visa applications await processing in or delivery from consular offices. Given what are often perceived as unusual requirements for the visa for those with limited international travel experience, or for those who may have extensive experience but have always traveled on tourist visas, we urge special diligence and attention to the visa application process soon after being admitted to a program.

Visa requirements are subject to change, and although the GEO staff and program providers endeavor to keep up with regulations there are instances where procedures, fees, or deadlines will change with short or even no notice. The role of GEO in assisting students to obtain visas depends to a large degree on whether or not a program provider (e.g. CET, CIEE, IFSA, DIS, IES) is assuming direct responsibility for such services. In some cases the provider is required by the host country to be responsible for the entire process, and GEO/Vanderbilt is not directly involved. In other cases students must prepare and submit applications directly, or make personal appearances before consular staff.