



A Checklist for Leaders of Short-Term International Programs

Short-term international programs (programs or STPs) refer to overseas study programs lasting less than one semester. Although they are increasingly popular, STPs present a variety of risks for both educational institutions and the individuals who lead these programs. The leaders of STPs who accompany students on a trip often lack the benefit of the infrastructures and support systems that typically exist for longer-term study abroad programs.

This checklist provides guidance to program leaders to help them ensure participant safety and avoid legal liability. Although not all checklist items will apply to every STP, they can be adapted to suit the needs of most program leaders. If a program leader is unsure whether an item in the checklist falls within his or her individual responsibility, the leader should take steps to confirm that someone at the institution has addressed the issue.

This checklist addresses issues that a program leader should consider before, during, and after a program and can be a helpful guide if emergencies occur during a trip. Leaders using this checklist should indicate “yes” or “no” in the column to the right of each item and consider what further actions, if any, they may need to take.

I. Program Planning

International travel with students always involves some risk, but many of the risks can be significantly reduced if they are considered during the program planning process. At some institutions, advance planning is handled by campus administrators who oversee STPs, but at others, the primary responsibility for planning may fall on program leaders themselves. The following questions can help these leaders anticipate and prepare for issues that could result in program disruption, threats to safety, or potential liability.

A. Structure and Scope	Yes	No	Further Steps
1. Does your institution have any policies in place that provide guidance or impose restrictions on the program you are planning?			
2. Is there staff or an office that you are required to work with as you plan the STP?			
3. Have you determined whether the program should be sponsored by your institution, facilitated by a foreign institution, or offered through an independent third-party provider?			
4. Have you decided what events and excursions should be included in the official program?			
5. Have you considered recreational or other activities that might be available to participants on an optional basis and not sponsored by your institution?			
6. Are you proficient in the native language of the program location?			

A. Structure and Scope (continued)	Yes	No	Further Steps
7. Have you decided whether participation should be limited to undergraduates, graduate students, or open to both?			
8. Have you determined whether students under 18 should be allowed to participate?			
9. Have you considered any significant cultural differences between the U.S. and the program location, such as language, religion, attitudes toward women, and legal drinking age?			
B. Safety Considerations			
10. Are you aware of safety and security risks at the program location, including whether it is subject to U.S. State Department travel warnings?			
11. Is the program location susceptible to natural disasters?			
12. Have you determined the minimum and maximum number of student participants feasible for the trip?			
13. Have you determined how many program leaders may be required?			
14. Do you know what medical facilities are available and the levels of care they provide?			
15. Have you researched which vaccinations are necessary or recommended?			
16. Have you decided where participants will be housed?			
17. Do you have a plan to ensure that a student who is injured or becomes seriously ill during the program is not left behind?			
18. Do you have a plan for responding, such as consulting an expert on the home campus, if a student shows signs of depression or instability during the trip?			
C. Travel During the Program			
19. Do you plan to use public transportation when possible?			
20. If you plan to use private chartered transportation companies, have you vetted them in advance by checking safety records, reliability, and insurance?			
21. Are you familiar with any institutional policy governing vehicle rental or use overseas and who may be permitted to drive such vehicles?			
22. If your institution allows program leaders to drive students during the program, do you meet license and insurance requirements in the foreign jurisdiction?			
23. Even if your institution does not formally prohibit students from driving vehicles in a foreign country, would you allow them to do so?			
24. If anyone from your institution will be driving during the program, are you familiar with general road conditions and local traffic laws?			
D. Participant Selection			
25. Have you decided or has your institution established criteria that should be used to select participants, such as:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum GPA or class standing requirements 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disciplinary standing 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign language skills 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relative maturity and ability to handle program requirements 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fulfillment of any prerequisite coursework 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal or academic references 			
26. Can students with physical or mental disabilities be accommodated?			

II. Pre-Departure Preparation

Following the initial planning phase, program leaders often are responsible for additional preparation that may require them to coordinate with others on campus, become familiar with certain institutional policies and procedures, select and orient student participants, and obtain waivers.

E. Coordinating With Home Campus	Yes	No	Further Steps
27. Have you reviewed the program with appropriate individuals on your home campus, such as representatives from:			
• Risk management, or someone responsible for its functions			
• Study abroad office			
• Legal counsel			
• Public safety			
• Student affairs			
• Student health and counseling services			
28. Have you attended any training or orientation sessions that your institution requires or provides for program leaders?			
29. Have you provided the home campus with a:			
• Complete program itinerary, including dates, locations, and contact information			
• List of emergency contacts for all participants			
30. Have you determined how program leaders will communicate with the home campus during the program?			
31. Have you determined how leaders and participants would communicate with each other in the event of an emergency or crisis during the program?			
F. Understanding Institutional Policies and Procedures			
32. Are you familiar with your institution's:			
• Student handbook or student code of conduct			
• Policies prohibiting discrimination and harassment			
• Emergency or crisis response procedures and what would trigger them (e.g., natural disasters, terrorism, criminal acts, or political unrest)			
33. Do you understand that program leaders have primary responsibility onsite for enforcing the institution's policies?			
34. Do you know whom to contact at the home campus in the event of:			
• An alleged rape or sexual assault by or of a student			
• Another alleged crime involving a student, as either a victim or perpetrator			
• An allegation of discrimination or harassment by or of a student			
• A significant disciplinary or academic infraction by a student			
• The death or serious injury or illness of a student			
• An event that might require implementation of the institution's emergency or crisis response plan			

G. Pre-Trip Orientation for Participants	Yes	No	Further Steps
35. Will you conduct a pre-departure orientation session for participants?			
36. Will the following information be covered in the pre-departure orientation?			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insurance coverage during the trip (e.g., whether students' existing coverage applies outside the U.S. and any additional coverage—such as emergency evacuation or repatriation of remains—that may be required or advisable) 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies on the home campus that apply overseas, including the student handbook or code of conduct 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How and to whom to report incidents of harassment or assault 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions to take if program leaders become incapacitated 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major cultural differences to expect 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing exposure to disease and illness 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risks of terrorism 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your institution's emergency or crisis response plan and how it would be implemented in the program location 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact information for all program leaders and participants 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency contacts on the home campus 			
H. Onsite Orientation for Participants			
37. Will you conduct an additional orientation after reaching the program site?			
38. Will the following information be covered during the onsite orientation?			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief review of the topics covered in the pre-departure orientation 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reminder about particular safety and security concerns 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ways to reduce the risk of sexual and other assaults, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avoiding drinking alcohol in excess or to the point of impairment - Not going out alone to bars or clubs - Avoiding leaving bars or clubs either alone or with a stranger - Trying not to walk anywhere alone, especially at night 			
39. Will you enlist the participation of a local speaker, such as an embassy or consular official or police officer, who has first-hand knowledge of the location's culture and likely risks?			
I. Explanations and Waivers of Liability			
40. Will participants be advised in writing about:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the general risks of foreign travel and any known risks of the program location 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the distinction between approved activities sponsored by the program and optional activities undertaken at the students' own risk 			
41. Before departure, will participants be required to sign country-specific waivers of liability, including statements of knowing assumption of risk?			

III. Handling Issues During the Program

Although most trips are successful, program leaders occasionally have to handle problems onsite, such as crime involving student participants or a serious incident of student misconduct. The following questions can help leaders respond appropriately to problems that occur onsite.

J. Safety Problems	Yes	No	Further Steps
42. If a student is sexually assaulted or otherwise becomes a crime victim, do you know how to take the following steps?			
• Obtain immediate medical attention for the student			
• Report the incident to local authorities			
• Report the incident to the home campus and seek further guidance			
• For their safety, advise other program participants about the basics of the incident while preserving the victim's privacy			
K. Disciplinary Problems			
43. If a program participant is accused of misconduct, do you know how to:			
• Provide appropriate officials on the home campus with documentation relevant to the alleged violation			
• Consult the home campus about recommended actions, including whether the accused student can or should be removed from the program			
• Comply with any due process requirements under the student handbook or code of conduct, such as giving the accused student notice and an opportunity to be heard			
• Inform everyone involved that retaliation will not be tolerated and could in itself justify removal from the program			

IV. Post-Trip Surveys

Learning from past experience, positive or negative, is a critical part of risk management.

	Yes	No	Further Steps
44. After returning, will you or your institution survey participants about:			
• Whether the orientation sessions sufficiently prepared them			
• Safety or security concerns or problems they experienced during the program			
• Complaints or compliments about any vendors used (e.g., transportation companies)			
• Suggestions for improving the program			
• Whether they would recommend returning to the program location			

Resources

- UE Online Course, “Short-Term International Programs” — available free to employees of UE members; contains helpful information and resources for leaders of STPs, including several case scenarios.
<http://elearning.ue.org/>
- Hoye, William P. *Understanding and Managing the Risks of Short-Term International Programs*. Chevy Chase, Md: United Educators, 2008 — designed primarily for use by on-campus administrators who oversee STPs, but portions of it are also relevant to program leaders.
https://www.ue.org/Libraries/Shared_RML/Managing_Liability_Managing_the_Risks_of_Short-Term_International_Programs.sflb.ashx
- *From the UE Toolbox: A Checklist for Campus Administrators Managing Short-Term international Programs* — intended for use by on-campus administrators, but contains some material that may be helpful to program leaders.
https://www.ue.org/Libraries/Shared_RML/UE_Toolbox_Short-Term_International_Programs_03-09.sflb.ashx
- The U.S. Department of State website lists travel warnings and advisories around the world.
<http://www.travel.state.gov/>
- The Embassy World website provides a comprehensive list of and contact information for embassies and consulates around the world.
<http://www.embassyworld.com/>

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