In the modern global economy, educational opportunities abroad—especially in developing areas—have become very popular at independent schools. However, study abroad programs pose unique challenges for schools, especially those that have never offered overseas programs.

This checklist provides independent school administrators who oversee study abroad programs an overview of risk management considerations. It is not designed for adult trip leaders, volunteers, chaperones, or student participants and their parents. School administrators should indicate “yes” or “no” in the column to the right of each question and then consider what further steps they may wish to take.

1 Preparation for the Program

Schools should establish a formal approval process for all study abroad programs. A written approval policy ensures that consistent standards apply and that program leaders, student participants, and their parents are adequately prepared. In addition, schools should carefully consider whether to directly sponsor a program or contract with a third-party provider. A third-party provider can offer experience and expertise that a school lacks and reduce—although not eliminate—the school’s liability exposure.

Program Formation and Approval

- Program Formation. Does your school have a written policy that identifies which school officials have authority to determine:
How study abroad programs are established? □ Yes □ No

Where the school’s students are permitted to travel on approved programs, including any countries to which travel is expressly prohibited, such as those with U.S. State Department travel warnings? □ Yes □ No

Whether individuals who are not program leaders or current students, such as school alumni, donors, or family members of participants, may be allowed to participate in a program? □ Yes □ No

Under what conditions an approved program may be suspended or canceled? □ Yes □ No

Writing Program Proposal. Does your school require a formal written proposal for new programs that addresses:

- The trip location and duration? □ Yes □ No
- The academic purpose of the trip? □ Yes □ No
- Skills and qualifications needed by trip leaders? □ Yes □ No
- The type of housing needed or anticipated? □ Yes □ No
- An overview of any particular risks of the trip? □ Yes □ No

Program Approval Process. Does the approval process for a new program seek input from:

- The individual(s) responsible for overseeing global education? □ Yes □ No
- The CFO or other school official responsible for overseeing risk management? □ Yes □ No
- Legal counsel, both at home and at the proposed program site? □ Yes □ No
- A representative from the dean of students’ office or an office that oversees academic programs? □ Yes □ No
- Student health and/or counseling? □ Yes □ No
- School security? □ Yes □ No

School’s Relationship to the Program

If your school directly sponsors the proposed program, do you:

- Require written contracts with all program leaders, including school employees and volunteers? □ Yes □ No
- Require written contracts with any other schools and service providers, such as tour operators, housing providers, and charter bus companies? □ Yes □ No
• Establish requirements or guidelines for an appropriate leader to student ratio? □ Yes □ No

• Establish a requirement that each program, regardless of the number of students, has at least two adult leaders? □ Yes □ No

• Have a contingency plan in the event that program leaders are injured or unable to perform their duties? □ Yes □ No

• Establish practices to vet foreign host families with whom students will stay? □ Yes □ No

• If your school contracts with a third-party provider to deliver all or part of a program do you:

  • Evaluate the provider’s experience and qualifications, such as its history running similar programs, references from other schools, approach to risk management, and vetting of any foreign host families? □ Yes □ No

• Cover the following issues in a written contract:

  – Provider’s emergency and crisis management protocols? □ Yes □ No

  – Orientation and on-site services provided for students? □ Yes □ No

  – Insurance and travel assistance services available? □ Yes □ No

  – Provider’s vetting process for charter bus companies or other on-site vendors? □ Yes □ No

  – Which party—the school or the provider—is responsible for injuries, claims, or property damage arising out of the program? □ Yes □ No

  – Possible naming of the school as an additional insured on the provider’s insurance policies? □ Yes □ No

  – Resolution process for disputes arising out of the program? □ Yes □ No

**Selection and Preparation of Program Leaders**

- **Selecting Program Leaders.** Have you established a consistent process for evaluating and selecting study abroad program leaders and chaperones—whether employees or volunteers (including parents of students)—that reviews:

  • Prior experience with or knowledge of the program location? □ Yes □ No

  • Relevant foreign language ability? □ Yes □ No

  • Background check results? □ Yes □ No

  • Training in applicable health emergency procedures such as CPR or the administration of allergic response treatments, such as the EpiPen? □ Yes □ No

  • General temperament and suitability for a leadership role? □ Yes □ No
Campus Communications and Contacts. During pre-departure orientation, does your school review with program leaders any relevant safety manuals and/or crisis management plans and identify individuals at the school to contact in the event of:

- Death or injury to a student? □ Yes □ No
- Natural disasters, such as earthquakes or tsunamis? □ Yes □ No
- Serious student misconduct? □ Yes □ No
- Harassment, assault, or other misconduct by another program leader on the trip? □ Yes □ No
- Arrests or other violations of local law? □ Yes □ No
- Property damage caused by someone on the trip? □ Yes □ No

Dealing With Students in Emergencies. Do you train program leaders on appropriate actions in emergencies, such as:

- Completing an accident or incident report in the event of a student's illness or injury? □ Yes □ No
- The preferred way to reach a student's parent or other emergency contact? □ Yes □ No
- Advising students what to do if program leaders are incapacitated during the trip? □ Yes □ No
- How to handle the remainder of the group after an emergency involving one student? □ Yes □ No
- How to enlist additional support if necessary, including school staff that can travel to the trip location to provide assistance in a crisis? □ Yes □ No

Insurance. Do you brief program leaders on the insurance available to them and program participants overseas, including:

- Whether health insurance applies during travel abroad? □ Yes □ No
- Whether supplemental insurance is available for items such as trip cancellation, property damage, psychological counseling, medical assistance, emergency evacuation, and repatriation of remains? □ Yes □ No

Student Selection and Pre-Departure Orientation

As part of your screening process for student applicants, do you collect information about:

- The applicant’s relevant language ability? □ Yes □ No
- Prior course work or life experience that prepares the applicant to participate? □ Yes □ No
References with personal knowledge of the applicant's maturity and readiness to study abroad? □ Yes □ No

Previous academic dishonesty or other discipline issues that may bear on the applicant's fitness to participate? □ Yes □ No

Any food or other allergies that may pose a particular problem for travelers to the program location? □ Yes □ No

With respect to applicants who may be disabled or have health conditions that require treatment during a program:

Are program leaders advised that applicants and their parents should not be asked about students' disabilities and that participation may not be denied solely on the basis of any disabilities? □ Yes □ No

Are applicants and their parents provided information about potential accessibility issues in the program location? □ Yes □ No

Once students are accepted, do you inquire about any special needs that might affect their full participation? □ Yes □ No

If a student or parent identifies the student as disabled and indicates accommodations may be needed, do you consult legal counsel and engage the student and parent in an interactive process to determine what accommodations may be necessary and whether they are feasible? □ Yes □ No

Do you have program leaders participate in the interactive process so that they are aware of students' particular needs and any agreed-upon accommodations? □ Yes □ No

Do you provide a written explanation to students, parents, and program leaders about the school's policy on distributing prescription or over-the-counter medications to participants while abroad? □ Yes □ No

Pre-Departure Orientation

Do you require student applicants to attend an orientation before the departure of any program? □ Yes □ No

Do you invite parents to attend the orientation? □ Yes □ No

Do you require parents to attend? □ Yes □ No

If parents are unable to attend in person, do you offer alternatives, such as Skype or conference call participation? □ Yes □ No

Are the following topics covered in pre-departure orientation:

General risks of overseas travel? □ Yes □ No

Risks specific to the trip location? □ Yes □ No

Required or recommendation vaccinations? □ Yes □ No
### Waivers, Assumptions of Risk, and Related Documents

**Before program departure, do you require:**

- The parents of student participants to execute a waiver of liability that releases the parents’ own claims of negligence against the school?  
  - Yes □ No ☑

- Any student participants who are not minors to execute a waiver of liability releasing their claims?  
  - Yes □ No ☑

- Both the participants and their parents to:
  - Acknowledge in writing that they have read the school’s handbook and any other school conduct rules, and understand that these rules apply overseas?  
    - Yes □ No ☑

  - Provide emergency contact information?  
    - Yes □ No ☑

- Student participants to sign an assumption of risk form that:
  - Identifies as specifically as possible the potential risks of the trip?  
    - Yes □ No ☑

  - States that the student understands those risks and is taking them voluntarily?  
    - Yes □ No ☑

- The student participants and their parents to execute and, if necessary, notarize any documents that apply to the particular trip, such as permission to travel or medical treatment authorization forms?  
  - Yes □ No ☑

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## Oversight During the Program

School administrators should establish written policies governing oversight of study abroad programs. In addition to requiring some level of on-site orientation for participants, such policies might cover key risks commonly associated with international study.
On-Site Student Orientation

- After reaching the program site, do you require program leaders to address the following topics, as appropriate for the location:
  - Information about your school’s crisis management plan and a list of emergency contacts at the school? □ Yes □ No
  - Contact information for local authorities? □ Yes □ No
  - Local cultural practices and beliefs? □ Yes □ No
  - Particular risks of criminal activity? □ Yes □ No
  - Specific health risks, such as communicable diseases? □ Yes □ No
  - Risks posed by the political climate, including war, civil unrest, or terrorism? □ Yes □ No
  - Responses to possible natural disasters, such as earthquakes or tsunamis? □ Yes □ No
  - Any other risks unique to the program location? □ Yes □ No
  - A daily review of any risks that participants are likely to face during that day’s activities? □ Yes □ No

Managing Key Risks

- **Accidental Death or Injury.** To reduce the risk of liability for a student’s death or injury during the program, do you:
  - Ensure that all written marketing and program materials provided to students and parents clearly identify which activities the school sponsors and state that any others will be undertaken independently? □ Yes □ No
  - Restrict school-sponsored activities to those integral to the program’s academic goals? □ Yes □ No
  - Prohibit inherently dangerous activities, such as cliff climbing or bungee jumping? □ Yes □ No
  - Prohibit program leaders from promoting or participating in nonsponsored activities? □ Yes □ No

- **Motor Vehicle Accidents.** To reduce the risk of liability for motor vehicle accidents during a program, does your school:
  - Vet charter bus/transportation providers or maintain a list of quality providers to use for sponsored activities? □ Yes □ No
  - Revise any campus vehicle usage policies to apply on study abroad programs? □ Yes □ No
  - Encourage program leaders to use public transportation or vetted transportation companies, even if leaders are allowed to drive during the program? □ Yes □ No
Assault. With respect to allegations of assault, including sexual assault, by or against anyone involved in a study abroad program, do you:

- Require program leaders who learn of an alleged assault to promptly report it to designated school administrators? □ Yes □ No
- Ensure that designated administrators are prepared to provide immediate guidance to on-site program leaders regarding:
  - Obtaining medical attention for the victim? □ Yes □ No
  - Reporting the assault to local authorities? □ Yes □ No
  - Advising other program participants of the reported assault and necessary details, such as the location and general circumstances? □ Yes □ No
  - Taking appropriate action if the alleged perpetrator is a program leader or participant on the trip? □ Yes □ No

Discrimination and Harassment. Because some court decisions indicate that U.S. laws against discrimination and harassment protect students on study abroad programs, schools and legal counsel should review and revise internal policies prohibiting such conduct for application abroad. Once this task is accomplished, does your school:

- Train program leaders and students during orientation on the policies, including:
  - Policy definitions of discrimination and harassment? □ Yes □ No
  - How to report policy violations? □ Yes □ No
- Require program leaders to report promptly any violations to the school? □ Yes □ No
- Provide trip participants with an alternate contact person at the school, in case the alleged perpetrator is a program leader on the trip? □ Yes □ No

General Violations of School Policies. All materials for study abroad programs should state that student handbooks and codes of conduct apply to overseas study just as they do on the school’s home campus. In addition, do you:

- Train program leaders to promptly notify the school if a participant is involved in a violation of any academic, disciplinary, or program-specific rules, such as underage alcohol use? □ Yes □ No
- Require program leaders to document the alleged violation? □ Yes □ No
- Ensure that school procedures for investigation and discipline are followed after a violation overseas is reported? □ Yes □ No
Evaluation After the Program

Schools should solicit feedback from study abroad program participants and parents, as well as program leaders. Post-program evaluations can be useful to schools when evaluating their global studies program and determining whether the same or a similar program should be approved in the future.

Student and Parent Evaluations

- Do you request that student participants or their parents complete a post-trip survey covering such items as:
  - How well the orientation prepared the student for the location, such as differences in culture, language, and customs?
  - How prepared the program leaders were?
  - Whether students experienced any health or safety problems?
  - Their overall impressions of the program, both positive and negative?

Program Leader Reports

- Do you require program leaders to complete a written post-trip report covering such matters as:
  - The effectiveness of pre-trip planning/orientation?
  - Ratings of services provided by vendors and contractors?
  - Whether they encountered any particular problems?
  - Information about the location that should be considered for future trips?

Acknowledgement

This checklist, “Managing Study Abroad Programs in Independent Schools” was written by Hillary L. Petregrew, JD, risk counsel for UE.