

Policy on Travel and Study in High Risk Countries

No program can guarantee a student's safety or eliminate all risks in a study abroad program any more than can any college guarantee a student's safety and eliminate all risks on the home campus. However, Southwestern College believes that, under normal circumstances, there is no greater risk in studying and traveling abroad than there is in studying and traveling here in the United States. In study abroad as in other settings, participants play a major role in their own health and safety through the decisions they make before and during the program and by their day-to-day choices and behaviors.

Specifically, Southwestern College:

- cannot guarantee or assure the safety of participants or eliminate all risks from the study and travel abroad environments;
- cannot monitor or control all of the daily personal decisions, choices, and activities of individual participants;
- cannot prevent participants from engaging in illegal, dangerous or unwise activities;
- cannot assure that U.S. standards of due process apply in overseas legal proceedings or provide or pay for legal representation for participants;
- cannot assume responsibility for the actions of persons not employed or otherwise engaged by Southwestern College for events that are not part of the program; or that are beyond the control of Southwestern College and its subcontractors; or for situations that may arise due to the failure of a participant to disclose pertinent information; and
- cannot assure that home-country cultural values and norms will apply in the host country.

Suspension of Approved Study Abroad Programs

Southwestern College has several study abroad programs that have been approved, in part, on the basis of knowledgeable and seasoned program personnel that are stationed in-country; the sound and proven program infrastructures that these personnel have in place; and the due care and attention that these personnel devote to enhancing the safety and security of our students.

In spite of our confidence in the measures our foreign partners take to enhance student safety and security, Southwestern College may find it advisable to suspend participation in an officially recognized study abroad program or destination due to political unrest, social instability, contagious disease control, military operations, or terrorism concerns within the host country.

Southwestern College endeavors to balance the value of participation in international educational activities against the potential risk to its students and

employees of such participation. In balancing these factors, the College relies on information from the Centers for Disease Control and the U.S. Department of State.

For decisions affecting study abroad programs and other College-sponsored travel to health-risk areas, the College will use the “Travel Alert” and “Travel Advisory” publications developed by the Centers for Disease Control.

For decisions affecting study abroad programs and other College-sponsored travel to security-risk areas, the College will use the “Travel Warnings” and “Public Announcements” publications developed by the U.S. Department of State.

Accordingly, when conditions in a foreign country make travel to or in that country unsafe, Southwestern College reserves the right to:

- suspend its own study abroad programs;
- withdraw approval of participation in an externally-sponsored study abroad program;
- limit the use of college funds for travel abroad;
- set conditions for student, faculty, and staff traveling to and returning from travel in high-risk areas;
- take other actions deemed appropriate to protect the safety of students, faculty, or staff traveling or intending to travel abroad under any form of Southwestern College sponsorship.

The Academic Dean, in consultation with the Director of Builders Abroad and others who have knowledge about the affected area, makes all decisions concerning the cancellation or modification of a study abroad program recognized by Southwestern College. Decisions taken by students and their parents regarding individual participation in a study abroad program are personal. There can be no guarantee of credit for students who independently attend a program for which approval has been suspended. Similarly, there can be no guarantee of credit for students who independently withdraw and return home from a non-cancelled program before the completion of scheduled instruction and examinations.

Policy for Study and Travel Abroad in Areas Affected by a Travel Warning

Southwestern College has developed the following policy governing its educational and other activities in areas for which the U.S. Department of State has issued a Travel Warning.

1. Except as provided in Paragraph 2 below, Southwestern College will not operate, pay for, supervise, direct, or otherwise support a study abroad program, research program, travel program, or other course or program for

any students (undergraduate, graduate, professional) in a portion of a country where a Department of State Travel Warning (“Travel Warning”) is in effect.

2. An individual faculty member, staff member, or graduate student whose professional activities (e.g., research, teaching at a foreign institution, attendance at a conference) necessitate travel to a portion of a country where a Travel Warning is in effect and any of whose travel/research costs are paid from a college administered account may undertake such travel only after the following steps have been taken:
 - a. A description of the proposed professional activities has been filed with each program that is funding the trip and each group has approved the trip in writing based on its feasibility and importance; additionally, the individual’s division chair, director of Builders Abroad, and academic dean have also approved the trip in writing.
 - b. The faculty member, staff member, or graduate student has signed the Faculty and Staff Travel Waiver Form (available through the Builders Abroad website) indicating that he or she understands the risks involved in travel to this location and releasing Southwestern College from any liability;
 - c. The faculty member, staff member, or student has appropriate health insurance approved by Builders Abroad;
 - d. Evidence of compliance with a., b., and c. is on file with the Director of Builders Abroad.
3. Notwithstanding the terms and conditions set forth in Paragraphs 1 & 2 above, any student who wishes to travel to an area subject to a Travel Warning in connection with a study abroad program or other course of study or research may do so under these conditions: (i) the program or other course of study or research is not operated or funded by Southwestern College or supervised or directed by Southwestern College faculty or staff, (ii) the student has made a successful appeal to the Director of Builders Abroad to participate in the program, and (iii) the student has signed the Student Travel Waiver Form (available through the Builders Abroad website) indicating that he or she understands the risks involved in travel to this location and releasing Southwestern College from any liability. If the student is an undergraduate, at least one of the student’s parents (or the student’s legal guardian) must also sign the completed Student Travel Waiver Form. During the time that the student is engaged in travel under this paragraph, the student will not be enrolled at Southwestern College.

Written Appeals to Participate in Suspended Study Abroad Programs

Appeals to participate in a suspended study abroad program must be submitted to the Director of Builders Abroad by the study abroad application deadline. Written appeals to participate in a suspended study abroad program consist of three parts, included in the application:

1. The student must offer a compelling academic rationale for study in the selected country, outlining how study in only that country will advance their academic goals and aid them in the pursuit of their Southwestern degree, and detailing why a study program in another country will not advance adequately the academic goals he or she has outlined.
2. The student must articulate what steps they have taken to inform themselves of the safety and security risks that study in the selected country may pose and demonstrate that they have considered such risks in a thoughtful and deliberative manner.
3. The student must print out and read the current U.S. Department of State Travel Warning for the selected area, sign it, and submit it at the time of the appeal.

A committee composed of the Director of Builders Abroad, the Academic Dean, as well as a faculty member with expertise in the proposed country or region will evaluate written appeals. If the committee denies a student's appeal, that denial shall be final and shall not be reconsidered.

Students who independently participate in a suspended program may not receive transfer credit for courses taken in those countries, and Southwestern College will not authorize the use of financial aid for students enrolling in such programs.

Possible Academic and Financial Loss

The committee's granting of a student's appeal to participate does not alter the College's position that study and travel in the country or region may be dangerous. Rather, it indicates that the College recognizes that the student understands and appreciates the risks involved in participation, is willing to assume individual responsibility for those risks, and, for academic reasons, the student has made the choice to participate in spite of such known risks. Furthermore, any student who seeks and is granted an exception to participate in a suspended program or destination shall bear solely and entirely any financial loss or loss of academic credit that may result in the event that the situation in-country deteriorates and the U.S. State Department's evaluation of the situation in-country changes and the U.S. State Department advises that all Americans leave immediately. Likewise, should a student choose to leave the program or destination for any reason prior to the completion of his or her studies, the student shall bear solely and entirely any financial loss or loss of academic credit that may result.

Students Already Participating in a Program Suspended due to a Travel Warning

If a student is already in the area for which the Travel Warning has been issued, the Director of Builders Abroad shall decide, in consultation with the Academic Dean and others having knowledge of the situation, whether the student shall be advised to return to the U.S. Where the student is advised to return to the U.S. or where the student desires to return to the U.S. under these circumstances, the College will work with the student, his or her family, and the overseas program to decide the best course of action at that time. If a student chooses to remain in the program, they will be asked to sign a waiver stating that Southwestern College is not responsible for their decision to remain in the Travel Warning area.

When Southwestern College withdraws approval of participation in a study abroad program during the semester, Southwestern College will do its best to assist students in completing the semester of academic work on the home campus.

Where the student has pre-paid the costs of a college-sponsored study abroad program the student may be eligible for a refund of all or a portion of the payment, but the availability of a refund is not guaranteed and will depend on the circumstances of each case.