

PREPARING FOR STUDY ABROAD: PRE-DEPARTURE SELF-ORIENTATION QUESTIONS

The following list of pre-departure self-orientation questions may be used in many ways, limited only by the imagination. Contact natives, returnees, tourist and travel organizations, libraries, native faculty or students, friends, and relatives to seek answers.

STUDY

■ Preparatory Questions

What am I looking for in a study abroad experience? Have I made a list of my goals?

What are my hidden (or unspoken) expectations?

What cultural experiences am I looking for during my study abroad period?

What effect will this experience have on my career objectives?

What courses (language, history, etc.) will help me prepare and get more out of my experience abroad?

How familiar am I with my own cultural heritage?

■ Travel and Arrival Questions

How do I get a passport? Why do I need one? What can I do to avoid having my passport stolen? If my passport is stolen, do I know where to go for a new one? Did I photocopy my passport and other important documents?

Will I be going to countries which require a visa? If so, have I obtained the appropriate visa? What is a visa?

Do I know the weight and size limits for luggage on planes? Do I realize that I may be carrying all of my luggage for plane and train changes? Can I manage it alone?

How will I proceed to the host campus once I have arrived in the country? Have I checked train and bus schedules? What if I arrive on a weekend or late at night? Who will I call? What will I do if no one can meet me?

Do I know the currency exchange rate of the country in which I will be traveling? Do I know how and where to obtain some of that country's currency before I leave? Am I familiar with the bills and coins?

What is the value to me of an International Student ID card, Youth Hostel membership, Eurail or Britrail pass? What other discounts are available to students?

■ On-Site Questions

What is the climate like where I will be? Do I have the appropriate clothes for the climate?

Do I have an option to live with a family? If I live in a residence hall, will I be able to stay in a single room? Can I room with local students? How close is housing

to the town and university? Should I take bed linens? What laundry service is available?

Will I use public transportation to get to classes? How much does it cost? Am I ready to spend 20-45 minutes on a bus to travel to class from my residency or homestay? Should I plan to buy a car or bike? Will my driver's license be valid abroad? Do I need to obtain an international driver's license? What rules govern driving, car rental?

How do I open a bank account? What are the banking hours? Is there a bank on campus? (Is there a "campus?") How long will it take to transfer money?

Are local telephone calls free? Are calls charged by both time and distance, even in the home? How will I arrange to pay for calls made from a home? Are calls overseas and within the country itemized? Do I know the long distance access codes? Do I have a "call me card" so that I can call my parents?

What are the normal expectations regarding the use of hot water, heating, and power consumption? What about voltage? Plug size?

■ Academic Questions

Will I be eligible for financial aid while I am studying abroad? How do I apply for it? What happens if my check arrives after I have left? What kind of scholarships are available? What are my chances of getting one? How do I apply for next year?

Are the university campuses in "my" country like American ones, with lots of buildings close together?

When do classes begin? When am I expected to report? Do I know to whom and where to report?

How do I go about registering for classes? Are there catalogs and class offerings posted? Who will help? What is normally considered a full class load? How will my courses transfer?

What happens if I decide to take courses different from the ones I signed up for while I was still in the U.S.? What happens if I fail a class? Will my grades transfer, or just the credit? Other exchange students have different regulations. Do I know mine?

What do I do in case of a student or faculty or even a general strike? Suppose it lasts for several weeks, what will I do?

How will I be evaluated? How often? (Quarterly, semester, annual, etc.) How will I get a transcript sent back to my home institution? Does my home institution require that I sit for a final exam?

Are there semesters and terms? Will I know the school calendar ahead of time?

What clubs are available for me to join? What other activities are available on campus?

What are the residence halls/dormitories like? Do the residence halls have visitation hours? What about roommates?

What is a refectory? A Mensa? How do I get tickets?

What are the library hours? For how long can I borrow books? Or can I? How are library fines assessed? Do students purchase textbooks?

Have all the necessary home university offices been informed about my plans to study abroad? Have I arranged to have mail forwarded?

What must I do at my home institution before leaving in order to guarantee credit transfer? Will I have to re-enroll? How do I pre-register for courses while I am still abroad?

Do I want to live in a residence hall when I return? What should I do before I leave?

■ General Questions

Have I read as much as possible about the country or countries in which I will be traveling or studying? Have I written to national tourist agencies for maps, free guide books?

Have I been reading magazines and/or newspapers to become more familiar with world news and events? Do I know what's going on in the U.S. as well? Am I prepared to discuss world events with new acquaintances?

What, if any, diseases are prevalent in "my" country? Have I checked into this? What inoculations, if any, will I need to get before I leave? What medications should I carry?

What is included in the program costs and benefits? How much extra money should I take? Can I get a part-time job? Will I need a work permit? Have I planned for such additional costs as vacation travel, entertainment, gifts, etc.?

If I need medical assistance while abroad, do I know what to do? If I am sick or have an accident, how will I obtain reimbursement for costs? Have I discussed my medical insurance with family?

Do I have any prescription drugs that I will need to take with me? How about glasses? Contact lenses?

Are traveler's checks a good idea for me? Do I know where to get them cashed in "my" country? Do I know what to do if they are stolen? Do I have a credit card in case of emergencies? Do I know about the different ways to have money sent to me in case I run out of funds? How will I transfer money?

Have my family and friends been informed as to how to reach me while abroad? Have I updated my address book so I can reach them?

Have I experimented with a "dry run" packing system? Do I *really* need all the items I packed?

Do I have a notebook in which to keep a written record of my experiences?

If I am staying with a family, have I selected gifts to take with me for them? Am I familiar with "hostess gift" customs?

Have I made photocopies of all of my documents such as a passport, visa, traveler's checks, health insurance card, prescriptions for drugs/glasses/contacts? Where are they?

Am I aware of the penalties if I am caught with illegal drugs or in the company of drug users while overseas?

—Mary Elizabeth Debicki

DR. MARY ELIZABETH DEBICKI is Director of the Office of Study Abroad at the University of Kansas.

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