

# Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Graduate and Professional Student International Travel

1 October 2012

One Committee member commented that the sun never sets on the University of Chicago. Graduate and professional school students' academic and extra-curricular pursuits draw them to all corners of the globe. This fact against the backdrop of an increasingly complicated world stage prompted the Provost to appoint a committee to assess the nature and scope of University-sponsored or -sanctioned graduate and professional school international activities and to recommend policies, procedures, and resources for the safe and effective conduct of such activities.

Throughout its process, the Committee reviewed policies and practices of numerous peer institutions. In pairs, members of the Committee met on our campus with faculty members, other academic appointees, administrators, and graduate and professional school students in each of the divisions and schools and in the Oriental Institute to learn about the range, purpose, and context of students' University-related travel abroad. Those discussions covered preparations, transportation, being abroad, returning to campus, and the challenges associated with those phases of international travel. Both routine and emergency aspects were considered.

The nature of graduate work in certain fields such as Egyptology or Amazonian ethnography presumes travel abroad. Canvassing broadly, however, the Committee learned that students from every graduate division and school routinely travel internationally for academic activities such as fieldwork, conferences, and credit-bearing courses as well as for complementary global exposure experiences such as internships, service projects, and trips sponsored by student groups. Alone and in groups small and large, students journey to bustling cities and isolated regions. Most of their experiences proceed without unexpected problems; occasionally their activities are disrupted by political upheaval, natural disaster, personal illness, crime, or other difficulties.

While many of the inherently internationally-intensive departments stated that they now seek students with substantial language background and in-country experience, it remains the case that some of the students traveling abroad for shorter-term research, internships, conferences, and the global exposure experiences are leaving the United States for the first time. Still others who travel abroad are not U.S. citizens, which can pose special problems with visas, departures, and returns.

As the media emphasizes globalization, applicants to the professional schools inquire about opportunities for such exposure. The professional schools have hastened to develop programs to meet this expressed demand and there are many new programs organized by people sometimes less familiar with the University's existing resources and practices.

The breadth of types of travelers and types of trips manifest the full range of travel complications, and there are policies, procedures, and resources that the Committee believes the University could implement to minimize the impact and risks of those complications and contribute to the success of our graduate students abroad.

Drawing on information gathered from graduate and professional student travel participants, those helping to organize and support that travel, and peer institutions employing best practices, the Committee offers the following recommendations.

## *1. Health Concerns*

- a. *Health Insurance* Graduate students are currently required to carry the University Student Health Insurance Plan (USHIP), which gives students coverage abroad similar to that which they receive on campus and includes medical evacuation and repatriation expenses, or to waive USHIP if they declare they have coverage that meets a detailed baseline requirements list. The list, however,

does not include anything specific with regard to coverage outside of the United States except for medical evacuation and repatriation expenses, and it is difficult to impossible for the University to confirm baseline equivalency of alternative policies, which may be inadequately translated, subject to different laws and customs, or invalid when a student is not on campus proper. The result is that the 7% of graduate and professional school students who waive USHIP may not be adequately insured to travel abroad.

All of the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) schools and most of our peers require their students traveling abroad to purchase the institution's student health insurance or per-diem health insurance negotiated with an outside provider for shorter-term coverage abroad. Such per-diem plans can also encompass emergency evacuation coverage, such as the University has through USHIP and with MedEx. To ensure that all students who are traveling abroad on University-sponsored activities be covered by adequate health insurance, the Committee recommends in the strongest possible terms that students carry either USHIP or a per-diem health insurance researched and recommended by Risk Management.

- b. *Travel Clinic* Committee members heard many times from faculty and students that they doubt the expertise they encounter at the Medical Center's Travel Clinic, where clinicians simply consult the Centers for Disease Control website during an appointment in order to dispense advice. Students also complained of long waits for appointments—particularly troublesome as some necessary vaccines and medications require 4-6 weeks to become fully effective. Students who were responsible for the costs of appointments also reported that the costs were high. Although the Travel Clinic is out of the purview of the Committee, we recommend that this feedback be given to those responsible for Student Health Service and the Travel Clinic so that consideration may be given to improving the student experience.
  - c. *MedEx* Many of the individuals the Committee met with were unaware of MedEx, the emergency medical and evacuation coverage that, thanks to Risk Management, has been available to them since 2008. Undergraduates who participate in formal Study Abroad programs are enrolled by that Office. Other students who wish to enroll may do so for a small fee by contacting Risk Management, or the trip organizer may contact Risk Management to enroll all University of Chicago trip participants en masse. Similarly, little to nothing was known of the newly established International Crisis Management Team.
2. *Defining University-sponsored travel.* With regard to drawing the occasionally delicate line between a student's private international travel choices and international activities that constitute University-sponsored activities properly falling within the University's purview, the Committee recommends the following principle: When University funds support any portion of a graduate or professional student's travel abroad, or when the student's travel abroad is organized or supervised by a faculty member, other academic appointee, or staff member of the University for University academic, educational, clinical, research, or business purposes, that travel is considered University-sponsored.
  3. *Waiver* The Committee recommends that students traveling abroad voluntarily in conjunction with University-sponsored travel sign an acceptance of risk and waiver. The Office of Legal Counsel has drawn up a basic waiver for this purpose. (See Appendix A.) A unit or trip leader may collaborate with the Office of Legal Counsel to tailor the waiver to suit specific situations and needs. Most peer institutions require a similar document.
  4. *Travel Registry Participation* The University continues to consider developing a Travel Registry to complement the University's Protocol for International Crisis Management and assist the University

with future international crisis response efforts. A Registry would enable the University to identify the location of faculty members, other academic appointees, students, and staff employees who might be at risk in situations abroad and to facilitate contact and assistance in an emergency. Such a Registry could also serve as a resource to offer travelers a wide range of travel planning tools in one place. For example, it could guide travelers to the State Department's travel resources and warnings, provide the University's medical insurance and emergency evacuation information, and offer links to information technology recommendations for travelers, and other resources identified in this report. A staff working group recently explored peer institutions' experiences with such registries and recommended that the University develop its own system. IT Services is developing a prototype registry, and participation in the resultant Registry would be urged but not mandated. The Committee strongly recommends adoption of such a Registry. While participation in the Registry would be urged for all members of the University community traveling abroad, the Committee recommends that students engaged in University-sponsored travel be required to participate in the Registry. An academic unit may choose to require Registry participation for all its students traveling abroad.

5. *Travel-Warning Countries* The United States Department of State monitors political activity and large-scale criminal around the globe and advises U.S. citizens about countries it deems risky travel destinations. It identifies such countries with a travel warning, and may similarly advise against travel to particular regions within countries.

The University operates formal programs in two countries with State Department travel warnings—Israel and Mexico—and takes special precautions to ensure as safe an experience as possible for students. Undergraduates wishing to go to travel-warning countries for any University-related activity—to conduct research, study, intern, work, etc.—must submit a proposal to the Study Abroad Risk and Security Assessment Committee (SARSAC), composed of individuals from the offices of the College Dean, the Dean of Students, Study Abroad, Risk Management, and Legal Counsel. This committee studies the proposal, interviews the student, evaluates the need to complete the project in the requested travel-warning country, and decides if the institution can accept the risk. Carefully considering dozens of cases, SARSAC has, for example, denied a request to study Arabic in Lebanon, advising instead that the student pursue language studies in any of a number of other Arabic-speaking countries, and has approved requests to intern in Pakistan and to study in Nigeria.

The Committee advises deference to academic activities and strongly recommends that activities that are not academic be limited to countries that are not travel-warning countries.

The level of risk associated with travel to those countries is generally higher for both the University and the student traveler. MedEx will not provide coverage in war zones or for political events occurring in countries where a travel warning existed prior to the traveler's departure. University travelers in areas such as Iran, Afghanistan, and Iraq, for example, would not today have the benefit of such coverage. The Committee recommends that travelers visiting these regions be alerted that University resources are restricted in these countries.

Establishing a University-level committee parallel to SARSAC does not seem advisable to the Committee at this time. An academic unit or a cluster of academic units may choose to create such a committee. Similarly, an academic unit may, in consultation with the Legal Counsel's Office and Risk Management, develop a local policy.

6. *Technological Connection* Thanks to technological improvements, it is now easy and affordable in many places to obtain a local cell phone for emergency use. Many seasoned University travelers report and recommend this safety practice, and the Committee echoes it. A faculty member who travels frequently

to isolated regions with unreliable or nonexistent cell phone coverage recommended a mobile satellite Internet solution.<sup>1</sup> IT Services will loan a satellite phone to a trip coordinator. ITS will advise any University traveler on turning on international roaming phone features; accessing eduroam (a secure, wireless, roaming service available to 35000 research institutions, including the University of Chicago, around the world); and on selecting the correct adapter for any destination. The ITS website offers technology tips to travelers at <http://answers.uchicago.edu/16284>.

7. *Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC)* Administered by the United States Department of the Treasury, OFAC has issued new and, for the untutored, confusing regulations restricting who may have access to what types of technologies and research information. These restrictions apply differentially to U.S. citizens and to citizens of other nations, and relate in part to what information and technologies may be taken out of the U.S. For example, there may be restrictions on taking a laptop itself or just on taking certain kinds of programs and functionality on that laptop. The restrictions hold whether the technology or equipment is in a carry-on bag, checked luggage, or shipped via any mode of transportation. The restrictions may also apply to data that is sent electronically from abroad to the U.S., or vice-versa. Because of the complexity of these regulations, the Committee recommends that a student review the [OFAC section](#) of the U.S. Treasury website to determine whether or not restrictions may apply to his or her travel. Questions related to OFAC restrictions are best directed to University Research Administration.

OFAC restrictions may also impact the accessibility of the University's travel insurance program in certain countries. OFAC sanctions limit the ability of U.S.-based insurance companies to pay funds into certain countries, including Syria, Cuba and Iran, among others. Questions regarding the University's travel insurance program should be directed to the [Office of Risk Management](#).

8. *Institutional Review Board* Students conducting field research abroad on sensitive subjects or under repressive political regimes reported on perceived tensions between Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements and their safety and that of their research subjects. Although it is beyond the purview of this Committee to remedy, it seemed wise to present these reports to those who might provide thoughtful guidance.
9. *Checklists* Many students reported receiving excellent advice from graduate students and postdoctoral researchers who had preceded them to research sites. Based on the information gathered from students and faculty members, the Committee believes that developing a trio of checklists, one for student travelers another for campus administrators such as Graduate Program Administrators and Deans of Students, and a third for trip leaders would enhance the preparedness of student travelers and improve their travel experience. The International Travel Resources website aimed at undergraduates and their trip leaders, <http://internationaltravel.uchicago.edu/>, as well as the Study Abroad and Graduate Student Affairs Offices offer useful information in this regard.
10. *Graduate Program Administrators* The University has increasingly recognized the critical role played by Graduate Program Administrators (GPA), who are ideally situated to assist their students with international travel questions and to provide needed information that students do not know to request. These Administrators now meet regularly on a variety of topics, and the Committee recommends that international travel information and resources be institutionalized as an annual topic for their meetings so that they become aware of best practice and are better able to use each other as resources as well. In the professional schools that do not have GPA, the equivalent staff should be included in the meeting on international travel.

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<sup>1</sup> He favors Broadband Global Area Network (BGAN).

11. *Human Rights/Ethnographic Research Training* Units with students who frequently spend extended periods embedded in other cultures conducting sensitive ethnographic research or doing human rights work have better developed mechanisms for preparing students for such environments and responsibilities. This tailored, departmental approach seems more sound than a centrally imposed solution. Units with less experience readying students for ethnographic or human rights work should be encouraged to seek assistance from those with greater expertise.
12. *International Travel Orientation* Given the numbers of students traveling abroad, particularly for extended periods, the question of a quarterly international travel orientation arose. Making such a program useful and relevant to the majority of attendees could be a challenge. It may be worth a pilot or two to ensure that students are aware of existing University resources, such as MedEx; guide them to additional or even project- or location-specific resources, and introduce students who will be traveling to the same or nearby locations or focusing on similar types of projects. Clearly there is much location-specific and trip purpose-specific information that would not be suitable for a general orientation session, but much advice and many best practices serve regardless of the destination, duration, or purpose.
13. *Resource Point-Person* Whereas the College's Study Abroad Office anchors expertise and the suite of resources for undergraduates traveling abroad on University-connected activities, no such home office exists for graduate and professional school students. Building capacity in Graduate Student Affairs would provide a locus for developing the checklists, organizing information sessions, advocating for improved Travel Clinic services for students, and, most importantly, advising students and Graduate Program Administrators. A resource point-person could be very helpful in getting information out about resources such as MedEx, the Travel Registry (once it exists), and the International Crisis Management Team.

The Committee values the University's tradition of deference to scholarship. While granting the academic enterprise abroad as much latitude as is reasonable, the Committee recognizes that certain precautions have become necessary and that timely and useful information and resources improve the international experience overall. If the Provost wishes to meet with the Committee to discuss any of these recommendations, the Committee would be very pleased to do so.

#### Committee Members

Tamara Felden, Director, Office of International Affairs  
Luke Figora, Director, Risk Management  
Ann Harvilla, Dean of Students, Chicago Booth  
Russ Herron, Associate General Counsel, Office of Legal Counsel  
Eileen McCarthy, Assistant Vice President, Office of the President  
Nadine Moeller, Assistant Professor, Oriental Institute  
Callum Ross, Associate Professor, Organismal Biology and Anatomy  
Beth Niestat, staff, Director, Office of the Provost  
Ingrid Gould, chair, Associate Provost, Office of the Provost

**THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDENT  
TRAVEL WAIVER, RELEASE AND INDEMNIFICATION AGREEMENT**

I am a graduate or professional school student at the University of Chicago (the “University”) and have decided to undertake research, study, work or travel in a foreign country or countries (the “Project”). I have chosen to undertake the Project voluntarily. This agreement confirms my understanding of the following:

1. I recognize that there are certain risks of physical injury (including death) which may arise from research, study, work or travel abroad. I also recognize that there are risks such as those described in the State Department Country Specific Information, Travel Alerts, or Travel Warning (see [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_4965.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_4965.html), [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/pa/pa\\_1766.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/pa/pa_1766.html), and [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/tw/tw\\_1764.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html)) for the countries included in my Project, and health risks as described in the Center for Disease Control Health Information for those countries (see <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>). I acknowledge I have read this information as it pertains to the countries in which I will travel as part of the Project.

Although the University may in some instances be providing funding, academic credit or other support for the Project, any evaluation of my Project has been solely on its academic merits. Among other things, the University is not in the position to evaluate, and therefore has not evaluated, whether the Project will take place in a safe and secure environment. These are judgments that I recognize I must make independently.

2. I have no condition or dietary needs which would present a risk of injury to me through my pursuit of the Project. I understand that I am responsible for obtaining any recommended immunizations before traveling to my destination(s). I hereby assume responsibility for any injuries, illness, damages or loss which I may sustain as a result of pursuing any and all activities connected with or associated with the Project, except if directly caused by the sole gross negligence of the University.

3. I hereby release and discharge the University, its trustees, employees, agents and representatives from any and all liability, claims, damages and losses, including, without limitation, those arising from delays, delayed or changed departure or arrival, missed carrier connections, weather, strikes, acts of God, force majeure, war, terrorism, quarantine, criminal activity, accident, sickness, injury or death, or other events outside the control of the University, that may be sustained by me or to any of my property as a result of or in connection with pursuing in the Project or any travel incident thereto.

4. I hereby agree to indemnify and hold harmless the University, its trustees, employees, agents and representatives from any and all liability, loss, damage, or expense, including attorneys’ fees, which arise out of, occur during, or are in any way connected with my pursuit of the Project or any travel incident thereto.

5. I also understand that the University does not provide health insurance (except student health insurance if I have elected to participate), accident insurance (unless I am part of a student group that has been enrolled in the University’s accident insurance program through the University’s Office of Risk Management), trip cancellation or baggage insurance to me. I certify that I have health insurance that will cover medical services that might be necessary and agree that I will not pursue the Project should I become uninsured. I further understand that should the University discover that I have not satisfied any one of these requirements, it may, but is not required to, terminate my participation or any funding or other support for the Project provided by the University.

6. It is my express intent that this Agreement shall bind the members of my family, my heirs and assigns. This Agreement shall be construed in accordance with the laws of the State of Illinois, without regard to choice of laws principles. In the event any provision of this Agreement shall be determined to be void or enforceable, such provision shall be modified to most closely reflect the parties’ intentions, and all other provisions of this Agreement shall remain valid and binding.

I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and fully understand the above and I voluntarily sign this Agreement.

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Participant Signature

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Date

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Printed Name of Participant

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