

A Guide to Sponsoring Individual International Winter Term Projects

A few definitions:

The Office of Winter Term defines **individual projects** as those that one or two students have proposed outside of a larger group. By contrast three or more students proposing the same project in the same location constitutes a **group project** and requires the designation of a trip leader and oversight by the Office of Winter Term. Students participating in a group project may or may not have the same sponsor, but this does not preclude them from the requirement to coordinate with the Office of Winter Term.

Projects that propose to spend 7 or more days outside of the U.S. and its territories are considered **international projects**.

A **Winter Term Project** is defined as any project for which credit or funding is given during the academic term.

Oberlin College Travel Warning Policy:

On April 29, 2011, the General Faculty Committee unanimously approved a new policy regarding the restriction of travel by students for academic credit to countries for which the United States Department of State has issued a Travel Warning.

The policy is as follows:

Oberlin students are not permitted to receive academic credit or use College or Conservatory funding for activities in countries that are subject to a Travel Warning issued by the U.S. State Department.

As an advisor or sponsor of academic work, faculty and staff should communicate this policy to students very clearly when discussing plans for conducting academic work abroad.

If a student wishes to receive academic credit for work done in such countries, a waiver procedure exists. However, students and faculty should consider carefully whether the work could be done in a country for which there is no Travel Warning and whether the increased precautions necessary to safely conduct the work will inhibit it in such as way as to hinder productivity.

The list of countries with a currently issued Travel Warning can be found on the website of the U.S. Department of State.

(http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html)

Part 1 - Re-SPONSOR-ability!

The numbers of students going abroad during Winter Term has increased each year. Data for the most recent 3 academic years show a continuation of this trend.

In most cases, the sponsor is the only member of the Oberlin community who is aware of the student's plans. In years past, the data from the Registrar's Winter Term Report have shown that fewer than 20% of individual students who received Winter Term credit for international projects consulted with the Office of International Programs.

As it is to the sponsor, student safety is the priority of the Office of International Programs. We strive to provide consultation, advice and assistance that will encourage students to travel safely and return having had a positive experience.

In addition to our desire to guide students through safely planning their time abroad, we also recognize that Oberlin College may be considered responsible for such projects as a result of students gaining Oberlin College credit and using Oberlin College funding to participate in these experiences.

As often the only person on campus with knowledge of international projects, we'd like to offer sponsors our support in assisting individual students.

Part 2 – Best practices

Students have great ideas, but may need your help to turn them into safe realities. This document is designed to help you effectively guide students through the process of planning safe International Winter Term Projects.

Getting Started...EARLY!

Planning international travel takes significantly more time and research than planning domestic travel. Each step of planning may take days or even weeks longer than it would in the U.S. due to any number of factors.

We recommend encouraging students to begin planning an International Winter Term Project as soon as they arrive on campus for the Fall Semester.

Vetting an organization / opportunity

Many students find opportunities to intern, volunteer or work with organizations abroad. It is sometimes difficult to determine if these organizations are legitimate and if the opportunity is "as advertised."

For example, WWOOFing (World-Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) has become popular among Oberlin students in recent years, and with good reason. WWOOF sites advertise free room and board in exchange for a volunteer's labor in some of the most beautiful places on earth. However, the WWOOF organization itself does not guarantee or even vouch for the authenticity of the farms they allow to advertise on their website and unfortunately, some WWOOF proprietors do not hold up their end of the bargain. Upon arrival, WWOOFers have found that they were asked to pay for their own food / lodging / transportation or even that the WWOOF farm did not exist or was not functioning as a farm at all.

With careful planning, such situations can be avoided. The Office of International Programs has developed a "Guide to Safe WWOOFing" and is available to offer experience and expertise in planning international travel. We would now like to make these tools available to sponsors to help keep students working towards their Winter Term Goals.

Here are some tips for vetting any international opportunities:

Research the organization:

- Talk directly to the person who'll be supervising your work or study.
- Talk to him/her again at another time to make sure he/she can be reached and will respond to requests for information.
- Double check that your goals line up with the work you'll be doing or classes you'll be taking.

Check References:

- Talk or email directly with a person who has worked or studied with the organization.
- Don't just read a blog or a Facebook post; if someone had a positive or negative experience, they'll be happy to share their stories.
- Get tips on travel, packing, local conditions.
- Make sure the program site is safe.

Traveling Safely within the Country

Once a student has arrived in his or her destination country, getting around in local transportation can be hazardous without appropriate prior planning. Here are some questions a sponsor can ask of a student to help him or her think through the transportation situation:

- How will you travel from the airport to your first night's lodgings?
- How will you continue your travel to the work or study site?
- Are there safety concerns with traveling during certain hours of the day or night?

- Are there weather / seasonal conditions that will impact your ability to travel certain routes or use certain modes of transportation?
- Are there other local conditions that could impact travel such as strikes, protests, political demonstrations or checkpoints?
- Are there safety conditions such as crime to be aware of on certain modes of transportation?
- How will you make financial arrangements?
- Do you need local currency? How much? Where can you get it? What's accepted? Where can you keep it safely?

Staying Safe all over

Each country, region and city has its own unique security profile, which will be largely unknown to a student arriving for the first time. Some considerations include crime, civil unrest and other culture-based security concerns.

Information on crime can help students plan to avoid dangerous areas or behaviors. The U.S. Department of State keeps detailed information on crime and safety updated on their travel website www.travel.state.gov. This includes information on crime that targets American citizens, scams, places known to be dangerous and tips to avoid becoming the victim of a crime. In addition to information for all travelers, the State Department also provides information specific to students abroad at their website www.studentsabroad.state.gov.

Staying Healthy

Student's health can become a major concern while eating new delicious foods, sleeping poorly on overnight trains to exotic destinations and not following usual hygiene routines.

Here are some things for students to consider ahead of time:

- Immunizations: Some countries require proof of vaccinations at the point of entry. Others don't, but students should ensure that they are properly immunized and have copies of those records with them. Many vaccines need time to take effect or may need to be administered through multiple doses. Planning ahead can mean the difference between a great or very uncomfortable experience. For information on what is recommended for each country, students should visit the Centers for Disease Control website at www.cdc.gov/travel.

- Insurance: Oberlin College Student Health Insurance does not cover students outside of the U.S. and many private insurance policies do not either. Some do, but with reduced coverage, or only for certain illnesses or injuries. Students should carefully

consider their health insurance needs and determine if additional coverage is needed. If so, there are many options. Two recommended by the Office of International Programs are [HTH Worldwide](#) (group access code required) and [iNext](#). Both provide extensive coverage inexpensively. Students may contact the Office of International Programs for more information about international insurance.

- Local conditions: Health conditions vary greatly between countries, but a little research can go a long way. The [World Health Organization](#) has detailed information on most regions.

- Access to emergency services: Knowing where to go and how to get emergency medical assistance could be a matter of life or death depending on the situation.

Well-prepared students should know the answers to these questions:

- Can you drink the water?
- What vaccinations do you need to keep yourself healthy?
- What vaccinations / health records do you need to enter the country?
- What kind of food will you be eating, how will you ensure that it is prepared correctly?
- Where is the nearest medical facility?
- How will you get there in an emergency?
- Will they accept your insurance?
- Do they have the equipment / medications to treat any condition you have?
- Will you be able to fill necessary prescriptions if you lose your bags?

Staying Legal

Visas, Permits and Documentation

Depending on the type of project, students may be participating in “work,” “study,” “internship” or some other legal classification which may require obtaining permits, visas or other documentation.

Students should research the answers to the following questions:

- Are you legally allowed to do this type of work or study in the destination country?
- Do you need a Visa or work permit?
- Do you need a volunteer visa / permit?
- If you need some kind of permit:
 - Who is responsible for obtaining it?
 - How much will it cost?
 - What is the penalty for failing to obtain it?
- If you do not need a permit:

- How long are you allowed to stay on a tourist visa?
- Do you need to obtain it before entering the country?
- How much will it cost?

Different Countries, Different Laws

Regardless of citizenship, all persons are subject to the laws of the country they are visiting. Our students, like any foreign visitor to a country, are responsible for knowing the local laws and abiding by them.

Students should research the laws surrounding these common areas for legal concern:

- Drugs, including prescriptions
- Alcohol purchase, consumption, public intoxication
- Laws governing possession and purchase of pornography or sexually explicit material
- Free expression of political ideas
- Religious expression
- Participation in strikes, protests and demonstrations
- Gender based laws / Sexual Orientation / sexual expression

Staying in Touch

Emergencies happen. Students get sick or hurt. Family members back home are hospitalized. Students must plan for a way to keep in touch while they are abroad. Here are some issues to discuss:

- Research what factors could impede your ability to keep in touch. (Prevalence of telephones, Internet, electricity, etc.)
- Know how to operate the local phone system in the destination country.
- Find out how often you will have access to the Internet.
- Designate a “check-in” buddy (your mom, roommate, sponsor) with whom you check-in at regular intervals. A failure to check-in triggers pre-determined plan.
- Give your family a way to contact you in case of emergency.
- Give Oberlin a way to contact you and a way to contact your family if needed.
- Make sure your organization knows who to contact if you are injured, sick or the victim of a crime.

Part 3 – Resources for more information

Office of International Programs

Office of Winter Term

For help evaluating an opportunity:

www.volunteerinternational.org

Travel Abroad Information for students:

studentsabroad.state.gov

www.studentsabroad.com

www.goabroad.com

For US Government country specific information and warnings as well as safety tips:

<http://travel.state.gov>

<http://www.osac.gov>

Website of the Embassy of the country the student wishes to visit.

For Health and Immunization information:

<http://www.cdc.gov/travel>

<http://www.who.int/ith>

It is recommended that students make an appointment to speak with a Medical Travel Consultant 4 to 6 weeks prior to departure. Local Medical Travel Consultants are listed below:

Elyria City Health Dept. Travel Clinic

202 Chestnut St.

Elyria, OH 44035

[\(440\) 323-6778](tel:(440)323-6778)

travel@elyriahealth.com;

www.elyriahealth.com/immunization/travel.shtml

Travel Consultation: Sandra Neives, RN

Oberlin Student Health Services
247 W. Lorain St
Oberlin, OH 44074
[\(440\) 775-8180](tel:(440)775-8180)
student.health@oberlin.edu
www.oberlin.edu/health
Travel Consultation: Dr. Tomblin