

Hello Parents and supporters of our MCAD Off-Campus Ambassadors!

We understand it can be hard to step back while your student takes on the planning and preparation for their travel experience. However, doing so is one of the most important tools you can give your student to be able to navigate their experience successfully. You should be available and ready to lend help, advice, and support, but it is critically important that your student take primary responsibility for planning their experience.

This section of our website contains information regarding the benefits of study abroad, [health and safety](#), [supporting your student](#), and [common FAQs from parents](#). This content is intended to help you better understand your student's experience and know which questions to ask.

The Benefits of Study Abroad

Study abroad is one of the best ways students can develop greater independence, maturity, and self-confidence; the flexibility to adapt quickly and creatively to unexpected developments and changing circumstances; and the ability to interact effectively with people from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. These skills and many more can prove invaluable throughout their lives, and are highly translatable to various employment settings.

Here are links to some helpful websites:

- [The Benefits of Study Abroad](#)
- [NAFSA Blog: Why Study Abroad Matters](#)
- [NAFSA: Measuring the Impact of Study Abroad](#)
- [U.S. State Department's Students Abroad site](#)

Health & Safety

Safety

According to the Association of International Educators (NAFSA) family guide, most study abroad professionals believe that study in a foreign country is no more dangerous than study in the United States. However, no study abroad program, no matter how professional, experienced, or responsible, can guarantee the health and safety of participants. Just as in the United States, a student's safety depends on them exercising mature and responsible behavior and making good decisions.

The [U.S. Department of State](#) provides useful and timely information regarding national and international emergencies, consular information sheets, travel advisories and warnings, and general travel tips. Additionally, they host a site specifically for [students traveling abroad](#).

Health

General health tips to keep in mind before your student studies abroad include:

- Verify that immunizations are up to date and will remain so for the entire time spent abroad. A country-by-country list of required and recommended immunizations can be found at the [Center for Disease Control Travel Website](#).
- Confirm that your student is in a state of good physical and mental health before leaving; be sure all health care providers (ie., doctor, psychologist/psychiatrist, other specialist) have been made aware of the travel plans so they can advise appropriately.
- If prescription medicine is required while abroad, be sure a sufficient supply is secured for the entire stay, or a plan is in place for how to refill the prescription abroad. Medication should always be packed in a carry-on and a copy of the prescription should be carried when traveling. Due to complicated customs regulations, you should not mail prescription drugs, vitamins, or any other type of medication to your student while they are abroad.
- If your student requires (or prefers) certain toiletry items, consider purchasing them in the U.S. and bringing enough along to last the length of the time abroad. U.S. brands may not be available; or, if they are, they may be prohibitively expensive. Feminine hygiene products may be very different, or entirely unavailable, depending on your student's location.
- If your student requires ongoing specialized physical or mental health care while abroad, encourage him or her to disclose these needs to MCAD's International advisor before leaving.

Supporting your Student

Communication

Before your student leaves, you should make a plan for communicating with each other while they are abroad. They have also been instructed to do this with you.

- When and how will your student contact you upon arrival in the host country? Options could include; buying a SIM card for their current cell phone; buying a cell phone on-site; using VoIP (internet-based verbal/video communication) via a service like [Skype](#) or FaceTime; or even buying a local phone card and calling on a landline.
- Set a regularly scheduled check-in, making sure not to make it too often. Plan to be flexible due to class schedule, traveling, time zone differences, and other events that will be happening.

- Have a system in place for connecting in case of an emergency. Designate relatives or close family friends to call in the United States, and (if possible) in their part of the world, in the event that you have trouble contacting each other.

Remember that the more time your student spends communicating with family and friends at home, the less time they will spend integrating into the local culture, which is one of the main experiences they are hoping to gain by studying abroad. If your student is busy and fully engaged in the study abroad experience, there will be less time to email/call you, which is a positive thing! Encourage your student to communicate when they can, and to tell you about all of the things they are learning and doing. This will help him or her make the most of their experience, while still including you. A travel blog can be a great tool for this!

Ways to Communicate

- [Skype](#), Google Hangouts/Meet, Facebook Messenger, etc are all great software applications that allow users to make voice calls over the Internet.
- WhatsApp, is an international text messaging system that is free to use and uses your phone's internet connection. It also offers voice and video calling that doesn't use your minutes or international calling charges.
- Cell phones, usually on prepaid plans, are also very popular in some countries. Phones can be purchased (or sometimes rented locally) for a fee. Most mobile phones work using a SIM card, on which your student can purchase minutes. Minutes will be deducted from the account for outgoing calls (incoming calls abroad are free) and text messages. Students can "top up" their account at any time to add more minutes. Rates vary by provider. Check with your carrier to see what international plans they offer.
- Snail mail via the postal service can take quite a bit of time, and packages can pose added challenges. Excessive charges on packages can sometimes surpass the value of the items being sent. Check and verify any customs procedures and regulations before sending a package to your student; items taken out of original packaging that appear to be personal in nature or that would have no commercial value should be clearly marked as such in order to avoid being assessed as imported goods.

Culture Shock/Homesickness

- Almost anyone who travels, works, or studies abroad will experience culture shock to some degree. This is not only a normal part of the experience, but may actually present some of the best opportunities for intercultural learning and personal growth. Culture shock is rarely identified as such by the person experiencing it, instead it may feel as if

there is a problem with the host country, the program, or the local population. This can even be true despite having an understanding of the “symptoms.”

- Students are much more likely to share the negatives than the positives, as students are more likely to call in times of frustration. It’s important to remind your student that while differences can be uncomfortable, they can also contribute to a great experience. Avoid getting overly involved. Encourage your student to stay positive and to work things out, while still letting them know that you are there to listen and to be a support.
- If your student calls home saying they want to come home, having made a mistake by going abroad, the best response is to be patient. Living in a new place that has different values, expectations, standards, and practices than those at home can be difficult, especially without one’s usual support network. Encourage your student to be patient with themselves and to make the most of every day until coming home. In serious cases, your student should contact the on-site program/university staff or the off-campus advisor at MCAD.

Visiting

- Visiting your student abroad can be a wonderful experience for everyone involved; however, good timing is key. Allow your student to work through the initial transition to life abroad independently, and consider visiting after the completion of the program. They will be able to show you around, impress you with new language skills and competency, and enjoy your company.
- Some programs may prohibit or limit visits to certain times (i.e., scheduled holiday breaks, or post-completion). If your student is in accommodation arranged by the program, do not assume that you will be allowed to stay with them; seek out separate accommodation for your stay.
- Don’t feel badly if you are unable to visit—some students actually prefer to keep the experience their own. You will be able to share the experience with your student via email, pictures, and souvenirs when they return. Just remember to leave plenty of time for sharing once your student returns.

Re-entry/Reverse Culture Shock

- Some students have difficulty readjusting to life at home, including resuming relationships with friends and family and getting back into the routine of school, upon return. Symptoms can be very similar to the initial culture shock that students experience when first going abroad.
- You can help your student through this period by listening to stories, looking at photos, and showing genuine interest in their experiences, and encouraging them to stay in contact with the friends made abroad. Encourage your student to connect with the off-campus programs advisor as a way to process the experience upon return.

- Be prepared for change (typically positive), upon your student's return. Acknowledge/affirm the changes you see.

FAQ

How do I contact my student in case of an emergency?

Set up a communication plan with your student before they leave. Have a plan for how/when they will first contact you upon arrival. Know their flight itinerary, so you can track their arrival. Give them 24 hours to settle in before you expect to hear from them. It's also helpful to know the timezone difference. If you are having trouble connecting with your student, please contact the MCAD Student Affairs office- Student_Affairs@mcad.edu.

Isn't studying abroad really expensive?

There is no additional tuition cost for studying off-campus. Students will receive their scholarships and financial aid the same as if they're still on campus. Housing cost is dependent on the location and duration of the program your student chooses. It is often similar to a semester at MCAD. One consideration is that students are not allowed to work abroad, so they will not be able to earn money due to immigration regulations. Additional costs include, but are not limited to: housing, food, travel/airfare, study abroad insurance, visa fees, host institution activity fees, etc. [Here is more information on specific programs.](#)

Is financial aid available?

Students participating in MCAD-sponsored off-campus programs will receive their financial aid and MCAD scholarships as though they are still on campus. There are many external study abroad scholarships that you can find based on eligibility by simply searching online. Here are a few lists: [NAFSA](#), [gooverseas.com](#), [goabroad.com](#)

Will my student's credits transfer?

If your student is approved by MCAD to study abroad and follows the directions of the off-campus programs advisor, in addition to receiving a grade of C or better in coursework attempted, they will be eligible to receive credit for classes taken abroad.

Will my student graduate on time?

Credits earned on MCAD-sponsored off-campus programs are eligible to count toward degree progress and in most cases should not delay your student's graduation. Credits earned on Independent Study Abroad programs must be approved by MCAD prior to participating in order to count toward an MCAD degree. In addition, your student should meet with their academic advisor and off-campus programs advisor to make sure that they have room in their degree audit and still graduate on time.

Does my student need international health insurance?

MCAD requires all full-time students to have specific study abroad insurance for the entire period of time a student is studying and traveling abroad. The off-campus programs advisor will assist your student in obtaining study abroad insurance.

Where will my student live while they are abroad?

Living arrangements vary by program. In most cases, the host institution will offer on-campus housing, or students arrange their own housing in off-campus apartments. While some exchange partners may provide guidance on finding housing, most do not. Check with the individual exchange program regarding housing.

How can I ship personal belongings to my student?

If you plan to ship personal items to your student, make sure to have them arrive after your student. Specify that the package contains "used personal items" in order to avoid customs fees. Removing gift items from packaging helps to clarify that they are not going to be used commercially. If you declare the value of the items, your student will be required to pay a percentage of that amount upon delivery.

What if I'd like to visit my student?

While we encourage families to visit their students abroad, the timing of the visit is very important. Visiting at the beginning of the program is generally discouraged to allow your student to adjust to the new environment on their own. Visiting during an academic break or at the conclusion of the program will typically be better for everyone. It is also best to have your student check with his or her program about any policies regarding visits.

How should I communicate with my student while they are abroad?

There are many easy and inexpensive ways to stay in contact with your student, with email being the easiest and most widely used. [Skype](#), GChat, or iChat provide inexpensive phone connections or even free video conferencing via computers or iPhones. Students may opt to purchase inexpensive pay-per-use cell phones or local SIM cards for a phone purchased in the U.S. Allowing your student to make the most of their study abroad experience, while checking in with you on a reasonable basis should be the goal when it comes to setting a communication plan.

What is culture shock?

Culture shock is a term used to describe feelings of homesickness and other reactions to spending an extended period of time in a new place/culture. It can be characterized by periods of frustration, adjustment, and depression. [More information about culture shock](#) (link back to “supporting your student page.”).