

## Implementing a Travel Risk Management Strategy for Academic Travel

By Mike Kelly, CEO of [On Call International](#)

According to the Institute of International Education, nearly [284,000 American students](#) studied abroad for academic credit during 2011-2012. Additionally, more than 150 U.S. colleges pledged to increase their study abroad participation rates as part of a new national initiative called [Generation Study Abroad](#). With the anticipated rise in study abroad programs and the health and safety risks associated with travel, the need for academic institutions to implement a proactive risk management program has never been more crucial.

And who bears the responsibility for student and faculty well-being when participating in study abroad programs? It falls on colleges or universities. Fortunately, academic institutions can reduce the impact of emergencies abroad by implementing an institution-wide strategy that safeguards students and faculty before and during academic travel:



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**A customized crisis response plan** catered to the specific needs of the institution and its travelers – both students and faculty/staff.

**Specific protocols** for managing medical, security and other travel-related emergencies.

**Pre-travel educational meetings** to share health, safety and crisis-response information *before* departure. Mandatory attendance for both administrators and academic travelers will ensure a collective understanding of protocols in the event of a travel emergency. These meetings should focus on:

**Assigning and communicating crisis response roles within the study abroad department.** This is important so students and staff members know who to contact should they encounter an emergency. It also allows internal stakeholders to understand how to respond during such emergency situations.

**Sharing pertinent information** about destination countries – including health risks. Ensure travelers are up-to-date on all routine vaccinations (such as influenza, measles and mumps) as well as other vaccines specific to health concerns in their destinations.

**Securing medical evacuation coverage.** Since many health plans do not provide coverage overseas, academic institutions must offer supplemental coverage to protect travelers from unforeseen emergency medical transportation expenses. Plans should include coverage for emergency medical evacuation (which can cost upwards of \$100,000 per incident for transportation alone). Many academic institutions partner with a travel assistance company to not only provide this important service, but also to ensure immediate access to help during any kind of travel crisis—big or small.

**A country-specific safety overview** for students and faculty that covers:

A current list of the U.S. State Department's travel [warnings](#) along with safety protocols in the event travel to one of these destinations is required. This information can be found by registering travelers with STEP (the State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program).

Destination-specific information with details about crime rates, places to avoid, and any other threats to personal safety.

**Emergency preparedness** –Ask travelers to add local emergency response numbers to their mobile phone contacts and keep emergency contact numbers (such as those for a travel assistance provider) handy.

**Local driving customs and rules** – Motor vehicle crashes account for the number one cause of death to healthy Americans traveling abroad. Prepare travelers with information about local driving practices to avoid accidents – whether they plan to be drivers or pedestrians in their destinations.

**Common sense practices:** Because traveling abroad can disrupt normal behaviors, sometimes common sense safety measures can go by the wayside. Remind students and faculty of everyday practices to follow, such as: carrying a minimal amount of cash, keeping personal items such as a wallet or smartphone tucked away securely, traveling with a group if possible and avoiding logos on attire that may target them as Americans.

As you can see, implementing a travel risk management strategy that includes pre-departure training will not only help protect academic travelers, but it will also protect the institution's reputation, financial standing and legal responsibilities.