

## **Guidelines Concerning Study and Research in Countries Under U.S. State Department Travel Warnings**

The University of Pittsburgh has a strong commitment to international engagement. It encourages international activities by its students and faculty, and strives to develop more opportunities for international study and research. At the same time, the University is aware that sometimes international activities carry additional risk as countries around the world are affected by war, terrorism, political unrest, disease, and natural catastrophes. The University aims to balance the importance and benefits of participating in international educational activities against the potential risk to its students and employees. For this purpose, the University relies on information from the U.S. Department of State, most importantly the Travel Warnings posted on its web site, along with other sources of information such as advisories from the Overseas Security Advisory Council and the Centers for Disease Control.

These guidelines state the University of Pittsburgh's approach to governing educational, research and service activities in countries for which the U.S. Department of State has issued a Travel Warning. Students must follow these guidelines if they are to earn credits for their study abroad program and/or use scholarship or other University funds in support of the educational experience.

Department of State Travel Warnings often fall into two categories: (1) warnings of conditions that heighten the ordinary risk of travel to a particular district/country and (2) more urgent warnings that forbid, restrict or otherwise urge U.S. citizens to defer travel to a country. In some cases, category (1) travel warnings include more urgent, category (2) warnings for specific regions within a district/country.

Where a Department of State Travel Warning wording is not clear on whether it falls into category (1) or (2) as set out above, the Safety Abroad Standing Committee shall review relevant information and make recommendations to the Provost.

A web link to the list of countries with category (1) and (2) travel warnings will be posted and maintained on the UCIS and Study Abroad Office web sites.

### **I. Category (1) Travel Warnings (“Heightened Risk”): Undergraduate Students**

No undergraduate student shall be required to participate in an educational activity under University of Pittsburgh auspices in a district/country for which the Department of State has issued a Travel Warning. The University of Pittsburgh also does not recommend such travel. Nevertheless, an undergraduate student who wishes to travel for his or her own educational purposes to a district/country for which the State Department has issued a “heightened risk” travel warning may do so, under the following conditions:

1. The student must review the Travel Warning and the U.S. Department of State Consular Information Sheet for the district/country in question. The student must

also review applicable U.S. Department of State public announcements for the region in question. These documents are available on the web at <http://www.state.gov>.

2. The student must consider carefully the risks described in the Travel Warning and, weighing those risks against the value of the educational opportunity to the student, make his or her own determination about whether to continue with the planned research or study activity. In balancing these factors, the student should take into consideration the possibility that the existing Travel Warning may be changed to a more urgent type of warning, triggering section II of these guidelines and possibly affecting the student's ability to receive a refund of monies already expended for the research or study activity. The student should also take into consideration the possibility that, if he or she encounters difficulties abroad, the University of Pittsburgh and even the U.S. Department of State may be unable to assist.
3. The student must sign a release, acknowledging the existence of the travel warning and his/her decision to continue with the planned activity despite that warning, and releasing the University from liability for death, injuries or losses suffered by the student while participating in the activity. If a student is under age 18, both of his/her parents or guardian must also sign this release.
4. If the general travel warning for the district/country in question contains category (2) warnings for specific regions within the country, the student must agree in writing to refrain from any travel to those regions during his/her education or research abroad activity. Failure to comply with this agreement will lead to a loss of enrollment status and the inability to transfer credit to the University of Pittsburgh as outlined in section II.
5. If the student is already in the district/country for which the travel warning has been issued, the Study Abroad Office will attempt to notify him or her of the changed status, and request a signed release as specified in 3 above. Should the student decide to return to the U.S., the University will, at the student's request, endeavor to help the student make arrangements for his/her return.
6. If the student follows the steps outlined in 1 to 5 above, he/she will be able to register for academic credit.
7. If the student follows the steps outlined in 1 to 5 above, and if the educational activity is otherwise approved and eligible, he/she will be able to use scholarship and other University funds obtained in support of the educational activity in the district/country affected by a type (1) travel warning.

## **II. Category (2) Travel Warnings: Travel Warnings Forbidding, Restricting or Urging Deferral of Travel: Undergraduate Students**

When the U.S. Department of State issues a travel warning that forbids, restricts, or otherwise urges U.S. citizens to defer travel to a certain district, the following rules apply for undergraduate students:

1. University of Pittsburgh study abroad programs in that district/country shall be suspended.
2. No undergraduate student shall be allowed to travel to that district/country under University of Pittsburgh auspices.
3. No undergraduate student shall be given University of Pittsburgh funding—including any external funding administered through and disbursed by the university—for any activity in that district/country. If the student has already received such funding prior to the imposition of the travel warning, the funding shall be returned to the University. Where a portion of the funds have already been expended in furtherance of the activity before the travel warning was imposed, the Safety Abroad Standing Committee, after consultation with the sponsoring department or office, shall decide the amount to be returned to the University, while taking into account individual circumstances
4. If the student is already in the district/country for which the travel warning has been issued, the Safety Abroad Standing Committee will make a determination as to whether the student shall be required to return to the U.S. Where the student is required to return to the U.S. or where the student desires to return to the U.S. under these circumstances, the University will, at the student's request, endeavor to help the student make arrangements for his/her return. The Study Abroad Office will attempt to notify those students who are already in the district/country where the heightened travel warning has been issued of the University's actions regarding their program and safety.
5. Where the student has pre-paid the costs of a University of Pittsburgh study abroad program the student may be eligible for a refund of all or a portion of the payment, but the availability of a refund is not guaranteed and will depend on the circumstances of each case.
6. In cases where an undergraduate student's early departure from a study abroad program due to a U.S. State Department travel warning leads to a loss of anticipated academic credit, the University of Pittsburgh will make a good-faith effort to provide alternative arrangements allowing the student to complete the work necessary to obtain the academic credit that he or she would have earned on the interrupted program.

6. If an undergraduate student elects to travel and participate in the activity despite the Travel Warning and the University rules set out above, section 3 above pertaining to use of University funds applies. In addition, if the student participates in research or other educational activity in a district/country while that district/country is under the Travel Warning, the student will not receive any academic credit from the University for that research or educational activity.

### **III. Graduate Student Foreign Travel to Areas Under Travel Warning**

The University of Pittsburgh will not require any graduate student to travel to a district/country for which a Travel Warning has been issued.

Graduate students who wish to travel to a district/country with an active U.S. Department of State travel warning (Category 1 or 2) for purposes of research or training must submit the following documents to the Study Abroad Office:

1. A written statement by the student explaining why travel to the respective district/country is essential to the student's research and/or training and containing a travel itinerary including detailed contact information.
2. A written statement by the faculty advisor, endorsed by the department chair, confirming that the research or training project is important to the student's academic program and stating how the advisor believes any risk would be mitigated.
3. A signed waiver and release (provided by the Study Abroad Office) stating that the student has been advised of the travel warning and associated risks, and still chooses to travel to this district/country. The waiver will also include an acknowledgement by the student that it is his or her own responsibility to take precautions with respect to his or her personal safety, and that he or she understands that the University of Pittsburgh, external funding agencies, and even the U.S. Department of State may be unable to help in the event he or she encounters difficulties abroad. The waiver and release shall release the University from liability for death, injuries or losses suffered by the student while participating in the activity.

Upon submission of all the above to the Study Abroad Office and receipt of a notice acknowledgement from the Safety Abroad Standing Committee, graduate students may use approved University of Pittsburgh funding—including any external funding administered through and disbursed by the University—for approved research or training activities in that district/country. However, any rules set by external funding agencies for travel to countries with travel warnings will take precedence if they are more stringent than University of Pittsburgh guidelines.

### **IV. Employee Travel to Countries under Travel Warning**

The University recognizes that, in times of international crisis, its employees may possess valuable expertise that is needed to assist with the resolution of the crisis. Consequently

the University does not prevent its employees from traveling to countries for which the State Department has issued a Travel Warning described in sections I and II above. However, the following rules and conditions apply to such travel:

1. No employee shall be required to travel to a district/country for which a Travel Warning has been issued.
2. Employees who wish to travel to such a district/country are urged to review the Consular Information Sheet and Travel Warning at <http://www.state.gov> and other available material about the conditions in the district/country in question and to consider carefully whether the value of the travel to them outweighs the risks they will face if they choose to travel.
3. The Employee shall take precautions with respect to his or her personal safety. He or she must recognize that the University of Pittsburgh, and even the U.S. Department of State may be unable to help in the event he or she encounters difficulties abroad.

#### **V. Composition and Authority of the Safety Abroad Standing Committee**

The Safety Abroad Standing Committee shall consist of two appointees from the Office of the Provost one of which will serve as the Chair of the Committee, one appointee each of the Director of UCIS, the University's Risk Manager, and the General Counsel; and the Director of the Study Abroad Office.

Where a Department of State Travel Warning wording is not clear on whether it falls into category (1) or (2) as set out above, the Safety Abroad Standing Committee will review relevant information and make recommendations to the Provost.

In any situation involving a Travel Warning, the special conditions that caused the warning to be issued \* may warrant additional or different University rules and responses. In such a case, the Safety Abroad Standing Committee shall recommend to the Provost suggested rules and response.

\* As an example but not as a limitation, such a situation could include travel to an area that is suffering a disease outbreak where there is a risk that the employee may spread the disease to the University community upon return.

For a complete list of current State Department Travel Warnings, please visit the University of Pittsburgh Study Abroad Office website:

[www.abroad.pitt.edu/travelwarning.html](http://www.abroad.pitt.edu/travelwarning.html)