

Mental Health & Traumatic Events Abroad: *Lessons Learned from the 2015 Paris Attacks*



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Draft Schedule

3:30 to 3:40 – Introduction (Carol Foley)

3:40 to 4:05 – Psychological Response to Terror Incidents (Suzanne Black, Psy.D.)

4:05 to 4:25 – New York University Response (Josh Taylor)
Questions for New York University

4:25 to 4:45– Northwestern University Response (Karey Fuhs)
Questions for Northwestern University

4:45 to 5:00 – General Questions



Overview

- The terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015 are being used as a backdrop to discuss the importance of access to mental health resources abroad.
- France is the fourth most popular destination for U.S. study abroad students, with 17,597 students reported by Open Doors in 2013-2014.
- Colleges and Universities focus on emotional and physical safety of students in Paris during the time of extreme uncertainty.



Note: Times reported as Paris local time (GMT +1) on 13 November 2015

Terrorism

Terrorism's essence is the creation of pervasive, unrelenting fear.

- We are far more likely to die in car crashes for example, than from acts of terrorism.
- Terrorism or the fear of, can cause sustained emotional and behavioral consequences.

Terrorism steals our sense of agency.

- Our daily lives and the belief in our ability to function is disrupted.
- This induces a variety of immediate emotional reactions and psychiatric stress phenomena:
 - Panic
 - Severe anxiety
 - Depressed mood

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Clinical Psychologist



Panic

Tied to the perception:

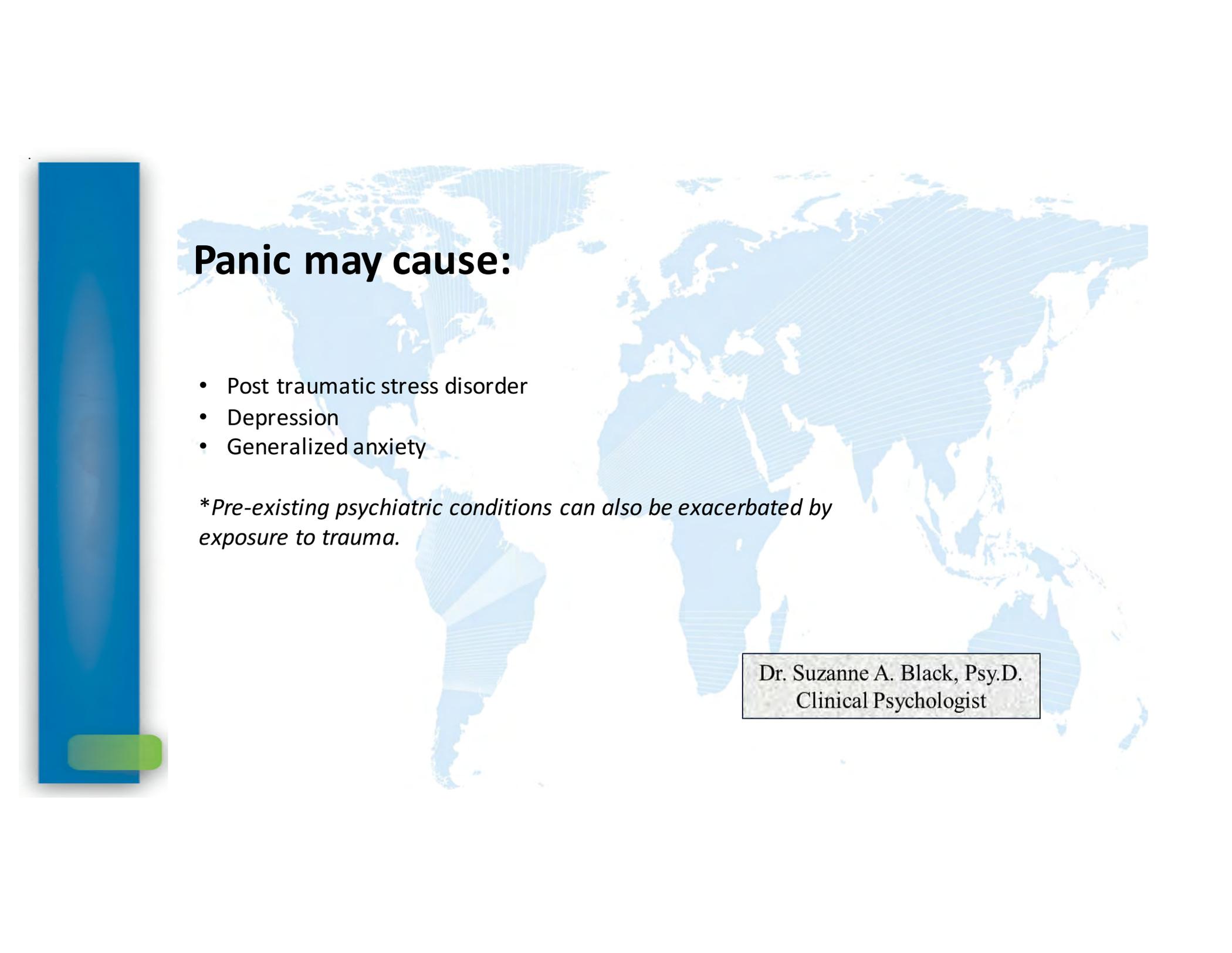
- “Limited opportunity for escape. “
- “Risk of being hurt or killed is high.”

Hallmarks of panic:

- Acute fear
- Extreme hypervigilance
- High anxiety



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Panic may cause:

- Post traumatic stress disorder
- Depression
- Generalized anxiety

**Pre-existing psychiatric conditions can also be exacerbated by exposure to trauma.*

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Support for Students

Students can reduce subjective fear by becoming partners in the monitoring and management of risk. Students will be re-assured that it is normal for people to feel traumatized under such circumstances.

- Practical information about personal safety
- General, “common-sense” advice about managing both real risk and subjective fear
- Awareness of psychological factors involved
- Automated information line
- A system of notification protocols such as use of social media, email, SMS, instant messaging, telephone trees and designation of program personnel responsible for being available [24/7](#) to answer questions and provide resources.
- Buddy system

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Psychological Support for Students

Students may feel embarrassed by their emotional reactions to trauma;

- Implement plans and protocols for acute management of both risk and fear.
- Administer psychological “first aid” to reduce the initial traumatic stress reaction caused by the crisis event.
- Assess the need for further intervention, e.g., referral for those in need of acute care to mental health professionals.
- Encourage students to talk about their feelings and thoughts related to the trauma.

**Expressing stress legitimizes, i.e., "normalizes" the experience in reaction to the traumatic event which can create a chain reaction among students of reducing shame and fear .*

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Signs of Heightened Difficulty

- Anxiety
- Fear
- Panic
- Sadness or depression
- Nightmares
- Sleep difficulties
- Somnolence during class
- Appetite changes
- Noticeable weight gain or weight loss

- Unkempt appearance
- Absence from class
- Restlessness and agitation
- Somatic symptoms
- Appearing "out of it"
- Social withdrawal
- Uncharacteristic anger or belligerence
- Violent behavior
- Substance use

**Alertness to symptoms necessary to intervene early and to head off the development of PTSD.*

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Institutional Model

- NYU has three degree-granting campuses, and 11 global academic centers
- NYU students from the three degree-granting campuses make up the overwhelming majority of those studying at its global academic centers
- At most global sites, NYU either maintains its own residence halls, or leases rooms from local providers. A small minority of NYU study away students live in external housing.
- Students study at NYU-operated academic centers, and are taught by faculty that are appointed in partnership with departments at its New York campus.
- NYU has wellness counselors on staff at most sites (including Paris), and all three campuses.



Immediate Response (*First 24 Hours*)

- Top priority: Tracking students – accounted for all students within 12 hours
 - NYU had more than 200 students in Paris at the time of the 2015 attacks.
 - The University collaborated on a shared document containing student roster, dividing that list up between staff in Paris and NY.
 - For students in one of NYU's two residence halls, staff was sent door-to-door to confirm students were safe.
 - NYU staff took lead on handling incoming parent calls, to ensure Paris-based staff could focus on students.
 - NYU Searched social media for posts from students who had not yet been contacted.
 - Sent out initial communications to students and families
- Contacted NYU's other European sites to identify students who might be visiting Paris.
- Contacted all NYU and visiting academic and study abroad advisors to provide updates, ensuring they too could respond to incoming parent inquiries.

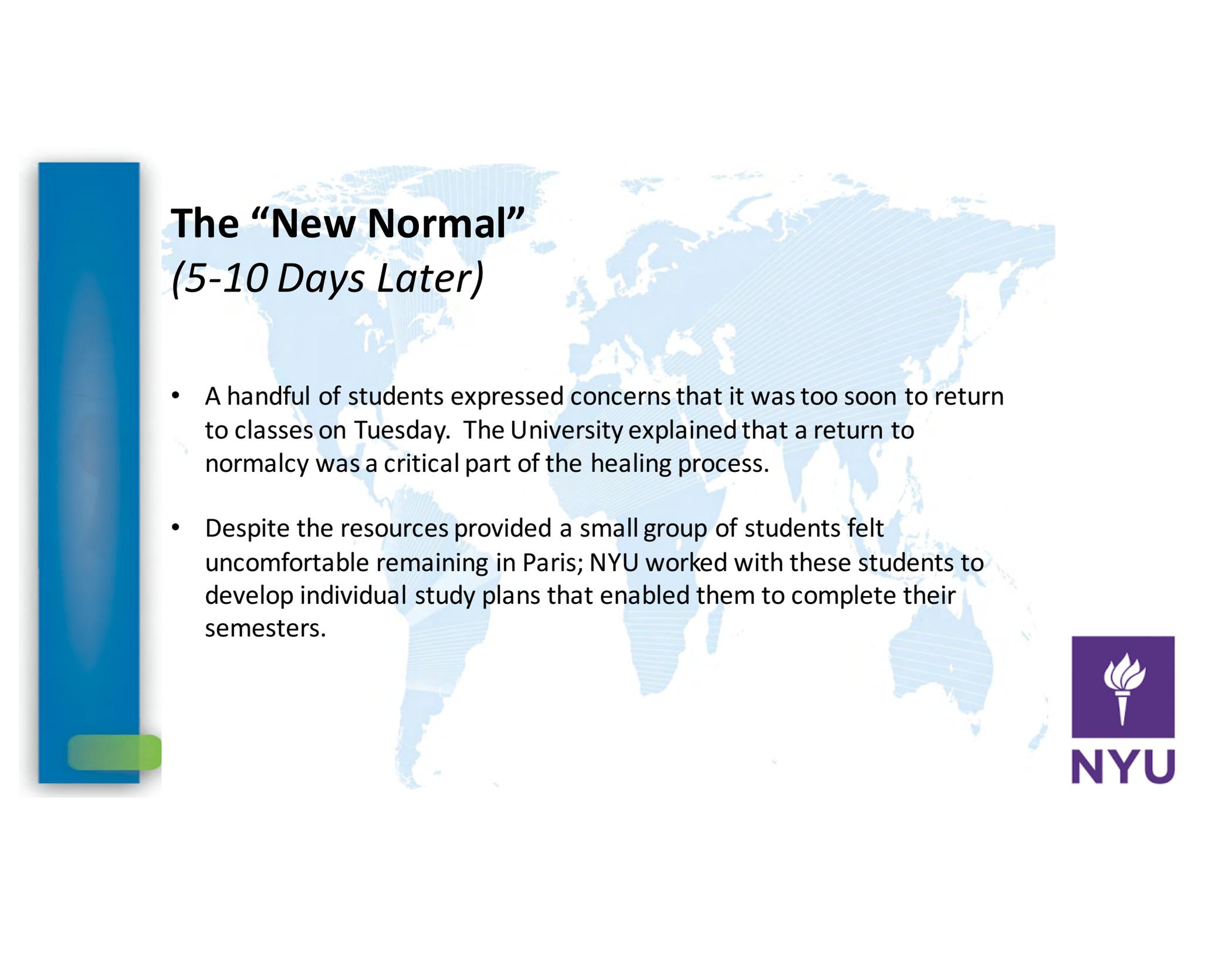


Decision Points, Risk & Fear Management

(1-5 Days Later)

- Support Available for Students:
 - On-site counseling
 - 24/7 counseling support, via NYU's Wellness Exchange hotline.
 - An additional counselor from New York's Student Health Center traveled to Paris to assist.
- A day of programming was held at the academic center on the following Monday, to get students out of their residence halls and apartments, and to provide them with a forum to engage with one another and with NYU Paris staff.
- Classes resumed on Tuesday.
- An administrator from NYU's Global Programs Office in New York traveled to Paris to provide additional support to Paris-based faculty and staff.
- Continued e-mail communications to students and families

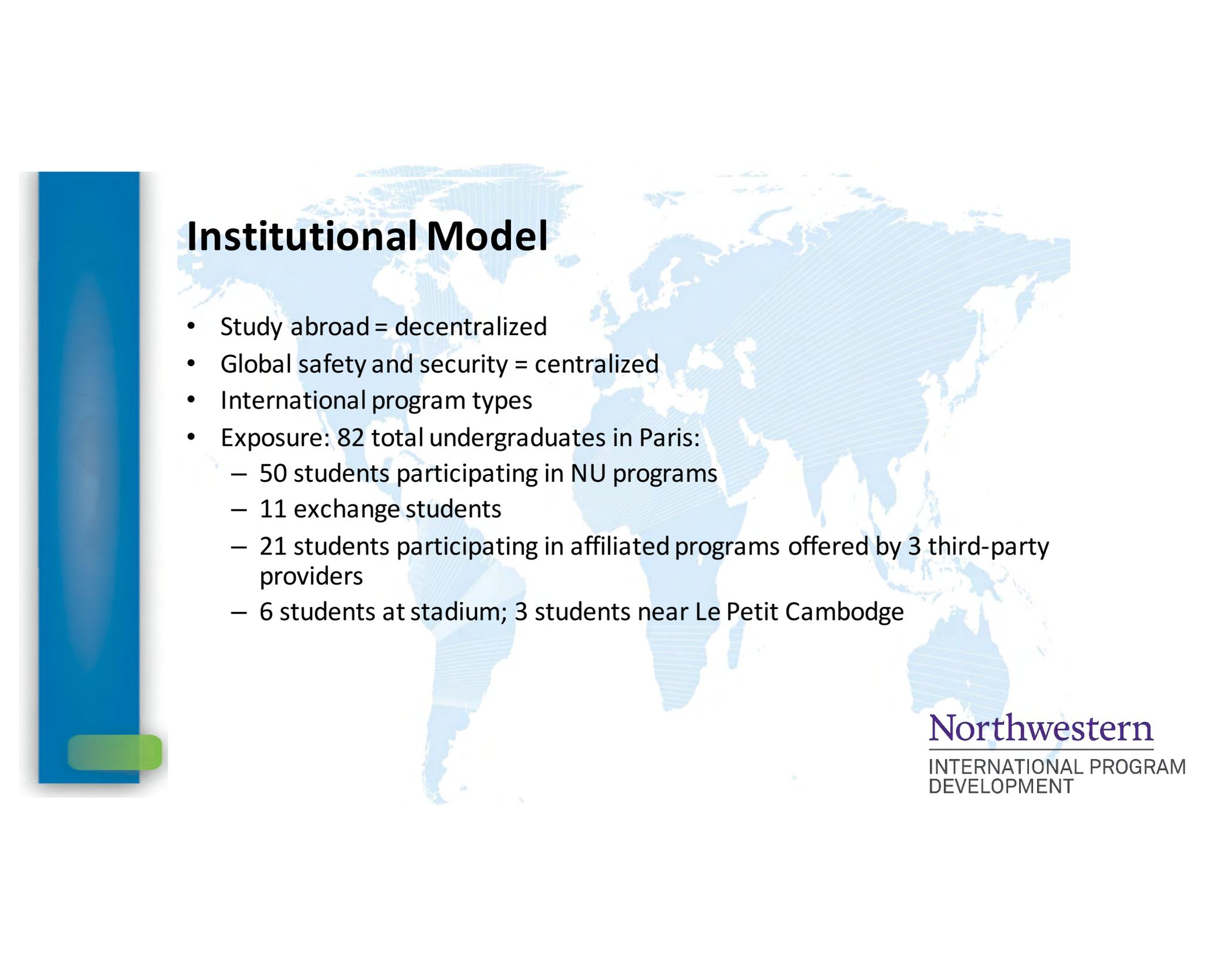




The “New Normal” *(5-10 Days Later)*

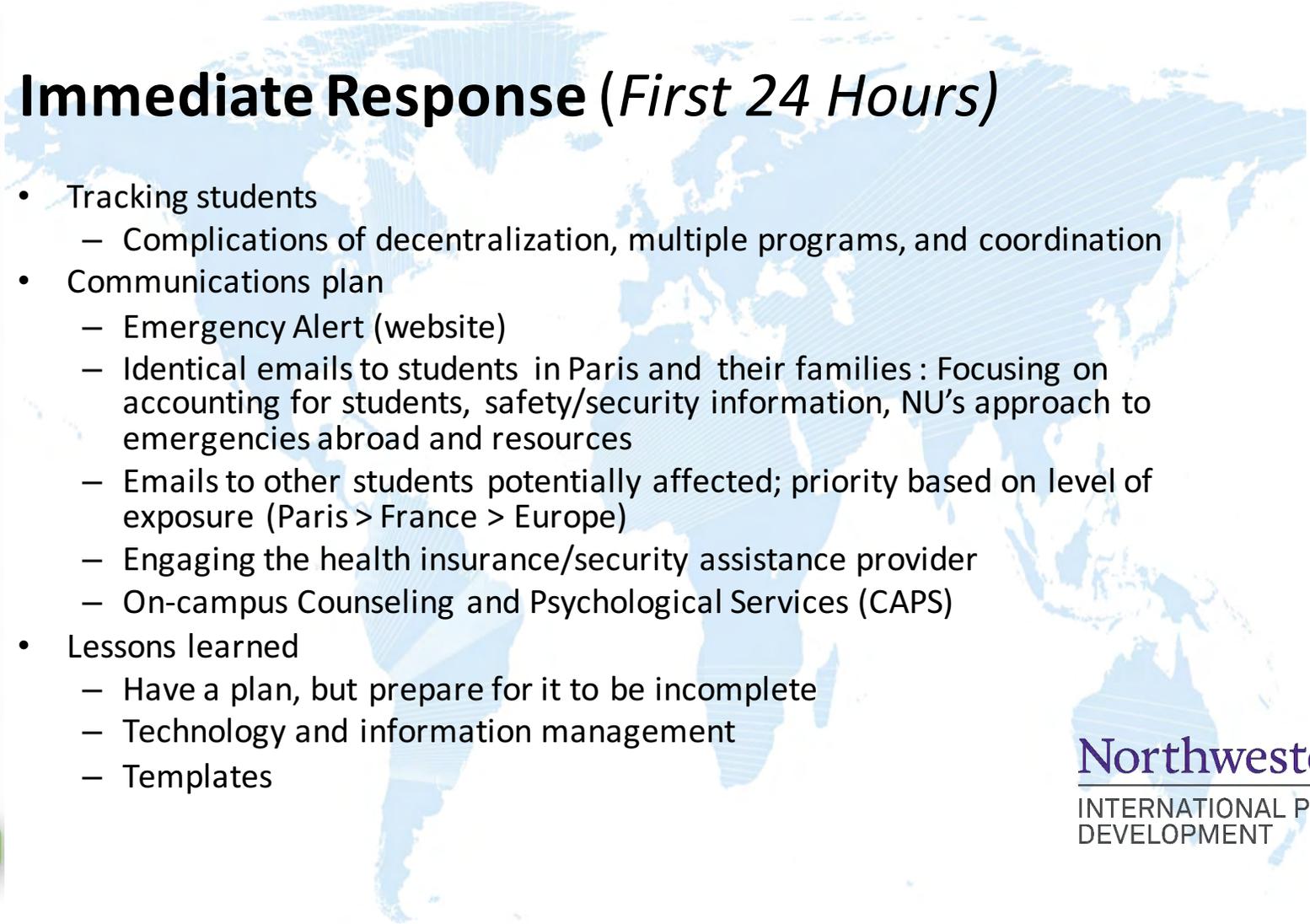
- A handful of students expressed concerns that it was too soon to return to classes on Tuesday. The University explained that a return to normalcy was a critical part of the healing process.
- Despite the resources provided a small group of students felt uncomfortable remaining in Paris; NYU worked with these students to develop individual study plans that enabled them to complete their semesters.





Institutional Model

- Study abroad = decentralized
- Global safety and security = centralized
- International program types
- Exposure: 82 total undergraduates in Paris:
 - 50 students participating in NU programs
 - 11 exchange students
 - 21 students participating in affiliated programs offered by 3 third-party providers
 - 6 students at stadium; 3 students near Le Petit Cambodge



Immediate Response (*First 24 Hours*)

- Tracking students
 - Complications of decentralization, multiple programs, and coordination
- Communications plan
 - Emergency Alert (website)
 - Identical emails to students in Paris and their families : Focusing on accounting for students, safety/security information, NU's approach to emergencies abroad and resources
 - Emails to other students potentially affected; priority based on level of exposure (Paris > France > Europe)
 - Engaging the health insurance/security assistance provider
 - On-campus Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
- Lessons learned
 - Have a plan, but prepare for it to be incomplete
 - Technology and information management
 - Templates

Decision Points, Risk & Fear Management (1-5 Days Later)

- Supporting students
 - Returning to a “safe” space > Returning to Paris > Returning to the program
 - Individuals:
 - Private professional counseling
 - Individual faculty meetings
 - Other needs/triggers
 - Group:
 - Group counseling session #1 (hosted at student dorm)
 - *For NU programs:* Processing time in class
- Supporting on-site faculty and staff
 - Information sharing: security, academic arrangements, mental health resources (conference calls with Dr. Black)
 - Visit by NU Vice President for International Relations

Decision Points, Risk & Fear Management, cont (1-5 Days Later)

- Communication Plan:
 - Identical emails to students in Paris and their families 1, 3, and 5 days later: Focus is on security updates, available program support, counseling options, visit of NU institutional representative, academic considerations and arrangements
 - Messages become more detailed as arrangements are confirmed
 - Special statement by Director of CAPS
 - Emails to other study abroad students (outside Europe) 1 day later
 - Notifications to NU community
- Lessons learned
 - Time
 - Counseling requests (trauma specialization, degree, group>individual)
 - Self-care

The “New Normal” (5-10 Days Later)

- Supporting students
 - Returning to class > Returning to life (traveling home for the Thanksgiving holiday)
 - Individuals:
 - Private, professional counseling
 - Meeting with the NU VP for International Relations
 - Group:
 - Group counseling session #2 (hosted by partner University)
 - *For NU programs*: Group (re)negotiation of final deliverables
- Communications Plan
 - Emails to students in Europe: Focus on travel safety, reminders about NU approach to risk management, counseling services and resources
 - Communication with families on an individual basis
- Lessons Learned
 - Trauma + Academic anxiety = Requests for incompletes
 - Thanksgiving returns (2 students on affiliated programs, 1 on NU program)
 - After-Thanksgiving returns (1 on affiliated program in Italy)



Questions?