Considerations and Guiding Principles for Education Abroad Programs in Conflict Zones

From a U.S. institution perspective:
• What are the agreed upon institutional philosophy and “guiding principles” in regard to education abroad goals in relation to risk tolerance?
• Do you have adequate policies to anticipate approval or crisis scenarios?
• Are these different for:
  o Integrated programs
  o Center based programs
  o Affiliated programs
  o Instructor or faculty-led programs
  o Independent study opportunities
• Who makes final determination?
• How are academic needs versus student safety concerns balanced?
• Are policies integrated into agreements and contracts or otherwise communicated to providers and host institutions?
• Are ethical considerations adequately addressed (financial, local partners and relationships)

From a study abroad provider perspective:
Program Development:
• Do your goals align with your mission? Do you work well together?
• Who has final say in program development and management?
• What is the strength of the partnership between the program provider and the host institution or partner abroad? Between the provider and the sending institution?
• Is there an institutional agreement in place? Is it comprehensive?
• How are faculty led or customized programs managed? Who handles crisis situations – faculty member or the provider? Who has final authority in crisis situations? Who trains the faculty member?
• Do you have references or recommendations?

Risk Management:
• What are the risk management practices and philosophy of the organization?
• What is the risk tolerance of the organization?
• Are safety and security site visits conducted prior to opening a programs?
• Do they have experience in risky locations - how many years have they been in operation in these locations?
• Do they have institutional liability insurance?
• Are third party vendors used by the provider vetted sufficiently?

Crisis Response:
• Is there a full-time health and safety professional on staff?
• Is there a crisis response team in place?
• Is there a crisis response plan? Can you obtain a copy of it?
• What type of training is provided to staff?
• Is there staff on the ground? Are they from the host country and/or lived in the location for very long?
  Have they been trained?
• What local resources are available?
- Does the provider have a comprehensive insurance policy: medical, security, and evacuation?
- Who is the emergency assistance provider?
- What are the guidelines for suspending or cancelling a program? Do they differ from yours?

Students and Parents:
- How are students and parents educated about the risks involved in studying abroad in a “risky” location?
- Is there a predeparture orientation or materials sent?
- Is there a student orientation at the beginning of the semester? Is it mandatory? Where is it? What is included?

Communication:
- Is there a developed communication plan between the provider, students, parents, host institution, and home institution? Other stakeholders?
- How do you communicate with students during and after a crisis?
- Is there an emergency number you or your students can contact?

From a host institution perspective:
- What are the unique elements of host institution (compared to provider):
  - Is it deeply rooted in particular location?
  - Does it know the local situation well?
  - Does it have very strong local contacts and resources in the event of an emergency? What alternative are available if local situation is unacceptable?
  - Often a reputable institution of higher learning in its own right with evolved policies and practices, though they may differ from what is done at the home institution.
- How does the institution deal with conflict-related content?
- How does it provide context?
- How does it deal with diverse opinions on the part of participants?
- Does the overall study experience provide sufficient added educational value?
- Is there an educational dialogue between the home and host institutions?
- How are students and parents educated about the risks involved in studying abroad in a “risky” location?
- Is there a predeparture orientation or materials sent?
- Is there a student orientation at the beginning of the semester?
- Is there an emergency number you or your students can contact?
Recently Published Articles on Studying Abroad in Conflict Zones


Ungar, Sanford J. “The Study Abroad Solution: How to Open the American Mind.” Foreign Affairs, March/April 2016. www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/study-abroad-solution

Forum Resources

Standards of Good Practice: https://forumea.org/resources/standards-of-good-practice/

Advocating for Student Safety Abroad: Working Together at Home and Abroad  
https://forumea.org/2016/03/22/new-forum-resource-advocating-for-student-safety-abroad/