



OVERSEAS RESPONSIBILITIES: TEACHING ON THE ROAD (Excerpts from UMAIE Faculty Director's Handbook)

A. Arrival and On-Site Orientation

1. Immediately after arrival, students are likely to be filled with varying degrees of euphoria and panic, anticipation and anxiety. They often will have forgotten what they learned beforehand and why they are there.
2. Your orientation session, held on-site as soon as possible following arrival, should review information they have already received about the program, policies and rules, the host country, etc. It should give students a chance to get to know one another and you, as well as to discuss and examine again their expectations and motivations for going on the program. This is also the time to review the educational objectives of the course. It is the optimum time to lay things out as you intend them to be. You are never more likely to have their fullest attention than during the first days overseas.
3. Obviously, the specific content of the orientation session will vary from program to program, country to country. General topics to be covered, however, might include:
 - Program rules and policies
 - Rules and regulations of the host institution (if applicable)
 - Proper conduct and the consequences of improper conduct
 - Information on the host country and its laws
 - Cross-cultural coping and integrative skills
 - Daily schedule and program itinerary, including excursions and field trips
 - Evaluation and grading policies
 - Housing/roommates
 - Local cuisine and customs
 - Health issues
 - Staying safe while on the program
 - Passing around the information sheet to include international cell phone information or best way to contact each

B. Providing Additional Materials

1. To the degree possible, it is helpful to provide students with specific on-site information in handbook form so they can carry it with them in their backpack.
2. The ideal handbook might include:
 - A map (hand-drawn is fine) of the area around the locations you will be visiting
 - The names and addresses of recommended places to eat nearby
 - Places for buying food and drink
 - Recommended shops for purchase of sundries, supplies, books and clothing
 - Pharmacies, hospitals, banks, post offices, bus and taxi stations, etc.
 - Cultural and historical landmarks, buildings, monuments, etc.
 - Vocabulary list to aid students in buying what they need locally and having other practical needs met.
3. Complementing this written information, consider scheduling a hands-on tour of the program setting, pointing out important locations and points of interest (when applicable), churches and temples of specific denominations, and the public transportation systems.

C. Setting up and Monitoring Living Arrangements

1. Whether your students are living in hotels, university housing, or with host families, you need to prepare a talk on the “do’s and don’ts” of this new social environment.
2. Try to provide culturally specific information concerning adjustments to family life (or the student culture) in the host country. It is important to convey to students that communications with the host family or other students may be challenging at first and that they should be as polite, respectful, and patient as possible.
3. Adjustment will take time, but the rewards of this situation are many. While there is a natural inclination for students to wish to “hang out” with each other, it is important to stress the importance of trying to fit in with local social life, to make friends in the time available, and to reach out to the new culture.

D. Explaining Your Role and Course Expectations

1. Some students will see you as their lifeline to familiar security networks back home, while others will see you as a potential deterrent to their free and open taste of a new cultural smorgasbord. Defining a middle ground between these extremes should be one of your first objectives. It is here that boundaries need to be defined, limitations discussed, risks reviewed and, most significantly, information given regarding when and where you will be available and for what. You must emphasize what is expected of each participant and how important their behavior and cooperation is to the overall success of the program.
2. Caution should be taken not to mislead students or to over-promise things. Experienced directors say that sometimes the more faculty agree to do for participants, the more students will come to rely on them, rather than learning to take advantage of their new opportunities and relative freedoms. On the other hand, students do need and usually appreciate seasoned guidance and prudent counsel.
3. Expectations and goals of students often prove unrealistic, in terms of their own capability and training, and in terms of what the program has to offer. One past participant commented, “Don’t expect anything — your expectations, good or bad, won’t be right, and you’ll be disappointed.” This overstatement contains some truth, of course, especially for students’ intent, for example, upon becoming fluent in a language in three or four weeks.

E. Achieving Good Group Dynamics

1. Students will spend a good deal of time together as a group. The concentrated overseas living and learning environment is quite different from their domestic campus setting where individuals work out the life-style which best suits their personal resources, interests, and whims. It may therefore be useful to point out the importance of patience, sharing, and self-restraint in a group setting and to note the many ways in which study abroad is distinctly different from study in the U.S. This difference applies to general social behavior, as well as classroom behavior.
2. It is very important to challenge students to:
 - Be open, flexible, and adaptive
 - Show individual initiative
 - Do their best to take maximum advantage of the new learning environment that will surround them overseas
 - Learn something they cannot learn on their home campus
3. Each group of students will have its own characteristics and particular tenor. Obviously, it is to your benefit to figure this out as early as possible in order to anticipate potential problems along the ways. Immature and vociferous students need to be reined in; silent, shy ones are encouraged to reach out. If you can, identify the natural group leaders and use them to solve some problems.

Often students unconsciously expect the conveniences of home and a high service program – characteristics that in fact may be counter to the learning experience abroad as well as impossible to provide. When students nurse dissatisfactions, behavioral or morale problems for the group may develop. Many students who are used to acting independently may find a group context stifling, while other students may find the group context helpful. You play the major role in counseling students and in providing a perspective on situations that may arise, both during the orientation process and during the remainder of the program.

F. Assisting Students in their Cultural Adjustment

1. You should be aware of the normal, predictable phases of culture shock. You should try to set the tone for understanding and accepting cultural differences in terms of lifestyle, food, values, dress, etc. Your genuine interest in the culture, language and program should serve as an example to motivate students.
2. If your group is like others in the past, it will contain students who are savvy about living and learning in a "foreign" environment and have good coping skills, as well as, at the other extreme, some who have never visited a foreign country. Obviously, these differences in background and attitude can split the group into two or more camps. Therefore the wisest approach might be that of appropriating the more experienced travelers in ways that encourage them to work productively with less-experienced travelers.
3. Once students indeed become aware that they are in a "foreign" social and cultural environment, they often become much more eager to fit in and not embarrass themselves. At the other extreme, there are students who will do everything possible to resist assimilation and giving up habits and values with which they are comfortable, especially if their new environment seems threatening. Encouraging students to immerse themselves in their new environment to the degree possible is of course an ideal worth pursuing. On the other hand, given the shortness of the time and the U.S. academic expectations which must be met, there are limits as to what can actually be accomplished, by even the boldest and most enterprising of students. Early efforts at building group thinking and morale can help lessen culture shock by directing attention to those goals that are achievable.

G. Integrating Excursions into the Learning Objectives

1. While it is understandable that each student brings to the program a certain set of concerns and interests, it is still important to relate to them the reasons why all planned activities are important and are relevant to the success of the course for them. You are responsible for contextualizing the excursion within the cultural and academic milieu of the program.
2. **Attendance at all classes should be considered mandatory.** A student should be excused only because of illness. Any student chronically late or absent from classes or excursions should discuss the situation with you and you should take appropriate actions. Under no circumstances can program participants be refunded money for an excursion in which they chose not to participate.
3. When necessary, students should be reminded that participation in excursions is an expression of interest and courtesy to the host country and that every student has a responsibility to act as an ambassador for the program and for UMAIE, despite possible feelings to the contrary. Embarrassing situations arise when special efforts are made to include students in special local activities, and few attend. Failure to attend such activities can be a serious disappointment for host nationals, and may compromise the status of the program, thereby making it more difficult to schedule worthwhile activities in the future.
4. You will be provided with on-site contacts, arranged via Seminars International. Become acquainted with these guides and other staff organizing the excursions, as well as with the specific terms of the contract made with the local operator on behalf of UMAIE. You are responsible for making sure the local operator fulfills the terms of its contract.

H. Advising Students

1. The fact that overseas teaching, learning, and academic/personal advising takes place in a "foreign" cultural setting can be both liberating and threatening to students. The counsel you will be asked to provide is considerably more likely to address the "whole person" of the student, rather than the more limited version which students generally share with faculty domestically. Responding to the intellectual needs of students, as well as the emotional and mental adjustment problems that some students develop, can therefore be a major challenge. It is also one that the average faculty member may not be fully prepared to deal with, without some serious forethought.
2. From years of experience in providing cross-cultural adjustment counseling to military personnel overseas, Dr. Brian Riedesel, Associate Professor of Counseling Psychology at Argosy University, suggests that the occurrence of mental health casualties can be reduced by following some basic guidelines designed to minimize the anxiety that comes with an unfamiliar setting. These include:
 - Frequent communication with all members of the group
 - Building group cohesion
 - Establishing a sensible pacing of program activities to reduce fatigue
 - Sensitive leadership

3. While most issues Program Directors confront may be fairly routine and can be satisfied with accurate information and foresight given to the group as a whole, deeper and broader questions are also very likely to arise for some individuals. The key is to:
 - Challenge students to try to integrate what they experience outside the classroom into their primary educational goals for being abroad, not to see it as something extraneous to what “the program” asks or offers.
 - Make sure that those who are having trouble know that you are there to assist them in any way you can.
4. You will probably not have an "office" in which to meet with such students, but you are nevertheless expected to be available to students on a regular basis and inform program students of your availability. At a minimum, you should try to be available to students before and after classes and there will always be places that can be used for private and small-group meetings.

I. Providing Health Care

1. Travel abroad can bring out a variety of minor illnesses and ailments – and medical catastrophes are always possible. You are not of course expected to function as the group nurse or medic. However, you should be prepared to give health care advice appropriate to the setting and be familiar with the local health care delivery system, as well as how students can obtain routine health remedies.
2. Under no circumstances should you serve as "in-house pharmacist" by dispensing any kind of over-the-counter medicines or medical counsel. The pre-departure orientation on health issues should have informed participants about bringing their own supply of whatever they might need. Post-arrival orientation can provide an overview of how to treat minor health problems locally and what to do in the case of emergencies.
3. The location of the program is naturally a major factor in the health risks students may encounter. In all cases, health and medical care are important topics to be discussed as thoroughly as is necessary. The need for good personal hygiene should also be emphasized.
4. Should a problem arise, the student should be advised to inform you as early as it becomes known, so that an informed decision can be made regarding treatment. While we do not realistically expect students to inform you of every cold or upset stomach, ailments that do not disappear in a few days should be reported. Prompt treatment may eliminate the need for hospitalization.
5. In most cases — e.g., colds, the flu, sore throats, and minor ailments — there is likely to be satisfactory treatment at local hospitals and clinics, again, depending on the location (and always sighted in advance). In the event of more serious injuries or illnesses, you should be prepared to accompany the student to a medical facility for care, having made pre-arrangements for someone to take over your leadership role in the interim.
6. Fear and anxiety can often take a toll on students in an unaccustomed environment, making them unable to describe their own condition and symptoms accurately. You will have to use your own discretion with regard to deciding on the appropriate medical treatment, hospitalization, (and sometimes surgery).
7. Seminars International and the student's home institution should always be informed immediately if situations arise in which extensive medical treatment is required. Seminars International's local operator and on-site contacts will provide you with guidance and information.

J. Resolving Student Disciplinary Problems

1. Expectations for appropriate student conduct are based on the same general standards that are in effect on the home campus and must be communicated to students both before departure and should be after arrival. If additional rules are needed on site, you must go over this during the orientation session.
2. In the event of an incident that involves academic or behavioral misconduct or a student's difficulty with local authorities, Seminars International and the student's home institution should be informed immediately.
3. Campus judicial procedures are impossible to replicate abroad. However, should an incident occur, you will want to proceed in a way that follows due process and will determine whether misconduct in fact really did take place. Evidence needs to be gathered carefully, and students need to have the opportunity to respond to the charges and the evidence. Hopefully the outcome of the procedures will be that the student learns from the experience and can participate in a positive way in the remainder of the course. You are encouraged to maintain as much oral communication as possible with the student. A written record, however, will afford the best protection should the

incident be reviewed at a later date. In the most severe cases where dismissal is a consideration, consultation with the student's home institution and Seminars International must take place prior to taking action.

4. Overall, we urge faculty to consult with the student's home institution at any point during this process if there is a need. Some problems that arise are very similar to what the campus deans handle regularly, and the precedents they have experienced may serve as a guide.
5. In cases where cultural factors may come into play or there are other complications, study abroad professionals may be able to identify others with relevant experience or expertise.
6. If prior consultation with people stateside is not possible, you must proceed on the basis of your own authority. A full, written report on the reasons for the action must be prepared and submitted upon return.
7. All expenses involved are the responsibility of the student. No refund for the remainder of the program should be expected in the case of dismissal.

K. Responding to Natural, Political and Social Emergencies

1. As the on-site UMAIE representative, it is your responsibility to coordinate an appropriate response to any natural, political, or social emergency that may arise. A determination must immediately be made as to the level of risk confronting participants and what course of action is most prudent.
2. A first step, if there is time and according to communications procedures established in advance, is usually to contact Seminars International and provide complete and accurate information about the nature of the emergency and how it has impacted the participants, or might.
3. An emergency involving the physical well-being of participants clearly dictates a more rapid response than say, a national strike or political coup, where damage assessment can take a more measured pace.
4. The continuing role in emergency response situations is for you to act as liaison with Seminars International, which will assemble a team of UMAIE home institution representatives to evaluate further response to the emergency, based on your recommendation. Once the situation on-site is stabilized, decision-making responsibility will be largely assumed by UMAIE.

L. Program Assessment by Students

1. Instruct students to complete an on-line student evaluation form that they will receive from their home campus UMAIE Board Member as soon as possible following the conclusion of the course, evaluating both the academic and logistical aspects of the course.
2. This should help you in your own professional development as a teacher, and is invaluable to Seminars International, UMAIE, and your home institution in getting the broadest possible perspective on the program and thus deciding whether to offer it again. It is important that all students complete the evaluation.
3. For most students, the overseas experience will have been one of the most eye opening of their lives, and they will rave endlessly about its many positives. Most, upon reflection, will be able to reach a more balanced view, and will have really useful suggestions to make about improvements for the next time.
4. Before students fill out their evaluations, it is sometimes very helpful to hold an informal group discussion to help them put their experience in perspective. For a few students, a sojourn abroad may end up being one long negative experience. Possibly, hesitant actions and in-grained attitudes prevented the desired openness and growth from having a chance, and they never got beyond the defensive strategies of coping with, but not really entering, the new culture.