Crisis Preparation and Protocols

CRISES ABROAD

UT Austin places the utmost importance on the safety, security, and well-being of study abroad program participants. Moreover, study abroad staff, faculty directors, and on-site partners follow prudent measures to verify that transportation, lodging, and medical facilities are safe and of reasonable quality, and that communication plans and crisis responses are in place to provide a safe environment for program participants.

While UT Austin is firmly committed to providing this support, programs must emphasize to students that they too must also take responsibility for their own safety, security, and well-being while abroad. This fact should be highlighted during pre-departure preparations, on-site orientations, and throughout the program.

UT Austin expects all participants to take the same precautions anyone would follow in their home communities in the United States and to make smart decisions. Students should be reminded to use common sense, be alert and aware of their surroundings at all times, travel with a buddy, and to never put themselves in compromising positions with the use of drugs or alcohol.

UT cannot guarantee or assure the absolute safety of participants or eliminate all risks from the study abroad environment. Nor can we monitor students’ choices and behaviors at all times, or prevent them from engaging in dangerous, unwise, or illegal activity. Nonetheless, we must do our best to run a safe program. Faculty directors comprise our front line and are a critical element to creating a culture of safety.

Defining a Crisis

In the context of faculty-led study abroad programs, a crisis is defined as any event that harms or jeopardizes the health, safety, or security of UT students, faculty and/or staff in a foreign country, necessitating immediate involvement and/or action by the University. The term crisis may refer to a range of incidents, from those with widespread impact on the University (e.g. the death of a student abroad) to less critical incidents (e.g. a common street mugging).

Crisis can be real or perceived. All cases should be handled with sensitivity and good judgment, reflecting the university's promise to care for the well-being of all its travelers abroad.

Although UT's crisis management strategy is designed with real crises in mind, it is important to note that perceived crises should not be ignored or deemed less important than real crises. Perceived crises may arise from actual events (e.g. a natural disaster or civil unrest) therefore, it is important to assess all available data thoroughly before responding.
Real crises are those that impact the health, safety, and security of UT travelers. It is unlikely, although not impossible, that an outbreak of war, a coup d’état, terrorist activity, or political instability will occur at a site where UT is conducting a faculty-led program. It is more likely that a medical emergency or a natural disaster would occur. Assessment of the situation reveals that immediate attention from the University is needed, oftentimes requiring the involvement of various offices to formulate an appropriate response.

UT Austin considers a crisis (real or perceived) to be any circumstance that poses a genuine risk to, or that has already disturbed, the safety and well-being of program participants. Crises include, though are not confined to, the following types of events and incidents:

- Physical assault.
- Disappearance or kidnapping of a student.
- Robbery.
- Physical/sexual assault or rape.
- Serious illness, physical or emotional.
- Significant accident and/or injury.
- Hospitalization for any reason.
- Terrorist threat or attack.
- Local political crisis that could affect the students’ safety or well-being.
- Arrest or questioning by the police or other security forces.
- Any legal action (lawsuit, deposition, trial, etc.) involving a student.
- Natural disaster such as an earthquake, flood, fire, tornado/hurricane, or volcano.

**Emergency Response Plan**

Prior to departure, faculty directors are required to create and submit an Emergency Response Plan (ERP) for their program. The purpose of the ERP is twofold:

1. To compile crisis management information including contact information (listed below) for on-site program partners, UT or U.S.-based emergency support, the nearest hospital, and more.

2. To mitigate risk. ERPs are written specific to the culture, customs, and current state of affairs of the program site. They should also plan for numerous issues, such as student misconduct, lost travel documents, student injury or sickness, and designating an alternate faculty director should the primary director become incapacitated during the program.
EQUIPPING STUDENTS FOR A CRISIS

It is not sufficient to compile ERPs and file them away in a wallet or folder. Meaningful practice, in the form of regular review of the plans, verbal rehearsal of emergency drills, and participation in problem-solving exercises, empowers program directors, on-site program partners and students to confidently respond to a crisis at a moment’s notice.

During the pre-departure orientations and on-site orientation, the faculty director and program coordinator prepare students for crisis prevention. This includes introducing students to resources like insurance and International SOS. For students, this task of engaging in meaningful practice can be rather challenging. Many students who have not previously traveled abroad cannot imagine themselves in a foreign country, let alone how they might react to a troubling situation abroad. The International Office recommends including activities in pre-departure orientations such as scenarios and ‘what would you do’ activities.

Tips for Crisis Prevention and Response Planning

The faculty director should follow the steps below before departure and while abroad to adequately prepare for the unexpected.

1. Acquaint yourself with region-specific health and safety concerns.
2. Prepare all program participants for a safe program, both physically and emotionally, by urging participants to consult with all of their health care providers prior to departure.
3. Conduct pre-departure orientations covering region-specific health and safety precautions and procedures.
4. Distribute emergency contact information to all participants.
5. Conduct an on-site orientation that acquaints participants with in-country medical procedures/ facilities, reinforces emergency protocols, and revisits the code of conduct and behavior expectations.
6. Be available 24/7 to respond to the needs of the program participants.
7. Carry emergency information, a student contact list, and a cell phone at all times and be prepared to communicate via phone or e-mail with ISOS or UTPD in the event of an emergency.

Responding to a Crisis

If an emergency should occur during your program, it is important to remember that you are not alone. The International Office works closely with offices across campus to coordinate the management of crises affecting participants in UT Austin-sponsored study abroad programs.

Assuring the safety and well-being of students, faculty and staff who are participating in UT
programs abroad is of the highest importance, and all reasonable actions will be taken to accomplish this. As described later in this section, a variety of resources exist to assist and respond in a time of crisis, and the International Office will help coordinate the use of these resources.

Faculty directors should follow these steps if an emergency occurs:

**Step 1: Secure safety of program participants.**

Do not panic. In a crisis your first responsibility is to preserve the safety and well-being of program participants. Do whatever is necessary to assure this, according to the situation: obtain prompt and appropriate medical attention, police protection or intervention, and/or US embassy involvement. **In a medical emergency, never leave an injured or sick student on his or her own.**

**Step 2: Account for the group.**

When applicable, locate and contact all program participants as quickly as possible to ascertain their well-being, and to coordinate an immediate response plan. Depending on the situation, the faculty director may or may not gather the participants together in a group. Advise participants to inform their parents, guardians, or emergency contacts of their safety and whereabouts as soon as possible.

**Step 3: Call International SOS**

When you have done all that you can reasonably do to assure the well-being of participants and to get a sense of the danger, immediately contact International SOS as well as your on-site partner. Be prepared to provide details on the situation as well as a call back number. ISOS and/or the on-site partner will then initiate their emergency response plans.

**Step 4: Contact the UT Austin International Office.**

Call the IO emergency phone number and brief the emergency contact. Together we will coordinate our fact-finding, communication, and response plan. Depending on the severity of the situation, the IO will make all US contacts as appropriate: the participants’ emergency contacts, UT offices and authorities, etc.

**Step 5: Continue to monitor the situation.**

Take immediate steps to gather more information about the problem and assess the situation utilizing all in-country resources available. Consult with on-site partners, International SOS, hospital administration and doctors, local authorities, other US enterprises in the area, and so on. If appropriate, contact the local US embassy or consulate regarding general, non-medical crises and follow whatever procedures they may require. Ask the embassy or consular officer to advise you on a regular basis about the evolution of the emergency and about how you should direct UT’s on-site response.

**Step 6: Maintain communication with the UT Austin.**

In an ongoing crisis, continue to keep the International Office / Study Abroad informed on a regular basis through telephone or e-mail. This is essential, as the IO will be working closely with you throughout the emergency to develop a situation-specific response plan. It will be the IO’s responsibility to consult with all appropriate UT offices in the development of that plan.

**Step 7: Submit Incident Report to Study Abroad.**
It is important that after all emergencies (small or large) an Incident Report Form (included in the Appendix) is completed and submitted to Study Abroad.

**EMERGENCY CONTACTS AND RESOURCES**

All faculty directors receive a wallet card with emergency contact information prior to departure. This card should be carried with you at all times.

In order to obtain effective assistance in an emergency, it is essential that relevant information regarding the emergency be clearly conveyed. When contacting the resources listed below, it is important that you identify yourself as a UT faculty program leader, give the city and country where you are currently located, give your name and contact information, and describe the emergency.

**International SOS**

The University of Texas System provides all students, staff and faculty access to an international emergency assistance service. The UT system currently contracts with International SOS to provide access to a full range of medical information and emergency services. It is NOT an international health insurance provider.

Phone: +001 (215) 942-8226 – main line  
+001 (215) 942-8478 – dedicated scholastic line  
(accepts collect calls from anywhere in the world 24/7)

Website: [http://www.internationalsos.com/](http://www.internationalsos.com/)

UT Member ID number: 11BSGC000037

All faculty and staff will receive an emergency card prior to departure which includes this vital information. The member ID number facilitates the use of the extensive online resources developed by International SOS. Faculty and staff are not required to take any action to activate this service.

Individuals can use this service to:

- Request emergency assistance including medical assistance, evacuation in case of political turmoil, terrorist attack, or natural disaster.
- Identify hospitals and/or English speaking doctors.
- Obtain up-to-date, comprehensive health and security information.
- Obtain guidance in the event of a widespread emergency.
- Request assistance securing treatment when prepayment of medical services is required. Any expenses incurred for services provided would have to be repaid by the student or faculty member, ideally through health insurance carried by the individual.
UT International Office

Study Abroad front desk: +001 (512) 471-6490

24-hour emergency phone: +001 (512) 669-8488

The emergency phone is answered by the international risk analyst and is accessible 24/7. This number is the primary emergency contact at UT for faculty directors abroad. Incidents should be reported to the UT emergency email: emergencyabroad@austin.utexas.edu. This e-mail address is checked regularly during business hours.

Students and parents, however, are directed to call UTPD directly (below) in case of an emergency abroad that requires UT assistance.

University of Texas Police Department—UTPD

UTPD Emergency Assistance Desk: +001 (512) 471-4441

If extenuating circumstances arise and the emergency phone is not accessible, the secondary UT emergency contact for faculty directors is the UTPD. Students and parents are directed to call UTPD in case of an emergency abroad that requires UT assistance.

UTPD operators are trained to respond to emergencies, and they have the ability to contact senior staff of the University 24/7. Upon receiving an emergency call from abroad, UTPD will contact the emergency line, the Dean of Students, or other relevant University officers to assist.

UT Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC)

Students and faculty can speak with a counselor about any issue at any time. Faculty may consult with a counselor on how to assist and advise a student experiencing excessive stress, anxiety, or other difficulties.

Phone: +001 (512) 471-2255 (24/7)

UT Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)

Faculty and staff can contact the Behavior Concerns Advice Line at any time to report unusual student behavior. BCAL can connect the caller to University resources if necessary.

Phone: +011 (512) 232-5050
Overseas Insurance Program

All students are required to have and are enrolled in the UT Austin Overseas Insurance Program. This program has three components and costs the student $19 per week.

- International health insurance provided by Academic Health Plans (GLMN04969340-12)
- International SOS emergency assistance coverage (member #11BSGC000037)
- General liability coverage

Faculty directors and staff accompanying students abroad on official programs are eligible to enroll in the AHP Health Insurance portion of the Overseas Insurance Program for a fee. Faculty and staff inscription in ISOS is free of charge.

Some programs may have additional health insurance coverage for faculty and students as required by the on-site program provider.

It is important that faculty directors are aware of both their own coverage and that of their students, including contact information and policy number. (See the Appendix for a copy of the UT Austin AHP policy.)

---

Adapted from Faculty Handbook for Developing and Directing Study Abroad Programs
Third Edition
April 2013