

International Field Activity Risk Assessment

While international field experiences offer many benefits and values to participants through experiential learning, any travel and instruction that take place outside of a traditional classroom are inherently high-risk. The health and safety of Saint Mary's students, faculty and staff are of the utmost importance.

The University has the duty of care to take reasonable steps to ensure the safety of all participants, prevent harm, and assist the participants in distress; the group leaders of an international trip plays a critical role. University employees in positions of supervision and responsibility (i.e., the group leaders) are tasked with considering the nature, scope and destination of the proposed travel, planning risk management, and exercising due diligence in every step so that the university meets its legal and ethical obligation for offering its students an international learning opportunity. Participants are required to comply with the direction of university faculty and employees acting in the legitimate performance of their authorized duties (Saint Mary's University Code of Conduct Policy (8-1020, D8).

The group leaders' responsibilities in addition to those related to program delivery include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Conduct a risk assessment as part of the pre-program planning. Within that assessment, identify risk-mitigation strategies and ensure that these strategies form part of pre-departure briefing for participants.
2. Provide or arrange orientation on site.
3. Guide participants in problem-solving and learning from their experiences. In case of serious difficulty or issues of personal health or safety, intervene and seek solutions with the participants' well-being as first priority.
4. Establish the code of conduct that is mutually understood by all participants.
5. Limit liability of the university by restricting advice to participants to those areas of immediate responsibility and personal expertise.
6. Liaise with the on-site partner institutions/organizations/schools, if any.
7. Maintain liaison with the Global Learning Services at Saint Mary's University (Miyuki.arai@smu.ca), reporting any critical incidents in a timely fashion. In the event that a critical incident occurs, complete a post-activity incident report.
8. Identify Canadian government offices in the host country/countries, and be familiar with their consular services in emergencies and in legal issues. If there are non-Canadian participants in the group, identify government offices of applicable countries.
9. Assist in planning for future field trips by collection or updating information and resources.
10. Arrange payment for in-country program expenses as appropriate.
11. Facilitate discussion and follow-up activities after return to campus.

The group leaders or their designate must complete the detailed risk management plans as below and submit it to SMU Risk and Insurance Services Risk@smu.ca for review well in advance and before university funds are committed. Any questions or concerns may be directed to Risk@smu.ca.

As outlined in the International Field Activity Approval Process, the initial submission of International Field Activity Risk Assessment to the International Field Activity Advisory Committee will be responded to normally in 3 working days, and the second step comprising the full Risk Assessment in 2-3 weeks. Approval may be given with or without conditions. Additional information and/or modifications may be requested. The plan is intended to be a living document and provide a tool of communication for the group leaders, participants, and the university.

Step One: Initial Application

Information completed by:

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Submission date:

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Activity summary:

Name of trip:

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Name of Academic Program/Dept/Faculty coordinating the international activity:

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Name, email, position of the lead coordinator for the above:

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SMU faculty/staff accompanying the group on-site as field activity leaders:

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Participant make-up (i.e., student/non-student, graduate/undergraduate, Canadian/non-Canadian, or unknown):

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Approx. number of participants:

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Destination country/countries:

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Approx. travel dates:

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Approx. number of days on-site:

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Signature of Responsible Faculty Member

Print Name of Responsible Faculty Member

Dated

Signature of Dean

Print Name of Dean and Faculty

Dated

Step Two: International Field Activity Risk Management Plan

Information completed by:

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Submission date:

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Alignment

How is the proposed international travel essential to Saint Mary's University? Please comment on the proposed activity's alignment with the strategic plans and priorities of your department/program, Faculty, and/or the university.

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Group leaders experience

What backgrounds and experiences of the group leaders will contribute to the successful execution of the proposed activity? Please explain:

- 1) leadership/mentorship
- 2) local knowledge/cultural mores, and
- 3) language abilities

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Partnerships and Outside Parties

Are there any organizations included in this activity including partner schools, organizations in the destination country, outside funding groups, etc.?

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Academic continuity and contingency

Unexpected events may prevent the group leaders from conducting all or part of the program as planned (e.g., they may need to attend to a student requiring medical treatment or they may experience medical emergencies themselves). What supports and resources are in place to ensure the group's academic continuity?

Activities during non-program time

While the local region and culture have much to offer for the participants' intercultural development and curiosity, travels and activities which are not essential to the scope of the program may be restricted at the group leaders' discretion to reduce the risk of exposure. Please comment on the group leaders' approach.

Local sites and accessibility

Please describe the appropriateness of the chosen accommodation type, field sites, isolated settings, available facilities and essential services, medical care, transportation options (public or hired), etc.

Demands expected of participants

What are some of key physical and mental demands expected of your participants during the proposed activity and the strategies to promote their well-being?

Group cohesion and inclusivity

Student engagement and safety of a group are a collective effort. Please explain your methods for student selection (academic pre-requisites, motivation, ability as a team member, etc.) and training opportunities which will enhance student experience, team cohesion, and a safe, respectful learning environment for all?

Information for participants

The group leaders are responsible for conducting a risk assessment as part of the pre-program planning. While it is not possible to anticipate all “what-if” scenarios, what are some of the potential risks/dangers/hazards? Please list concrete examples as well as mitigation strategies the group leaders want to inform their participants about during pre-departure planning and on-site orientation. It may be helpful to think in terms of:

- 1) *use of equipment and hazardous substances,*
- 2) *local transportation safety,*
- 3) *standards of medical facilities,*
- 4) *food/water-borne diseases, disease/parasite spread from insects, wildlife, and persons,*
- 5) *natural disasters and climate,*
- 6) *local laws,*
- 7) *crime, and*
- 8) *previous or current political unrest, government, military or terrorist activity.*

(The Government of Canada’s Travel Report should be one of primary sources – click on “Travel Advice and Advisories” under the destination country name at <https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/country-pays/index.aspx?lang=eng>)

Disease control and prevention at home and abroad

Please list information sources and websites which the group leaders and participants can refer to for information (COVID-related or otherwise) on health-related entry requirements, border measures, testing, as well as preventive measures and restrictions implemented in the destination country and municipality. Information for Return to Canada is found at <https://travel.gc.ca/travel-covid> and to Nova Scotia at <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/travel/>.

Emergency Management Planning

Travel arrangement and plans for shelter-in-place, relocation and evacuation

Important Notes:

- Risks include the possibility that the trip may be cancelled or not be completed or individual activities may be curtailed or cancelled, due to weather, flooding, illness, political disturbances, terrorism, vehicle accidents, transportation problems, failure to perform on the part of the travel agents, guides, airlines or transportation companies, problems relating to customs, immigration or visa requirements, or other circumstances either within or beyond the control of Saint Mary's University.
- Saint Mary's University will not be responsible for any additional costs related to participants' taking the trip.
- All participants are required to arrange travel insurance coverage which is adequate for the destination and scope of their international travel.
- The Release of liability, waiver of claims, assumption of risks and indemnity agreement will be prepared by the university's risk and insurance services for the participants.
- The Task assignment letter will be prepared by the Global Learning Services for the group leaders.
- Emergency consular assistance for Canadian citizens is provided by the Canadian mission in the destination country <https://travel.gc.ca/assistance/embassies-consulates> and by the Emergency Watch and Response Centre in Ottawa <https://travel.gc.ca/assistance/emergency-assistance>.

Additional Resources:

Recommended training:

- Mental Health 101, 202, 303 <https://www.smu.ca/campus-life/mental-health-series.html>
- First Aid – Please contact Valerie Wadman in Occupational Health & Safety for information on first aid training. valerie.wadman@smu.ca

Recommended review material:

- SMU OHS Reporting Incidents and Injuries <https://www.smu.ca/about/ohs-reporting-incidents-and-injuries.html>
- Code of student conduct <https://www.smu.ca/studentconduct/welcome.html>
- Sexual violence support <https://www.smu.ca/svs/>
- Sexual Violence Policy https://www.smu.ca/webfiles/6-2019_SexualViolencePolicy.pdf
- Mental health resources for students <https://www.smu.ca/campus-life/counselling-centre-resources.html>
- Mental health resources for faculty and staff concerned for a student in distress <https://www.smu.ca/campus-life/counselling-centre-for-faculty-and-staff.html>
- Health and wellness for faculty and staff <https://www.smu.ca/healthwell/welcome.html>
- Fred Smithers Centre of Support for Students with Disabilities <https://www.smu.ca/campus-life/fred-smithers-centre.html>

Funding for students in credit programs

- Funding for international learning opportunities <https://studio.smu.ca/intl-funding>
- Financial need-based bursary <https://www.smu.ca/academics/undergraduate-aid-and-awards.html#FNBB>