Greetings from Calvin College Off-Campus Programs (OCP) Office. We are writing to you today to share some information related to your son or daughter’s upcoming semester off-campus next fall. We are excited about the growth opportunities (academically, socially, culturally, spiritually) that this experience will provide; but also recognize that there may be some questions related to the semester. With this in mind, we thought we would take this opportunity to introduce ourselves and to answer some common questions you may have. We hope this information is helpful. If you have additional questions please feel free to contact our office.

Sincerely,

Don DeGraaf, Ph.D.

Professor and Director of Off-Campus Programs

ddegraaf@calvin.edu

616-526-6225

**CALVIN SPONSORED OFF-CAMPUS SEMESTER PROGRAMS,**

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)**

**WHAT IS THE STAFF STRUCTURE OF THE OFF-CAMPUS PROGRAMS OFFICE?**

The Off-Campus Program (OCP) office was established at Calvin in 1999 to serve students who studied off-campus in either semester programs or interims. Today, the OCP office is a part of the Center for Community Engagement and Global Learning. Currently, Calvin has 11 different semester programs and between 25 and 30 off-campus interims a year, serving between 700 and 800 students. Approximately 65% of all Calvin students study off-campus at some point during their college years.

The OCP office works with faculty to prepare students for their time off-campus, manage the overall experience while off-campus, and evaluate our programs once students return. Currently, the OCP office includes a Director, a program manager, and an admin assistant who all work collaboratively with other offices at Calvin (e.g. Health Services, Center for Student Success, Financial Services, Broene Counseling Center, etc.) to support students as they live and learn off-campus.

**WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF THE SEMESTER AND HOW WILL IT BE BILLED?**

Costs of the semester have been shared with students in the Terms and Conditions sheet they were asked to sign in confirming their intent to join the program. The program cost may be higher than on-campus tuition, room and board as it covers a variety of additional costs such as airfare and excursions. All costs will be billed (after the deposit) as if your son or daughter were on campus.

**WHAT MEASURES HAS CALVIN PUT INTO PLACE TO ASSESS SAFETY OF THE GROUP WHILE THEY ARE STUDYING OFF-CAMPUS?**

Although no one can guarantee safety or eliminate all risks from a study-abroad experience, Calvin College is committed to doing its utmost to provide secure environments in which students can live and learn. Our goal is to minimize risks and keep students aware of special situations as they study off-campus. As a part of our overall risk management strategies, Calvin addresses safety concerns in the following ways:

* **Experienced Faculty**. Calvin faculty have experience in the place where they are teaching and work with local, trusted partners whenever possible.
* **Networks**. The Off-Campus Programs Office receives daily briefings on world events from the Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), which operates in cooperation with the U.S. Department of State. In addition, the Off-Campus Programs Office is part of a crisis response team of the Christian Reformed Church, which has networks around the world that we can draw on in the case of an emergency. On campus, Calvin has initiated a group of professionals (the Travel Safety Committee) from across campus (individuals from Health Services, Center for Student Success, Financial Services, Off-Campus programs, and Risk Management) to make decisions related to the safety of specific experiences and events.
* **STEP Registration**. Calvin will enroll students in the Smart Travelers Enrollment Program at the U.S. embassy in their host country. This program is administered through the U.S State Department.
* **Risk management protocols**. Calvin has developed a large number of protocols related to specific situations that the group may encounter. Program Directors are familiar with these protocols, which can be found on the Off-Campus Programs website.
* **Orientations/Trainings**. Calvin provides on-going training for faculty and staff who lead an off-campus course or program. As a part of this training, we encourage each instructor to develop site-specific orientations for their students for each location where they will be teaching. In addition, Calvin provides students with on-going orientations, along with resources related to health and safety while traveling abroad (many of these resources can be found on the Off-Campus website).
* **Health briefing and vaccinations**. We require students to complete the on-line health briefing and receive all necessary vaccinations.
* **Travel Insurance**. Calvin purchases supplemental travel insurance for those studying internationally. The policy can be found in the student and parent resource page of the Off-Campus Programs website.

**HOW CAN I CONTACT MY SON OR DAUGHTER IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY AT HOME?**

If you have an emergency at home (e.g. sickness, death in the family, etc.), please let our office know immediately and we will work with you to contact the Calvin professor/instructor leading the group or to talk with your son or daughter as quickly as possible. In times of emergency, our goal is to be a resource to students, instructors, and families in whatever ways are needed. In cases of emergencies, feel free to contact the Off-Campus Programs Office via phone, email, or call the OCP cell phone (616-558-7245).

**WHAT HAPPENS IN THE CASE OF AN EMERGENCY SITUATION WITH THE GROUP?**

In the case of emergencies with the group, the Off-Campus Programs Office will contact you immediately. In the event of problems, off-campus instructors are directed to contact our office as soon as they can so we can offer any support needed. This includes getting information to you in a timely way if your son or daughter is involved in any way.

**WHAT IF MY SON OR DAUGHTER HAS A MEDICAL EMERGENCY?**

If your student faces a medical and/or safety emergency at any time, day or night, they should contact their program director or the Director of Off-Campus programs at Calvin. Calvin on-site directors will assist in arranging medical attention or dealing with the situation in any way needed.

Calvin does encourage students to have a credit or debit card abroad and maintain access to emergency funds of at least several hundred dollars, However, in cases of emergency medical care, Calvin will guarantee payment (if the student is unable to do so). All receipts will be saved and if needed an insurance claim will be made. Payment details can then be sorted out at this time.

**WHAT DOES THE TRAVEL INSURANCE COVER?**

As part of the program, each student traveling internationally will automatically be provided additional travel insurance. The complete policy, which works in conjunction with your personal insurance, can be found on the Off-Campus Programs website. A summary of Calvin’s policy includes the following benefits while you are studying abroad:

* Maximum benefit per incident (accident or sickness): $100,000
* Dental coverage (in case of accident): $100/tooth up to $500
* Mental health coverage (outpatient): Up to $300
* Medical evacuation (to nearest qualified hospital): 100% of the cost
* Security evacuation (to nearest safe haven): $50,000 per student

Aggregate limit $500,000

* Lost Luggage Benefit: $250 per student
* Trip interruption (fly back in case of funerals for family) 50 % of a round trip ticket, up to

$1,500 per student

* Accidental Death and Dismemberment Benefit: $25,000
* Repatriation of remains: 100% of the cost

There is a $500 deductible per covered accident or sickness.

**WHAT DOES THE TRAVEL INSURANCE NOT COVER?**

This policy does not include trip cancelation insurance, and as a result if your son or daughter decides not to participate in the off-campus interim or semester, it will not pay for the cost incurred on his or her behalf. If you desire trip cancelation insurance, you are encouraged to purchase this insurance on your own.

If at any point, a student has to drop out of the off-campus interim or semester program, he or she should let the Off-Campus Programs Office know as soon as possible. If a student drops out of the program, recognize that we will do our best to recoup money spent on his or her behalf but we will have to bill the student for any costs that we are not able to recoup.

**WILL THE OCP OFFICE COMMUNICATE WITH STUDENT FAMILIES?**

The OCP office will send out three newsletters each semester, one at the beginning of the semester, one in the middle of the semester, and one at the end of the semester. These newsletters will include a variety of information and resources to help you understand what is going on with the groups that are studying abroad.

In terms of sharing specific information about a student, the process is a bit complicated due to privacy laws, the wishes of students, and the desire of the college to facilitate the growth and development of all students. The College believes that one of the best ways to encourage this development in students to treat them as adults, which we seek to do in the following ways:

* Communicate directly with students and encourage parents to do the same;
* Encourage students to communicate directly with their parent(s);
* Student’s permission is requested to share general information with his or her parent(s) (i.e. financial information, academic progress -- grades, academic services and accommodations, general group updates, group dynamics, and personal counseling matters). However, in the case of an emergency (as deemed by the college, see examples below), parents will be contacted immediately;
* Even though communication to parents via students is the operative principle, it is not an absolute one. Exceptions could include:
	+ Hospitalization such that students are unable to contact parents personally;
	+ Serious disciplinary action for a violation of the student conduct code (e.g. most cases, resulting in disciplinary probation and in cases of suspension). In these cases, parents must by notified. Our preferred method is to allow students a short but reasonable time frame to make contact with their parent(s). Parent(s) are then asked to contact the Director of Off-Campus Programs for further discussion;
	+ Suicide attempt; and
	+ Permission by the student to deal directly with parent(s).

The Off-Campus Programs staff is always willing to listen to any concerns you may have but we will always go back and start with the student and try to get him or her to work through any issues with us.

**ANY SUGGESTIONS FOR TOPICS TO TALK TO YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER PRIOR TO DEPARTURE?**

With busy schedules and often being in different places, we know it is not always possible to connect prior to departure; but if you can here are some possible topics to explore:

* Explore resources: learn about the places where students will be living and learning. What kind of food will students be eating? What kind of music is popular? What are key historical events that have shaped this place? What is currently happening in this place?
* Technology: how can students use technology well? How much do students hope to communicate with family and friends back home? What is the best way to communicate? Technology today makes instant communication possible which is great; but it can also pull students from living in the moment. What is a good balance here?
* Budget: All the basic needs for students are provided, but there are always extras that students might want to plan for, including: independent travel on weekends, going out for coffee or other incidentals, shopping, etc. In addition, students should explore how they want to manage money. How do students want to plan to access funds while abroad? Do they bring funds with them, use an ATM, etc.? Make sure students inform their credit and debit cards that they will be abroad for the semester.
* Documents: Ask your son or daughter for copies of important information and documents such as the following: emergency contact info (Calvin will provide emergency contact cards to students at the airport), passport, visa, itinerary, credit cards and prescriptions.
* Support: How can family and friends support students while away.

**WHAT ARE SOME RESOURCES THAT MIGHT BE USEFUL FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS AS THEY PREPARE FOR THIS EXPERIENCE?**

* Flight Tracker: If you know the flight numbers of your son or daughter’s itinerary, you can follow the progress of flights. <http://www.flightview.com/>
* Information on Calvin’s supplemental health insurance for all students studying abroad: <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/off-campus/Insurance/ACE_Insurance.htm>
* Information from the U.S. State Department for Students studying abroad.
	+ <http://travel.state.gov/content/studentsabroad/en.html>
* Recently, a new book (*There and Back: Living and Learning* Abroad) has been published that includes over 100 blogs and reflections for students studying abroad (the majority from Calvin students). The book is available in the Calvin Bookstore and also from Amazon. All students going on a Calvin semester have received this book but friends and family might enjoy reading how past students have been impacted by the experience.

**WHAT IS THE PROCESS IF WE WANT TO VISIT OUR SON OR DAUGHTER WHILE ABROAD?**

Visiting your son or daughter while he or she is studying abroad can be a wonderful experience for everyone. If you are thinking about visiting encourage your son or daughter to communicate with his or her program director on timing. Work around your son or daughter’s class schedule (as he or she is studying abroad). In addition, work with your him or her to plan your trip. One tip during your visit is to try to balance seeing local sites with taking some time to relax and soak up all that is around you. Keep in mind, something as simple as spending an afternoon at a local café with your son or daughter can give you great insight into local culture.

**HAVE A QUESTION THAT HAS NOT BEEN ANSWER?**

Feel free to send it to Don DeGraaf, Director of Off-Campus Programs (ddegraaf@calvin.edu).