GUIDING PRINCIPLE: Calvin’s Off-Campus Programs Office takes its responsibility seriously to do its utmost to provide a secure environment in which our students can live and learn. Although no one can guarantee or assure the safety of participants or eliminate all risks from an off-campus study experience, our goal is to minimize risks and provide training to help students partner with us to create a safe and secure off-campus experience. The goal of this handout is to give you specific tips (and checklists) regarding your personal safety while off-campus. The goal is NOT to scare you or make you anxious but rather to help you be attentive to personal safety issues while studying and traveling abroad. Again, we hope that these tips will not deter you from going off-campus but rather remind you to be wise on your adventures!

PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST:

- Read through the Medical Issue, Health & Safety portion of the student handbook found at on the Off-Campus Programs webpage under Student and Parent Resources (this site also includes program specific information on each semester program. These resources can be found on the Off-Campus programs webpage under Student Handbook.
- Get emergency contact information from your Calvin instructor/director (for semester programs this should be included in your semester handbook) to share with family and friends. Make sure the Calvin director and the Off-Campus Programs office has all your emergency family contacts.
- Photocopy or scan key travel documents (passport, drivers license, itineraries, etc). Take one copy with you (or send them to your email account) and leave one copy with your family or friends. For international programs you will be asked to scan your passport (this can be done in the off-campus programs office).
- Discuss with your family how often you will contact them. Think about how you can share the experience in meaningful ways so that family and friends can better understand your experience.
- Pack well – see the handout entitled Packing Tips for studying abroad found on the OCP website (under student and parent resources).
- Check with your airlines to learn their luggage policies. You are responsible for additional charges connected to overweight luggage. – Make sure luggage have id tags with name and phone number.
- Get proper immunizations; follow up with Calvin Health Services to obtain immunizations and address other travel related concerns. Make sure you get adequate supplies of prescription medication and be sure to carry medicine in your prescription bottles. In addition make sure your prescriptions are legal in the countries you will be visiting (see CDC website below).
- Learn more about health in your host country. Review the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention country specific health info – http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel
- Learn how to access your health insurance coverage while abroad (know what your plan covers & how payments are made). Remember Calvin provides SUPPLEMENTAL travel insurance. This insurance includes: medical and political evacuation insurance and supplemental health insurance that will offer additional coverage when you have exhausted your primary insurance. More info is available on the Student/Parent Resource page of the OCP website.
- Practice language: Learning the language is important; start before you go. At the very least learn a number of survival phrases that will be useful in the places you will be traveling.
- Learn a bit about the culture in your host country. Review the US State Department Consular Information Sheets found at http://www.state.gov/travel/. In addition, inform yourself about local laws and customs in the country you are visiting before you leave.

IN-COUNTRY CHECKLIST:

- While traveling on airplanes, keep yourself hydrated. In airports be attentive to your luggage and possessions. Keep possessions in your sight. Take care and look out for each other.
- Cultivate a sense of situational awareness; be constantly aware of your surroundings. See the attachment at the end of this handout.
- Understand where your resources within you host country are and how to get to these resources if needed. Where is the hospital? Police station? U.S. consulate or embassy? Program
director’s home and office? What are the telephone contact numbers I need to carry with me? This should be addressed with your group upon arrival.

- Learn to carry cash and valuable in multiple places on your body. Carry one wallet that has a small amount of spending money in it along with a basic ID. If anyone attempts to rob you give this up immediately. Carry a second wallet in a money belt or around your neck (under clothes), which has an ID, some cash, credit card(s), a copy of your passport & a list of emergency phone numbers). Try to have a safe place in your room where you can stash extra cash and valuables, don’t carry large amounts of cash around with you.

- Understand the emergency action plan and discuss it with the director and fellow students in case of a natural disaster or traumatic world events. Make sure you understand the security briefings that are arranged for the group when you first arrive in country. Speak the native language as much as possible.

- Carry a cell phone with minutes for local calls (provided on most Calvin semester programs).

- Think about how you will manage your money flow – banks, ATM machines, credit cards, etc are all options depending where you are. Avoid carrying large amounts of cash, do not flash your cash, make sure you make good decisions related to accessing your money. For example you might want to access an ATM machine during the day in a place where there are lots of people around.

- Understand general rules related to safety on the streets (described in the attached handout on situational awareness.

- Dress conservatively and follow local customs. Leave jewelry at home (you don’t need it).

- Think twice before you use alcohol. Although the drinking age is often younger abroad, alcohol can contribute greatly to the possibility of you being a victim of crime.

- Use only reputable transportation companies (taxis, etc). Get the numbers of a company you trust that you can call to pick you up or cultivate 5 or 6 specific drivers you can call when you need a ride. Make sure to have these numbers available when you are out and about in the city.

- Utilize a buddy system with others in your group when traveling around the city.

IF LIGHTNING STRIKES (SOMETHING HAPPENS)…”

- If someone tries to rob you give up your possession, remain calm. Initially give up your wallet with your spending cash but if they persist, give up what you have. Don’t try to resist.

- If someone tries to abduct you, resist and try to bring attention to yourself, carry a whistle and use it to bring attention to the situation and get help.

- If adducted. Be CALM; don’t add to the drama of an already emotional event. Being calm will help conserve your energy for future challenges. Staying calm may even influence the abductor to be calmer and less prone to violence. Then CONNECT with your abductors in a manner that causes the abductor to see you as more than a symbol or object but rather as a human being with family and friends. Seek out commonalities you might share with your abductor in such a way to emphasize your humanity. Work to ease tension without being submissive. Then be ready to CAPITALIZE. Stay alert for any opportunity to encourage your abductors to release you.

- Whenever an incident happens (no matter how small) during an off-campus semester make sure to report it to the Calvin instructor/director. You are also encouraged to report it directly to the OCP office using the incident form found on the OCP website. You can fill this form in on-line and it will be sent directly to the OCP office.

- Remember you can also use the U.S. Embassy or consulate for help if needed.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. What are some of the cultural norms around dress in your host country?
2. What are some of the local laws in the host country that you should be aware of?
3. What does it mean to be a “hard” target rather than an “easy” mark while traveling/studying in your host country?
4. As you read through the information shared on this handout, what will be easy for you? What will be difficult?
5. Brainstorm some ideas for keeping a healthy balance between being paranoid and scared while off-campus versus being naïve -- “nothing will happen to me” while I am off-campus.
6. For semester programs: How will the off-campus study aspect of the experience and the fact that the experience will be longer (4 months) make it easier to keep safe while you are off-campus? Harder to keep safe while you are off-campus?

These checklists were developed from the DVD entitled *Safe Passage: Travel Companion* (2008)
CULTIVATING A SENSE OF SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Situational Awareness: What is it?
Situational awareness is a skill whereby individuals monitor what is going on around him/her allowing individuals to see potential threats before – and as – they develop. This allows the individual to avoid potential dangers before they happen. It is more of a mindset than a hard skill and as a result can be practiced by anyone. It also involves learning to trust your “gut” or intuition. Many times a person’s subconscious can notice subtle sings of danger that the conscious mind had difficulty articulating.

Situational awareness does not mean being paranoid or obsessively concerned about your security; rather it means developing a sense of relaxed awareness whereby you are aware of what is going on around you and if something is troubling it will bring you to a higher level of awareness whereby you can act quickly if needed.

Situational Awareness: What does it include?

- Be constantly aware of your surroundings. Whenever something unusual is happening, pay attention.
- Anticipate what may happen next and how you might respond. For example, when in a new building or location check where the exits are and how you would get out of the building in case of an emergency.
- Be aware of people or events that distract you or divert your attention from being attentive to your surroundings. For example beware of groups of vagrant children who could create a distraction to pick your pocket.
- Learn to trust “your gut” -- if something makes you uncomfortable get out of the situation into a more safe and secure location as quickly as possible.
- Always assume criminals are armed and act accordingly. If robbed, put your hands up, step back, move slowly using one hand to get your wallet, keeping the other hand up in front of you.
- Learn not to share too much personal information in public places or on-line (e.g. facebook).
- Develop a sense of confidence as you navigate new surroundings. When you walk as if you have no idea of where you are or what you are going to do next you are sending an immediate signal that you are a soft target to scam artists. Make use of maps to orient yourself prior to a trip.
- Avoid known high crime areas, don’t use short cuts, narrow alleys or poorly lit streets; try not to travel alone at night, and walk in well-lit and heavily travelled areas.
- Avoid public demonstrations and protests as you try to keep a low profile.
- Limit visits to typically American establishments like McDonalds and Starbucks rather look for ways to engage the local culture
- Wear the shoulder strap of any bags across your chest and walk with the bag away from the curb.
- Vary routines and take different routes as you travel on foot whenever possible.
- Make responsible decisions related to alcohol -- Don’t be pressured to drink if you don’t want to drink, know your limits, and use the buddy system (don’t drink alone).

Resources:
- Center for Global Education: International Resource Center -- [www.studentsabroad.com](http://www.studentsabroad.com)
- U.S. State Department Travel Page: [http://www.state.gov/travel/](http://www.state.gov/travel/)
- Global scholar: On-line courses that help you make the most of your study abroad experience: [www.globalscholar.us](http://www.globalscholar.us)
- Contact info for overseas citizen services (U.S. State Department): 888-407-4742 or 202-501-4444
- Overseas Crisis Readiness info: [www.state.gov/overseascrisisreadiness](http://www.state.gov/overseascrisisreadiness)

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