

# GUIDELINES FOR UNDERGRADUATE HEALTH-RELATED EXPERIENCES ABROAD

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## **ABOUT THE FORUM ON EDUCATION ABROAD**

The Forum on Education Abroad is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, membership association recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission as the Standards Development Organization (SDO) for the field of education abroad. The Forum's institutional members include U.S. colleges and universities, overseas institutions, consortia, agencies, provider organizations and foundations.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The Forum on Education Abroad serves as the collective voice of U.S. post-secondary education abroad. To benefit students, The Forum develops and disseminates comprehensive standards of good practice, resources and training, advocates for education abroad and its value, and engages the field in critical dialogue.

# GUIDELINES FOR UNDERGRADUATE HEALTH-RELATED EXPERIENCES ABROAD

*A companion to the Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad*



## INTRODUCTION

Experiential education in health-related settings abroad has the potential to provide expansive learning opportunities for undergraduate students, but also presents unique challenges not typically encountered in other education abroad contexts. Public health and patient-care activities involve highly technical interactions that have repercussions on health and well-being, possibly putting patients, host communities, and students at risk. These guidelines have been created to support institutions and organizations that serve undergraduate students participating in experiential learning in clinical and community health settings.

These guidelines are essential because of the competency- and systems-based nature of safe and effective health care and public health provision. Systems look very different around the world and people coming from resource-rich frames of reference may make assumptions about the needs of health systems operating with fewer resources. Students may have an inflated sense of their own skills and competencies and be unaware of the potential for unintended harms that accompany any health intervention. The host community and health professionals need to know each student's level of competency, or lack thereof, and the services a student is permitted to provide—or not provide. Students must be trained to recognize the risk they pose to themselves and to patients and communities.

These Guidelines apply to undergraduate health-related experiences abroad. The *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad* apply to all education abroad opportunities. Use them together to develop and assess health-related experiences abroad.

## STANDARDS

The *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad* were established in 2004 by The Forum on Education Abroad, recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice and Federal Trade Commission as the Standards Development Organization (SDO) for the field of education abroad. They are higher education's benchmark for education abroad program excellence and accountability.

## KEY TERMS

**health-related program:** any educational program delivered in public health and/or health care delivery settings, including both clinical and community health care contexts

**home institution:** college or university where a student is pursuing their degree of study

**coordinating organization:** the institution or organization responsible for organizing and arranging health-related experiential learning opportunities; this can be a college or university, a program provider, or an in-country NGO

**experiential site:** health care or community health setting where students' observational and experiential learning opportunity takes place

## BEST PRACTICES FOR HEALTH-RELATED EXPERIENCES

Successful experiential opportunities in clinical and community health settings are offered in collaboration with established, licensed health care and public health organizations in the host communities. Prior to students participating in an experience, all involved parties should come to an agreement about learning and safety objectives. The following best practices can help achieve these goals:

- a. Establish that the primary purpose of the experience is learning about health care and public health through observation (sometimes called shadowing), and that relevant and appropriate activities do not exceed the student's education and training level.
- b. Engage with and recognize existing health care and public health organizations on-site, including governmental and non-governmental agencies. Program development should empower, not avoid, ignore, displace, disregard, or circumvent those organizations and professionals.
- c. Collaborate and clearly articulate responsibilities of all involved organizations and institutions.
- d. Ensure that visual images and social media used in promotional materials and program information accurately represent the student experience.
- e. Ensure that the home institution, the coordinating organization and the staff of the experiential site understand each student's capability and level of education, and provide a learning experience that is appropriate to that level. Provide this information concisely, and in the local language wherever possible, to all staff who may have contact with the students.
- f. Ensure the safety of the students and those with whom the students interact.
- g. Ensure that students are educated to understand the local history and culture that influence health care and public health and that students are prepared to function and interact appropriately with local practitioners and community members.
- h. Provide support for clear and efficient communication among the student, the experiential site, and the coordinating organization, and between the home institution and the coordinating organization.
- i. Ensure a safe space for both students and experiential site staff to report when students perform or are asked to perform activities that are out of scope of their education, training, knowledge, and skills.

- j. Ensure that research results, project reports, and audio/visual products meet ethical review, legal, and professional requirements. Provide credit and acknowledgment for local authors and contributors.
- k. Ensure that agreements are in place about the distribution of any final reports, etc. and provide reports back to coordinating organization and/or experiential site where possible.



# **GUIDELINES FOR UNDERGRADUATE HEALTH-RELATED EXPERIENCES ABROAD**

Use the following guidelines, along with the *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad*, when developing health-related programs and/or vetting potential partners.

## **1. MISSION AND GOALS FOR HEALTH-RELATED EXPERIENCES**

- Establish that the primary goal of health-related programs is to provide learning and observation experiences appropriate for the students.
- Clearly articulate how the health-related program relates to, supports, and enhances the institution or education abroad organization's mission and goals.

## **2. STUDENT LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR HEALTH-RELATED EXPERIENCES**

- Identify student learning and development goals specific to the on-site experience, host country, and culture.
- Ensure learning and development goals are appropriate for undergraduate students.
- Ensure learning goals focus broadly on health care professionalism, standards of practice, ethics, cultural competency, community health, patient safety, and personal safety.
- Limit student-patient interaction to the same level of patient/community interaction that they would have in a volunteer or educational position in the United States.

### **3. ACADEMIC FRAMEWORK FOR HEALTH-RELATED EXPERIENCES**

- Clearly articulate the academic pre-requisites and requirements of students prior to placing them at an experiential site.
- If the experience is credit-bearing, articulate clear criteria for the awarding of credit; identify who will evaluate the student on these criteria.
- Match student capacity, including knowledge, skills, and competencies, with the capacity necessary for the experience so that patient and community well-being are not compromised.
- When students are involved in research, assure all projects are reviewed by the appropriate oversight body for every entity involved before any research activities begin.

#### 4. STUDENT SELECTION, PREPARATION, AND ADVISING FOR HEALTH-RELATED EXPERIENCES

- Clearly articulate that the experience is intended as an observation and learning experience only.
- Clearly articulate the expected knowledge and competencies needed to be successful in the experiential setting, such as language, medical terminology, cultural, interpersonal, and applicable academics.
- Ensure students meet language competency requirements, including but not limited to medical language skills, or that language services are available for students at the experiential site.
- Ensure undergraduate students have adequate academic education that matches expectations in the experiential site.
- Ensure that students are appropriately prepared for their experience in a public health or patient care setting and that students are aware of and can articulate appropriate and inappropriate activities.
- Provide orientation information that includes local expertise, puts health in a social-cultural context, and provides sufficient comparative information about health systems, health status, and public health, allowing students to adjust their perceptions and expectations prior to participating.
- Provide ongoing orientation and teaching of relevant and appropriate skills to ensure the health and well-being of both students and those with whom they are interacting.
- Confirm visa requirements, which may be of a different class and/or have different requirements from traditional student visas.
- Inform the student of expectations and cultural differences that may impact their experience, including:
  - ▶ dress code
  - ▶ punctuality
  - ▶ interactions with experiential site staff, patients, and community members
  - ▶ language specific to the workplace, e.g., medical terminology, honorifics, and signs of respect
  - ▶ gender roles
  - ▶ social, economic, and political contexts of the experience

## **5. STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY MEASURES FOR HEALTH-RELATED EXPERIENCES**

- Ensure that students are made aware in writing of consequences for acting unprofessionally or inappropriately in the health-related setting (see §4).
- Make students aware of their obligation to act appropriately and not engage in activities beyond their education, training, knowledge, and skills level.
- Establish disciplinary measures to address students who engage in activities outside their scope of education, training, knowledge, and skills, and clearly articulate those disciplinary measures to students during orientation.

## **6. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR HEALTH-RELATED EXPERIENCES**

- Ensure that students understand and comply with all applicable licensing and certification policies, patient privacy regulations, visa policies, research ethics, data security procedures, and any other health-related policy applicable to their experience.
- Ensure all experiential sites adhere to international, national, and local laws with regard to providing patient and community care (e.g., patient privacy training, immunizations, etc.).
- Establish policies on the creation and distribution of final products such as research results, reports, audio/visual products, including processes for sharing such projects with coordinating organizations and/or experiential sites when appropriate.

## **7. ORGANIZATIONAL AND PROGRAM RESOURCES FOR HEALTH-RELATED EXPERIENCES**

- Recognize the implicit power differential that exists in educational partnerships that involve partners with disparate levels of resources and influence; consider these factors when making program-related decisions.
- Ensure that programs and experiential sites have adequate financial, human, and facility resources to provide health services and a learning environment for students.
- Assure experiences that take into consideration the needs of the community and patients in coordination with the student's learning goals.
- Compensate translators and other persons supporting students fairly and in a mutually-agreed upon fashion.
- Maintain appropriate staffing levels to train and oversee the students while at an experiential site.
- Make students aware of the limits of an experiential site's resources and of being respectful of the resources they use.

## **8. HEALTH, SAFETY, SECURITY, AND RISK MANAGEMENT FOR HEALTH-RELATED EXPERIENCES**

- Articulate clear expectations for coordinating organizations and experiential sites regarding health, safety, and security of the students; partnerships may be dissolved and students removed from the site if articulated expectations are not met.
- Select coordinating organizations and experiential sites with comprehensive health, safety, security, and risk management policies to protect students, patients, and the community's health and well-being.
- Provide students with information about infectious diseases endemic to the host community and any potential health risks that students might be exposed to during their program.
- Confirm vaccine requirements specific to the experiential site.
- Include in pre-departure and on-site orientation information about safety protocols when working in patient-care settings and training on what to do in specific case scenarios, such as an incident of exposure to infectious disease.
- Clearly articulate policies that protect the health and safety of students in the event of an outbreak or other health risks.
- Ensure that students are made aware that they are responsible for understanding their own limitations; educate and empower them to decline when asked to perform activities outside their scope of education, training, knowledge, and skills to protect themselves, the patients, and the community.



## 9. ETHICS OF HEALTH-RELATED EXPERIENCES

- Prioritize human dignity and patient autonomy such that educational agendas of the student or the home institution are not prioritized over patient safety, autonomy, dignity, and the provision of health services.
- Recognize the risk of paternalism, exploitation, and neocolonial behavior on behalf of institutions/organizations from resource-rich environments when engaging with partners in low-resource settings.
- Respect the needs of the community when developing learning opportunities for students.
- Honor the ethical obligation to ensure that all experiential site staff who have contact with the students understand students' level of education and qualifications (or lack thereof), as well as the appropriate nature, scope, and limitations of students' activities.
- Establish and follow protocols for making patients aware of the student's learner status, including asking patient for permission for student presence during clinical encounters.
- Ensure familiarity with and utilization of relevant ethical guidelines and best practices in health care by all parties involved.
- Meet World Health Organization quality and process standards for donation of equipment, pharmaceuticals, and other medical supplies.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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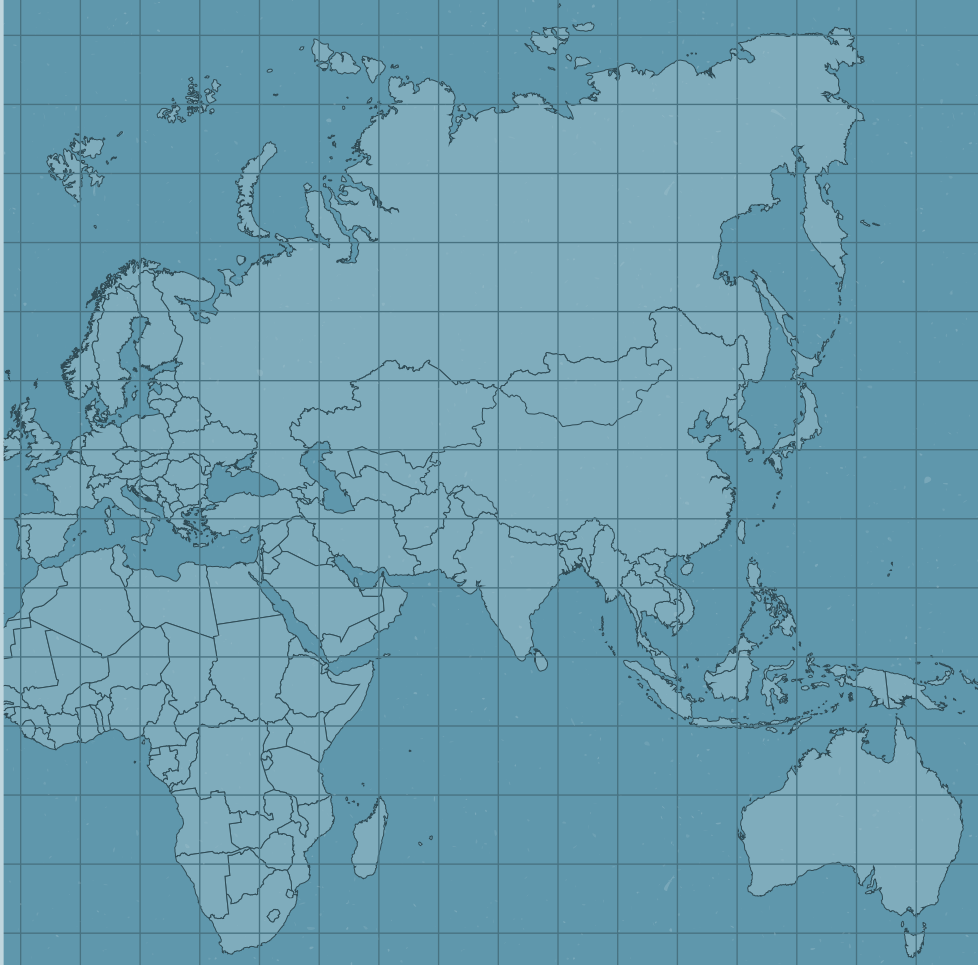
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