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INTRODUCTION
Congratulations on your student’s acceptance into a domestic off-campus study program through the Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM). ACM is a consortium of 14 liberal arts colleges in the Midwest; its members are Beloit, Carleton, Coe, Colorado, Cornell, Grinnell, Knox, Lake Forest, Luther, Macalester, Monmouth, Ripon, and St. Olaf colleges, and Lawrence University. As a consortium, ACM administers a selection of off-campus study programs on behalf of its members with academic and student service standards comparable to those of the ACM college home campuses. Many ACM programs are also open to students from other colleges and universities, and some of those institutions choose to affiliate with particular ACM off-campus study programs to provide even greater benefits to their students.

Students’ off-campus study experiences have the potential to become the highlight of their undergraduate careers, and it is ACM’s goal to make this opportunity both personally enriching and intellectually engaging. Studying off-campus can be demanding and at times frustrating; however, it can also be exhilarating and rewarding.

We applaud you for supporting your student’s decision to study off-campus. Only a small percentage of U.S. students take advantage of the opportunity to live and study off-campus during their undergraduate years and your support for their doing so is an important component of their success. ACM’s role in this is, in part, to prepare students (and their parents/guardians) for a positive experience. We can work together to encourage the academic and personal growth that lie at the heart of off-campus study.

This handbook is designed to provide answers to some of the many questions you may have begun to ask about participation in an ACM off-campus study program—how the finances will work, what the safety arrangements are, and how the credits will transfer. It is a general guidebook for parents/guardians of all students accepted into ACM programs, regardless of a student’s home college or off-campus study destination. More specific information for each program and location can be found in the student handbook or at the ACM website at www.acm.edu.

THE ACM AND OFF-CAMPUS STUDY
The ACM was established over 50 years ago, and throughout its existence off-campus study has been integral to its mission, which reads:

The Associated Colleges of the Midwest, a consortium of residential liberal arts colleges, aims to strengthen its member colleges as leaders and exemplars in liberal arts education through significant, innovative, and sustainable collaborations. The ACM does this by:

- **Fostering professional effectiveness of faculty and administrative leaders at member colleges;**
- **Providing exemplary liberal arts learning through off-campus studies;**
- **Promoting members’ excellence in teaching and learning, especially as achieved through collaboration.**
ACM member colleges endorse off-campus study for their students and see it as a vital part of the undergraduate curriculum. Personal growth, character development, and cultural understanding are critical elements in the curricula at ACM colleges, and our programs play a central role in promoting these.

ACM programs are typically small in size, in line with class sizes at the home colleges. Although the programs’ goals vary, there are similarities among programs: each has dedicated on-site faculty and staff; each encourages active, discussion-based learning; and each promotes cultural immersion as an important feature of the program. Most of the programs also incorporate independent living arrangements, self-directed research projects, and/or organized field excursions as integral elements of the curriculum.

The ACM office is located in Chicago, and off-campus study programming and support is a significant portion of our work. We provide students and the off-campus study offices on the home campuses with information and advising about ACM programs and help students prepare to go off-campus after they have been accepted to a program. This support continues while students are on-site and includes handling any emergencies that may occur.

**COURSES, CREDITS, AND GRADES**

**Students go off-campus as scholars and not as tourists,** and the academic experience shapes the core of their time away from campus. Academic work completed through participation in an ACM program is recorded on the individual student’s academic record at his or her home campus. Although each campus sets its own policies regarding off-campus study programs, students from ACM member colleges who participate in ACM programs remain fully enrolled at their home campuses, and the courses and credits taken off-campus count toward graduation credit. At many ACM schools, students are required to meet with their advisors as soon as they are accepted into a program to determine how the program courses can be used to fulfill their various college requirements and to ensure that the credits are appropriate for their individual academic program. After the off-campus study program has been completed and a student’s grades assigned, ACM reports the results to the registrar at the student’s home campus so that these may be added to the student’s academic record. This record will include the total number of credits assigned for the program, as well as the title, number of credits, and grade for each course the student has taken through the program.

Please note that ACM staff members may not discuss a student’s academic performance with a parent without the student’s permission. This policy is in accord with policies in place on all ACM campuses regarding access to students’ academic work and records. (For more information, please see the section titled “Communication with ACM” on page 10.)

ACM will bill students (through their home campus accounts) at the end of the program for outstanding program costs and any additional program expenses such as medical costs, damage to program housing or equipment, loss of keys or equipment, etc. ACM is only able
to release grades once payment for all expenses has been received and a student has completed all program and student conduct requirements.

FINANCES, SCHOLARSHIPS, AND FINANCIAL AID
The total amount students pay to participate in an off-campus study program varies from college to college, as does the availability of financial aid for off-campus study. These campus policies are often based on the specific curricular goals established at each college. Depending on the policies of your student’s home college, charges for off-campus study may be based upon the program’s cost, or may be based upon the college’s own tuition. Additional tuition charges and/or fees for off-campus study are likely to apply at most colleges. These additional campus charges typically relate to expenses for academic support services and the awarding of academic credit and/or financial aid. Therefore, students should check with the Off-Campus Study Office and the Financial Aid Office to find out how their college charges students for off-campus study programs, what additional campus fees may apply, and how financial aid may be used toward the cost of their program.

ACM will bill the student’s home college directly for all fees for off-campus study. These costs consist of two elements: educational costs and a program fee. The latter typically covers housing, on-site orientation, special program activities, and some meals. Please note that the specific items covered by the program fee may vary among the programs, and it does not include airfare and personal expenses. A detailed breakdown of program costs, including estimates of those expenses not covered by the educational and program fees, is available on the ACM website. These costs are based on the most current information available to us, and we ask that you review them carefully. The cost sheet clarifies which costs are included in the program fee and which are separate, additional expenses. In some cases, as indicated on the cost sheet, we can only provide estimates (e.g., for airfare or food). Keep in mind that expenses during off-campus study may be greater or less than the estimates and may vary based upon each student’s spending habits.

All students are required to pay a $400 non-refundable deposit to the ACM to secure their place in the program; this deposit then is credited to the program fee which the ACM bills to the college. Until this deposit is received, the ACM is unable to reserve a student’s place in the program. Students are asked to pay the deposit within two weeks of receiving their acceptance notification. It is not possible to return deposits to students who withdraw from the program after being accepted. In addition, ACM will bill students’ colleges for a percentage of the program costs if they withdraw after deposit. Please refer to www.acm.edu/pricing for the most current policy on withdrawals.

Students participating in an ACM-sponsored off-campus study program are typically eligible to apply some or all of their financial aid awards toward the cost of the program. The ACM supplies cost information about its programs to the financial aid and off-campus study offices at the ACM member colleges for use in calculating students’ financial aid packages. Some colleges also have additional funds available to support off-campus study, and students should inquire about this possibility at the off-campus study office at their
home institution. There are also outside scholarships for students studying off-campus. A partial list of scholarship resources can be found on the ACM website at www.acm.edu/scholarships.

**MEDICAL INSURANCE & FACILITIES, MEDICATIONS, AND ON-GOING CONDITIONS**

Accessibility to health and medical care is a major concern. ACM requires all students who are participating in an off-campus study program to have health insurance. In case of an emergency, students can go to the emergency room of the hospital nearest their apartment. You should consult with your insurance company to determine where your child should go in the event they need medical care. We encourage students to bring an insurance card with them if possible.

Some on-going medical conditions may require treatment while off-campus. The ACM urges students to take copies of their medical records to share with medical professionals should the need arise. In addition, it is important for the ACM and on-site staff to be informed in advance about such medical conditions, particularly those conditions which may require special accommodations in housing, diet, or academic arrangements. Please note that not all medical conditions can be accommodated at every program site and that, in certain situations, it may be necessary to seek an alternative program for a student.

Please remember that medical insurance does not cover personal property. You may wish to purchase insurance for loss or theft of personal property such as laptops and cameras.

**PRE-DEPARTURE REQUIREMENTS, PROGRAM DATES, AND ORIENTATION**

In preparation for their time off-campus, students receive a program-specific handbook and information about program dates and other program-specific arrangements. They may be expected to conduct one or more phone or video conference calls with ACM faculty or staff in preparation for various components of their program. This will be in addition to more general pre-departure meetings at the home campuses at most schools.

This pre-departure information is designed to help students learn how the program operates, what they need to do to prepare for the program, and what is expected of them academically. ACM staff will also discuss with students the safety measures for their particular program and program location. Information about safety, local arrangements, and various on-site activities will be covered again in an orientation meeting when students first arrive at the program site.

Students’ program handbooks will contain information about program beginning and ending dates. All programs begin with a required orientation session. This initial meeting is critical for students as it is the first time they meet the program director, staff, and fellow students face to face. During orientation, the director will review the academic requirements for the program, appropriate behavior, safety guidelines, and emergency contact information.
SAFETY DURING OFF-CAMPUS STUDY

Our first guiding principle regarding our students off-campus is concern for the safety and well-being of our students, faculty, and staff. For this reason, we monitor conditions at our program sites before and during students’ time off-campus and provide students with safety information they will need to know. Should conditions at a program site deteriorate to threaten students’ safety, the ACM will take the appropriate steps to place students out of harm’s way.

When informing students about safety at program sites, our practice is to repeat the information early and often. Safety issues are addressed during on-site orientation when students first arrive and discussed in students’ program handbooks. Directors and other on-site staff also meet with students periodically and when warranted during the program.

It is important to emphasize to students that even in a new setting with specific local concerns, the most significant safety risks they may face while off-campus are the same risks they face on their home campuses—alcohol and traffic-related accidents and injuries. Our programs advise students to abide by the law and we remind students who are of the legal age to purchase alcohol to be cautious in their consumption. In the discussion of safety and health issues, program staff members remind students that their judgment is impaired while intoxicated and that they may be ill-equipped to evaluate the risks of dangerous situations in an unfamiliar setting.

ACM PROGRAM RULES AND POLICIES

The ACM has a listing of standards and rules that apply to all program locations. These policies are available in all student handbooks, which are available on the ACM website at www.acm.edu. Other policies that apply to particular program locations will be noted in the specific student handbook for that program or will be outlined during the initial on-site orientation.

Each ACM program participant is also expected to read and sign the ACM Study Abroad Contract and Comprehensive Release Form which outlines expectations for student health and safety, student behavior, financial obligations, and more. This document is available at http://www.acm.edu/uploads/cms/documents/2013-14_-_contract_and_release_-_international.pdf

COMMUNICATION

With cell phones and e-mail so widely used, many students and parents are accustomed to instant communication. It is easy to expect that the same simplicity of communication will be the norm while students are off-campus; however, this may not be the case during the first few days of a program as students get settled into apartments and are engaged in the orientation. Please be patient. You can expect that your son or daughter will soon settle into a daily routine and resume expected communication.
E-mail is a simple way to stay in touch and minimizes the problems caused by time differences and individual schedules. Students studying off-campus typically continue to use their home school e-mail accounts. Virtually all program sites offer computer access for students, either at the program center, in student housing, or at a cyber café. Although these facilities are usually more than adequate, they are seldom comparable to what is available on the home campus or at home.

The immediacy of cell phone and e-mail communication is not without its hazards. Perhaps chief among these is when a student's regular (or daily) communication with parents, friends, or significant others back home interferes with the student's acculturation or time to make connections at the program location.

Because students are encountering unfamiliar situations and may be unsure how to conduct themselves or to assess specific situations, it is not unusual for them to call their parents/guardians to share their concerns before they have had a chance to analyze the situation and to discuss the problem with on-site staff. Parents/guardians may hear negative comments that reflect immediate reactions or frustrations that students encounter as a typical stage in acclimating to a new environment and cultural setting. At times, students may complain that “no one is helping,” or that what they remember as being promised has not materialized.

The ACM strongly recommends that as a first step, students discuss the problem with the on-site staff, who are likely to have the best perspective on the situation. This is what we recommend to students, and it is often all that is necessary to resolve a problem. Learning how to problem-solve in a new environment is an important element of the personal growth experienced through off-campus study.

COMMUNICATION WITH ACM
Parents of students participating in ACM's off-campus study programs often have questions about specific activities or events during the time their sons and daughters are away from their home campus. Please direct your concerns and inquiries to the ACM Chicago office rather than attempting to contact ACM staff on-site. Communicating directly with faculty or staff on-site can be very difficult given the busy program schedule for some locations. The ACM Off-Campus Programs team welcomes parent phone calls to our offices in Chicago during regular business hours, Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Central Time. Our contact information is included at the end of this handbook.

Please be aware that the ACM is prohibited from releasing certain information to anyone without the expressed permission of the student. In accordance with the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), a student’s education records are maintained as confidential by the Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM) and, except for a limited number of special circumstances listed in that law, will not be released to a third party without the student’s prior written consent. FERPA regulations do allow the ACM to release limited “directory information” at any time, without obtaining the prior consent of the student. The ACM does not provide directory information to third parties for
commercial purposes. The ACM has determined that the following student information is considered directory information:

- Name
- College/university
- E-mail address
- Off-campus study program
- Semester/term of off-campus study
- Awards, honors

Students can sign a release form to give parents or others access to protected information. Having a release form on file does not mean that information will automatically be shared with parents or other authorized designees; information will be made available upon request from the authorized third party.

In most cases, the ACM will not contact parents to provide medical, academic, or disciplinary information without the student’s permission. In the case of an extreme emergency, where the student’s health is in jeopardy or if there is a concern that the student poses a threat to themselves or others, the ACM will contact the student’s listed emergency contact. As a general guideline, however, if a student is able to communicate about the situation, the ACM believes it is up to the student to decide whether, how, and when to discuss the situation with parents and others.

The U.S. Department of Education is responsible for overseeing FERPA. For more information, see their FERPA website at:

**CULTURE SHOCK**
During the first weeks in which students arrive on site, it is not uncommon for them to experience culture shock, surprise, dismay, and even anxiety at the cultural differences in the new location and in the unfamiliar situations in which they find themselves. This happens even for students who may have previously visited or lived in the city where the program is located. The academic curriculum of the off-campus study program may push your student to experience this seemingly familiar place in a whole new way. The on-site orientation program is intended to help ease this adjustment. Students can and do adapt to the new situations in a surprisingly short time. Finding themselves able to settle in and adjust independently to a new environment is a component of easing culture shock.

Research has shown that many students go through a three-step adjustment process in acclimating to their new environment. In the first stage, they are likely to be excited and entranced by the novelty of being in a new location and delighted with most things around them. In the second stage, after the initial “euphoria” has worn off, they may focus on the ways in which everything is different. The tendency is to highlight the differences and compare them unfavorably to things at home—the food is bad, the computer facilities are inferior, services are badly organized, etc. During the third stage, their view of home and
their program location is more nuanced—they are likely to take a more analytical approach to both locations and to find good and bad things in each.

As a primary support person for your student, you may hear, early and often, what your student is experiencing and thinking. We very much hope that you will provide them with the support and encouragement they need as they learn about their program location and the new context in which they find themselves.

ADDITIONAL TRAVEL WHILE STUDYING OFF-CAMPUS
Students are often eager to visit as much of their program region as they can while studying off-campus. And while we are delighted for them to do so, we also wish to emphasize that off-campus study is an academic activity, for which they will be earning credits and grades. Absences from on-site orientation, classes, or exams will be reflected in student grades. It is not appropriate for students to miss classes in order to travel, and we strongly urge them (and hope you will too) to confine their travel to weekends and program breaks.

Similarly, if you plan to visit the program site, your trip should coincide with an academic break or occur before or after the program dates. This also means that you should not plan to visit the program during the initial on-site orientation period. We ask you to keep in mind that students are expected to remain at the program site until the end of the program—it is not possible to arrange final exam dates to accommodate students’ travel interests, or, except in emergency situations, to allow them to return home early.

RE-ENTRY
When students return from studying off-campus, they may have mixed feelings about sharing their experiences with family and friends. Their experiences, even for a domestic program, may have been intense and exhilarating. They are often eager to convey the flavor and detail of this experience with those closest to them. For many students, off-campus study has been a transformative experience, both intellectually and personally, and they want those around them to be aware of the importance of their time off-campus. As one returned student remarked, “I can’t begin to tell you how different I am from who I was when I left campus.”

Some students, even those who have studied in the United States, may note that the adjustment to life back on campus presents its own “reverse culture shock”. This may be expressed as criticism of their home culture, a certain distance from friends and family, or simple homesickness for what they left behind. All of this may continue for a number of months. In time, students generally find ways to reflect upon the experience, integrate it into their lives, and, perhaps, make significant choices about the direction they will take in life based upon the experience. The single most important contribution you can make to this readjustment process is to listen. Students who experience reverse culture shock in its strongest form report that they find it hard to describe their time away to family and friends, who are seldom willing to take the time to listen to what they have to say.
**A FINAL NOTE**

One of the exciting features of off-campus study is the extent to which this experience enriches and broadens students’ perspectives of themselves, their home, and the rest of the world. For parents, it’s a time to let your son or daughter learn about and adapt to new situations—new people, new foods, new communities. The learning process is not always tidy, and there will undoubtedly be times when your son or daughter is dismayed or disappointed and wants to share this with you as much as the good times. This, too, is part of the intellectual and personal growth that is at the heart of studying off-campus.

The ACM takes great pride in our programs and their role in undergraduate education. We work hard to provide the necessary support to make this experience as fulfilling as we can for all of our students.

**CONTACT INFORMATION AND OFFICE HOURS**

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