Colorado College
Associated Colleges of the Midwest
First Semester Away (FSA) Costa Rica

Student Handbook • Fall 2017
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Welcome and Program Overview

Congratulations on your acceptance to Colorado College’s First Semester Away Program in Costa Rica. While you will be participating in a Colorado College run program, the Associated Colleges of the Midwest will be coordinating the first two blocks of your time in Costa Rica. The faculty and staff at ACM Costa Rica will serve as your on-site support.

This ACM & Colorado College Costa Rica program handbook is intended to help prepare you for your semester in Costa Rica and to give you an initial sense of what to expect academically and personally while you are there. It is revised each year based on comments from ACM program participants to include more current information and contains details on various logistical arrangements for your trip. It is, in effect, a reference tool that provides you with the information you need as you make arrangements to participate in the program. It is important that you read it carefully and raise any questions you may have with Marlee Stein, Off-Campus Study Coordinator, via email at mstein@acm.edu or phone at (312)-561-5911.

The ACM Costa Rica staff is ready to help you in any way they can. You should feel free to go to them with your questions and problems. They are always willing to provide assistance or advice, particularly on cross-cultural matters. We hope you will learn a tremendous amount about Latin America, that you will form lasting friendships, and that you will come to love Costa Rica and its people. May your experiences in Costa Rica be rich and memorable: ¡Que la aprovechen!

Program Overview

Central America is a region of great historical, cultural, and biological diversity, with the approximately 40 million people who inhabit Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua sharing much in common. Governed in Spanish colonial times as a single unit, today they are separate countries sharing similar economic pursuits. While in the past they may have been characterized as “coffee” or “banana republics,” today their economies continue to grow more diverse as the region takes on the twenty-first century challenges of building justice and prosperity in the context of globalization. As Costa Rica continues to grapple with issues such as poverty, public health, and environmental conservation, “Ticos” (as Costa Ricans like to call themselves) are committed to universal health care, social programs, and democratic government. Over the years, Costa Rica has always stood somewhat apart from the historical dramas of Central America, making it a fascinating comparative case and a safe observatory on progress in nation-building and sustainable development in this region so closely tied, both politically and economically, to the United States.

By participating in this program, you’ll benefit from studying in a new location that combines experiential, place-based learning with
academic purpose similar to your home campus as you pursue the program's learning goals. This program offers you opportunities to participate in multiple sectors of Costa Rican culture and society and gain an understanding of the country’s broad questions, challenges, and aspirations.

On this program, you’ll enjoy small class sizes, allowing you to work closely with faculty and other students. You’ll also live in housing and participate in activities that provide everyday opportunities to connect course-based learning with the local community and culture.

Course offerings build on the framework of a liberal arts education and focus on analyzing Costa Rican culture, politics, and environment, as well as Spanish language acquisition. Courses are discussion-centered, enrollments are small, and faculty work closely with students. The housing arrangements, with host families in San José, enhance the immersive aspect of the program, as do excursions to sites in and around San José.
# Fall 2017 (Blocks 1 & 2) Schedule

**August 25 – October 21st, 2017**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friday, August 25th</td>
<td>Students arrive in San José</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday, August 25th-</td>
<td>Welcome Activities and Orientation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday, August 28th:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday, August 29th:</td>
<td>First day of classes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday, September 18th:</td>
<td>Depart for Nicaragua field trip</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday, September 22nd:</td>
<td>Return to San José</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, September 25th:</td>
<td>Resume regular class schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, October 21st:</td>
<td>Departure date from San Jose</td>
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Academics

The Colorado College First Semester Away Program will be divided into four blocks. Blocks 1 & 2 (7-weeks) will be organized and administered by ACM and blocks 3 & 4 will be organized and administered by Colorado College.

Blocks 1 & 2 will be taught at ILISA Language Institute and at the ACM program center in San Jose. Blocks 3 & 4 will be taught by Colorado College professors in Monteverde and Belize.

When you complete the program, you should be able to discuss some of the major issues of contemporary life in Costa Rica, describe similarities and differences between Costa Rica and neighboring Nicaragua, and demonstrate significant progress in understanding and expressing yourself in Spanish.

Intensive Spanish at ILISA
Instructor: ILISA Staff

Students will be placed in various Spanish language levels based on placement interviews and previous language experience. These classes will take place Monday through Thursday for 20 hours a week. Should you need additional practice, tutoring will be offered as well. ILISA will teach 100 and 200 level courses which mirror the Colorado College course equivalents.

100-level Spanish Language Course
This course will go over the first half of the beginning level sequence in Spanish. This course is an integrated study of language and cultures of the Spanish-speaking world. This course assumes that the students taking it has no prior knowledge or experience with Spanish. Development of speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills are important course goals. The overall emphasis is on realistic situations that could prove useful, in a practical sense, to the student. The topics that will be explored will relate to Spanish-speaking countries, academic and daily life, family, shopping and tourism, weather, and food. Given that this course will be taught in Costa Rica, these topics will be discussed in the context of Costa Rican culture and lifestyle. Students will build their communicative proficiency in Spanish through study of culture as presented in literary and non-literary readings, films, and music, among other sources. This course will be carried out entirely in Spanish.

200-level Spanish Language Course
In order to prepare you for this challenge, this course will introduce you to several language functions through theme-based units that will give you a meaningful context for communicating. You will learn how to communicate effectively in Spanish integrating the following language skills: listening, reading, speaking, writing and cultural knowledge. You will also acquire the necessary grammatical structures, vocabulary, discourse strategies, and familiarity with the cultural norms that are linked to communication. Various cultural topics relevant to Costa Rica will be covered in this course, focusing on the social, economic, political, technological, and environmental influences on today’s contemporary world. In addition, you will become more sophisticated when talking about yourself and your needs. For example, you will acquire new vocabulary and learn new grammatical structures in order to speak about your everyday life, personal relationships, your preferences and needs while traveling, your emotional and physical states, and your health and well-being.
Building upon the communicative skills and knowledge you already learned in previous courses, we will explore in more depth some of the grammatical structures introduced at an elementary level and will identify new contexts and situations for the use of these structures. These contents and grammatical structures will be practiced in a variety of communicative contexts that take into account different language registries, the diversity found among Hispanic cultures, and other sociolinguistic considerations, such as age, cultural norms and expectations. During Block 2, and moving into a higher proficiency level, you will develop strategies for language learning, while improving upon your communicative and interpersonal skills. You will also increase your capacity to analyze and discuss a variety of films, literary texts and music from the Hispanic world. Finally, and in preparation for more advanced courses, you will be introduced to the writing of short comparative essays in Spanish. Finally, this course will help you identify resources for learning Spanish autonomously and practicing the language outside the classroom. You will acquire an intermediate-advanced command of the language. This course will be carried out entirely in Spanish.

Two Area Study Courses
Instructor: Mario Morera and Gustavo Chavez

There will be two consecutive courses for a duration of 3.5 weeks each. These will be taught in Spanish for advanced students. This course is the equivalent of a 300-level credit course at Colorado College.

A Latin American Environmental Discourse in Essay, Literature, and Film
This course for advanced Spanish language students in which they will explore environmental issues in Costa Rica and Latin America (trip to Nicaragua will enhance this objective) through academic, historical, social, cultural, and political themes, as represented in essays, literature and audiovisual products. Such approaches will be supported by class discussions, readings, cultural activities, guest speakers visits and fieldtrips which will give the students the opportunity to consolidate their linguistic skills while learning and experiencing the dynamics composing the area’s environmental identity. The course’s contents will be divided into 3 main modules of one week each. Those modules will represent the study and past-current environmental topics in: Week 1-essays, Week 2-literature, and Week 3-films and documentaries. For each module, there will be a guest speaker, expert in the corresponding area, who will come and discuss with the students how studied issues are represented in his/her work. Students will work with an anthology including a series of essays, reports and lectures offering different perspectives of the state of environmental studies affairs. All coursework, including conferences and fieldtrips, will be in Spanish. For all aspects related to this advanced course, the high school linguistic level of the potential students will be highly taken into consideration in order to allow them to be an active part of the classes’ development.

The Natural Environment of Costa Rica: Perspectives in a Changing World
In this course students will investigate the parallel tracks of the history of the conservation movement in Costa Rica and the distinct environmental features and diversity-rich flora and fauna that make the country one of the prime examples of tropical conservation in the world. The creation of the national park system, the leading role of indigenous populations in environmental protection and sustainability, models of ecotourism, and organic farming will be considered in the context of national policy and regional and international agreements. In preparation for the field trip to Nicaragua, we will compare tropical environments in Costa Rica and, on a larger scale, in Latin America. The interactive approach of the class will include invited talks, visits to protected areas, and, research and Eco touristic locations. Furthermore, the course will utilize a
discussion-based, interactive approach. All coursework will be in Spanish. Students’ previous language experience and linguistic level will be taken into consideration as the course develops.

**Culture & Community in Costa Rica**

Instructors: José Zeledón Mora  
Credits: Non-credit bearing, but mandatory

This course introduces students to the panorama of Costa Rica’s culture and society through active engagement with and exploration of San Jose and its environs. Walking tours take students throughout the city—its distinct neighborhoods, the natural environment of “hidden rivers,” and urban gardens, and the arts scene of theatre, dance, and music. Volunteer activities are organized with local community groups, and field site visits are planned to culturally significant locations including the nearby cities of Heredia and Cartaga, as well as to sites important to the country’s social and economic fabric, such as a cooperative coffee farm and a cocoa plantation. Through discussion, reading, and reflection, students will begin to critique their own cultural makeup, analyze their host culture, and develop respect for cultural difference in the context of social and community life.

**Nicaragua**

Students will participate in a five-day trip to Nicaragua. The main objective of the excursion is experience first-hand the historical and current cultural situation of Nicaragua and reflect upon its relationship with Costa Rica and make comparisons between the two nations’ identities. While travelling there, students also have the opportunity to visit local landmarks such as Nicaragua lake, Masaya volcano, and the colonial cities of Granada and Masaya, guided by local experts.

**Credits and Grades**

Students will receive 8 credits for the two blocks in San Jose, Costa Rica. The language and area study courses will be for-credit and the Culture and Community course will non-credit bearing.

**Expected Participation**

You are expected, unless excused, to attend all FSA classes and events and to participate in the field trips. As a general rule, students will not be excused from FSA activities to attend to visitors from the United States, whether friends or family. As a courtesy to your fellow students and to your host family, be sure to attend all FSA social activities. Those who participate fully in the program will benefit culturally and socially. Keep in mind that visitors may not take precedence over your academic responsibilities; a prolonged visit by family or friends causes an inevitable regression in your Spanish learning and may cause you to fall behind in your courses. Parents and guests should not expect to participate in orientation or other ACM activities or excursions.

**Preparing to go and Arrival**

**Forms**

Please watch your email for information regarding forms and deadlines. We have included a list of pre-departure requirements. If you have any questions, please reach out to us.

- Complete the housing form and send documents to ocs@acm.edu by July 20\textsuperscript{th}.
- Send a signed copy of the first page of your passport to ocs@acm.edu by July 20\textsuperscript{th}.
• Complete ACM’s Comprehensive Release Form by July 20th
• Complete Colorado College’s Medical History form by June 16th
• Complete pre-departure orientation on Canvas by August 8th

Pre-Departure Orientation & Communication
Please note, you can reach out to the Off-Campus Study Coordinator, Marlee Stein, for any program specific or individual questions prior to the start of the program. She is happy to speak to you via phone or email. If you have specific health, safety, or medical concerns, please reach out to Emily Gaul, Assistant Director.

Canvas Site
ACM has created a canvas site outlining general ACM policies, personal goal setting, and cultural adaptation. The site is organized by subject-specific modules that you will be required to complete. Please review the content and complete the assignment connected with that given module. You will need to work through all the pre-departure modules by August 8th. Log in and enrollment details will be sent to you via Canvas Instructure by July 5th

Passport and Visa
You will need a valid passport. Make sure that your passport is valid at least six months from the day you board the plane to return home. If it expires during that time, you should renew it immediately. Passport information is available at https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports.html

As a precaution against a lost or stolen passport, ACM recommends that you make a photocopy of the photo page of your passport. Carry this information separately; having this information easily available can make the replacement process both quicker and simpler. (In Costa Rica it is possible to travel throughout most of the country carrying a certified copy of your passport, which will be provided for you during the first days of the program. The exceptions are regions near the country’s borders where it is recommended that you travel with the actual passport. In that case, keep your passport separate from your wallet in a money belt or other concealed carrier—if you lose your wallet, you won’t have lost your passport as well.

The Student Services office at the ACM program center has a safety deposit should students prefer to leave their passport there for safe keeping.

Visa
Costa Rica automatically gives 90-day tourist visas to incoming visitors from the United States and you will be no exception. The program includes a five-day trip to Nicaragua halfway through the program. Upon your return to Costa Rica, you will be issued a new tourist visa that will allow you to remain in the country until the end of the program.

You must arrive in Costa Rica with a round-trip ticket or an on-going ticket out of the country. Students without a return or one-going ticket can have trouble entering the country. The ACM Chicago Office will provide Inger Bull a letter a few weeks prior to your departure explaining the program’s visa procedures which you can give airline personnel if you are questioned at the check-in counter. If you encounter any problems, please touch base with her as she will be traveling with those letters.

If you are not a U.S. citizen or not flying to Costa Rica from the United States, please inform the Chicago office as soon as possible. Visitors from certain countries must undergo a special process to secure a tourist visa, and this process can take a long time and should be started as soon as possible.
Arrival in San José
You will arrive on Tuesday, August 22nd to Colorado Springs for an orientation. On Friday, August 25th you will depart from Colorado Springs. You will be taking AA Flight 2495 to Dallas/Fort Worth and AA flight 986 to San José.

You will arrive to San Jose on Friday, August 25th, 2017 at 17:58. At the airport, you will be met by ACM staff and brought to the hotel. The group will stay at the hotel for two nights. In the afternoon on Day 3, you will be introduced to your homestay families and you and another Colorado College student will travel to your homestay home. The first several days on site will include health and safety orientations, language placement interviews, conversations about cultural adaptation, and opportunities to get to know each other, the other ACM Costa Rica students, and the staff and faculty. You will also participate in walking tours to help orient you to the city. More details about orientation week will be shared with you upon arrival.

Communication
Mail and Packages
Your mail should be addressed to you in care of the ACM office, because delivery to your host family’s street address is not always reliable. The ACM will distribute student mail. In San Pedro, the post office is located 100 meters (a block) to the south of the Outlet Mall, 100 meters north of the ACM.

Student mailing address
Student’s name
Associated Colleges of the Midwest
Apartado (P.O. Box) 2562-2050
San Pedro de Montes de Oca, Costa Rica
CENTRAL AMERICA

ACM does not recommend that you receive any packages in Costa Rica. Customs charges a flat fee on all incoming packages containing books, used items, or things for which no value is declared in the shipping documents. If a value is declared on the package, however, you (the receiver) will be charged 20% of the declared value for customs fees, plus an additional 20% for value-added tax.

Despite the hassle and cost, if you still plan on mailing a package through a shipping service such as UPS or Fedex, you must use the physical location (street address) of the program center, listed at the back of this handbook.

Computers
If you have a laptop, we recommend that you bring it with you. The ACM office provides a locker in the building where you can store your laptop overnight and during extended stays outside of San José, and have access to it whenever our building is open. Although we cannot assume liability for it in case of loss or theft, students have found this to be a good way to have the freedom to use their laptops throughout the ACM building, without worrying about the risks of carrying it on the street.

You will need to be sure that your computer is insured, as ACM does not provide insurance coverage for students’ personal property. Keep in mind that it is best not to travel about with your laptop in Costa Rica with the same confidence you would at home. Household security (door locks, etc.) is often less strict in rural areas,
and fluctuating electrical current, dust, damp conditions, etc. are more frequently encountered outside of San José.

The ACM student computing facilities include four personal computers, two black and white laser printers, one color inkjet printer, and a full-page scanner. ACM is able to provide you with wireless internet access during our limited building hours. Wireless will likely not be available in your host family.

**Telephones**

For logistics and security reasons, it is imperative for all students to have a working cell phone with capabilities for calling and texting during your off-campus study. The phone should always be charged and be able to receive phone calls or messages. After you have set up your phone, you will be required to share your local phone number and your preferred way to get in contact with members of the ACM staff.

During your first few days in the homestay, ACM staff will take you to buy a SIM card and/or a phone in a mall near the ACM or at a store near your host family home. We suggest the following phone options:

1) Bring an unlocked U.S. phone (works best with smart phones) and purchase a Costa Rican SIM card.
2) Purchase a cheap Costa Rica cell phone and a Costa Rica SIM card
3) Use an international plan via your U.S. phone provider (While this is an option, we do not suggest you choose this option as it is more expensive and the coverage is not as reliable in Costa Rica).

A SIM card will cost you 1,000 Colons, approximately $2. You will set up a pay as you go plan; only paying for the minutes you use. Typically, these plans cost 50 colons per minute. For one dollar, students can talk internationally for 11 minutes or locally for 30 minutes. Each text message costs 3 colons. Should you choose to purchase a cheap phone instead of using your American phone and switching the SIM card, the cost of that phone is approximately $30.

**Whatsapp** is a simple, fast, and secure messaging application for smart phones. It allows you to text and record voice messages using very little data. You can also make phone calls, although this uses more data then messaging. The phone connection is much better when connected to WIFI. This is a very common application internationally and is widely used in Costa Rica. Most people choose to use this option as it is more affordable than SMS. The other great thing about Whatsapp is that it is a simple, affordable way to stay in touch with family and friends back in the U.S. or in other countries. It is a one-time flat fee of .99 cents to purchase this application. We suggest you download this application before you arrive in Costa Rica.

**To call the U.S. from Costa Rica**, dial the international calling code (00) + country code (1 for the U.S.) + 3-digit area code + 7-digit number. **To call Costa Rica from the U.S.**, dial the international calling code (011) + country code (506 for Costa Rica) + number. When making international calls, remember to account for possible time zone differences.

**Money**

Students on the program in the past several years have relied on debit and ATM cards almost exclusively to obtain colones for daily expenses. (For information on what expenses you can expect to have, please see the Cost Information sheet for the Costa Rica program on the ACM website.) ATM machines (known as cajeros automáticos in Costa Rica) are readily available throughout San José and other large towns, and you should have no problem withdrawing funds in colones from your U.S. bank account. Before you leave for the program, however, you should notify your bank that you will be abroad. (If you neglect to do so, you may find that your bank, fearing that your card has been stolen, will freeze your account
after several withdrawals.) You will also want to check on the transaction charges your bank charges so you can find the most economical option for your time in Costa Rica. You'll also want to keep careful track of your debit card; there have been incidents of students leaving their debit cards in the machines. Have the information you need on hand to cancel your debit card immediately should it be lost or stolen.

While the exchange rate is typically good when using an ATM or debit card, you may find that such transaction fees discourage multiple withdrawals of small amounts. As of March 2017, the exchange rate is $1 = ₡561.40 and frequently fluctuates by a few colones.

While ATM and debit cards work well, this should not be your only means of getting money—ATM and debit cards can get lost, stolen, or eaten by cash machines. You should also bring along some hard currency in dollars—perhaps $100 or $200 in smaller denominations ($50 and $100 bills are not accepted by many businesses)—and a credit card. Visa is more widely used than other credit cards, but you should not plan to use it with the frequency that you likely do in the U.S., as many small businesses in Costa Rica will not accept credit cards. Be sure to carry some colones in case of emergencies or when you travel outside of San José.

**Packing Considerations**

**What to Bring**

Packing can seem like an overwhelming task, but using common sense and the following checklists can make it much less daunting. If you see something on the list you can do without or would never use in the U.S., don’t bring it! Trust your own judgment. Remember when packing certain items that most Costa Rican houses use 110 voltage so U.S. electrical appliances also work there.

Remember, that immediately after Block 1 and 2 in San Jose, you will be traveling directly to Monteverde and Belize where you will need to pack extremely light. Limit your belongings to one backpack or suitcase.

Don’t forget to leave some extra space for things you’ll buy when you’re abroad. Airline luggage restrictions can be strict and you are likely to be charged for excess luggage. Check with your airline to find out what the exact limitations are regarding the number of pieces of luggage you can take and restrictions on the weight and dimensions of your luggage. Remember that when you travel to rural areas by bus you may want to use a large backpack or duffel bag, rather than a suitcase.

Put anything you’ll need immediately upon arrival into your carry-on bag. Make sure you have your passport, money and credit/debit cards with you in a safe compartment of your carry-on bag. *Never* put prescription drugs, passport or valuables in your checked luggage. Bring copies of the prescription using the generic name since brand names may vary from country to country. If you wear glasses or contacts, bring an extra pair.

**Clothing**

Costa Rica has two seasons: the wet season, usually from late May through November; and the dry season, usually from December to May. During the wet season in San José, it will rain almost daily, usually in the afternoon for brief periods of time and, during October and November, the rains can last all afternoon, and occasionally all day long. The weather in San José and its surrounding environment is generally mild year-round. The daytime temperature rarely exceeds 80°F in San José, but evenings are brisk and Costa Rican homes do not have heat. Temperatures can drop to the 30s and 40s high in the mountains and rise to the 80s and 90s in the tropical lowlands, accompanied by high humidity.
Clothes in good condition are appropriate, and your appearance should always be neat. Excessively informal, revealing, or sloppy attire can attract unwanted comments or attention, particularly from men. Short skirts or shorts, low cut shirts, muscle shirts, extremely tight clothing, and midriff-baring clothing are considered inappropriate for this program. You’ll want to bring one outfit that is appropriate for professional interactions. Past students have said that, more or less, they dress like they do on campus but they never see Costa Ricans in shorts or athletic clothing.

Try to select clothing that will adapt to different seasons and situations. The weather can change fast, so be ready for quick changes between hot and cold, raining and not. Bring a raincoat or an umbrella. A couple of sweaters and/or jackets are important for evenings and during the wet season or if you visit higher elevations. Avoid a piece of clothing you’ll wear only once or twice during the semester. You may require one or two slightly more formal outfits for attending a family wedding, the National Theater or for your community engagement practicum, if you will be working with an educational or health institution. Wash-and-wear clothing is recommended, since dry cleaning is expensive and clothes tend to get dirty quickly from air pollution and dust, especially in the dry season. Laundry is included in your housing costs but host families do not use dryers so your clothes will drip dry on clothing lines.

**Gifts**

It is a wonderful gesture to take a gift to your host family. Choose something representative of your college, town, or culture, but keep it within a moderate price range. When choosing presents for your San José family you may wish to make use of the description of your family sent to you by the ACM office in Costa Rica. Here are some general recommendations:

- Boxes of chocolates or candies
- T-shirts or pennants from your college or sports teams
- Calendars with scenes of your home state or town
- Picture books about the U.S. or your home region
- College mugs
- Artwork from your hometown (small pottery, weaving, watercolors)

**Suggested Packing List**

**Documents**

- Passport + copy
- Copy of certified birth certificate (in case of lost passport)
- Debit or ATM card, credit card, cash (approx. $100-$200 in smaller denominations)
- Copy of round trip flight ticket
- Airport entry letter provided by ACM Chicago
- Copy of student insurance card
- ID card with photo
- Printed copy of Colorado College’s acceptance into the FSA program
Clothing
- T-shirts, and a few light, long-sleeve shirts
- A few light, long-sleeve shirts
- Jeans / pants / lightweight pants
- For women, Capri or knee-length shorts, skirts, dresses
- Shorts for trips to the beach (short shorts are normally not worn in the cities)
- One dressy outfit (i.e. formal presentations, meetings with dignitaries)
- A few heavy sweaters and/or a light jacket since the temperature in San José drops in Nov. and Dec.
- Clothes for group field trips and the practicum portion, which may be in a rural area
- Comfortable walking shoes and a pair of field boots for hikes and camping (sandals are not safe for hiking in the tropics). These should be shoes you won’t mind getting wet (for the fall rainy season)
- Rain jacket or umbrella
- Slippers or sandals to wear around the house (it is not culturally acceptable to be barefoot)
- Beach clothes (if you choose)

Personal and Miscellaneous Items
- Toiletry articles in travel and traditional size (It is cheaper to purchase personal hygiene items in the U.S. and bring them with you, but less expensive, local brands are available in Costa Rica)
- Hand sanitizer
- Glasses or contact lenses and a copy of your prescription. Contact lens solution is expensive, so you might want to bring a semester’s supply.
- Enough prescription medicine to last your stay and copies of prescriptions (with generic names)
- Medicine for an upset stomach
- Tampons
- A bath towel and a beach towel (do not expect to use your host family’s towels but you can buy these on-site)
- Sunscreen
- Bug spray – important for mosquitoes
- Camera with memory card, AC adapter and cable
- Backpack for routine daily use in San José (some students bring larger backpacks to use for weekend travel)
- Money belt
- Guidebook
- Laptop computer (and plastic bag to protect it) and any necessary cables or AC adapter
- Water bottle, Ziploc bags
- Pictures of your family, home, and college to show to your host family and friends. These items provide an excellent way for your family to get to know you better and make for good conversation.
- Host family gifts
ACM Building

While the ACM building is a comfortable space, there are some living adjustments that need to be made when a large group is present. Please be courteous towards others and pick up after yourself in the various rooms of the building. We urge you to adopt an “early morning schedule,” that is to say, get to the ACM early to use the computers, to consult with the staff, and so on. Please do not leave backpacks and other personal items lying around. Use your locker to store your things as there are often people not associated with ACM in the building.

The main classroom is for your use when classes are not in session. You can use it to study, use your laptop, meet with other students, and to eat lunch, but again please keep it neat. Especially toward the end of the semester when papers are being written, please remember that studying always takes precedence in the ACM building, and be considerate of those trying to work in the various rooms of the building by taking conversations outside and listening to music with headphones.

Students often enjoy spending time in the lounge or when it is nice out, they hang out on the lower patio areas. Coffee and tea are available for you on a daily basis in the kitchen; many students prepare their lunches there, but please respect your instructor’s rules about eating in class.

The ACM building opens at 7:00 a.m. and closes at 4:30 p.m. from Monday through Friday. The closing time is strictly observed, for security reasons. Under no circumstances will students be allowed to stay overnight in the ACM building. Always keep the gate of the ACM building closed. The ACM staff will be available to help you from Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., and from 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. If you work best in the evening, then it is strongly recommended that for academic and cultural reasons you take advantage of the UCR and the San Pedro student neighborhood that are only blocks away. The UCR comes alive in the early evening, as many students take night classes. Studying in the UCR libraries or in San Pedro’s internet cafés will give you the opportunity to mingle with Tico students.

The ACM has a small library with a collection of approximately 5,000 books and some other bibliographical materials. You will receive ID card from the University of Costa Rica (UCR) that entitles you to use the University’s library and sports facilities. Your ID card will allow you to utilize all of the libraries and sports facilities of the UCR, both on the main campus and on the regional campuses. You will receive orientation on how to use the UCR library system during the first weeks of the program.

More information about ACM center and classroom policies and guidelines will be conveyed to you at on-site orientation.
Use of Spanish
In the building we (ACM staff and students) speak Spanish as much as possible, although we understand that on several occasions English will be necessary to communicate essential information. There will be times when you might want to speak to a staff member in English because you may be concerned about misunderstanding an important issue. If so, explain that to the staff member. Language immersion is considered a primary goal of this program and we want to provide you every opportunity to improve upon your Spanish. Please contribute to this program goal by maintaining a Spanish-speaking atmosphere in the building and encouraging others to do so. One of the major reasons for is to improve your Spanish, so please practice it with us! In addition, since you are in a Spanish-speaking country, it is polite to use the host country’s language in communicating with others. “Skyping” is strictly limited to certain sections of the ACM center, since it tends to lead to distracting and lengthy conversations in English.

Host Country Information
People
Costa Ricans are progressively moving away from a national identity based on dubious notions about European origins and “whiteness,” and towards more awareness of the diversity of the population. For example, an estimated 10% to 15% of the population is made up of recently-arrived Nicaraguan immigrants. Descendants of 19th-century Jamaican immigrant workers are an important (and frequently English-speaking) presence in the Atlantic province of Limón—at 3% of the population—and are probably the most significant historical minority in Costa Rica. Few of the native Indians survived the first 100 years of European contact; the indigenous population today numbers about 29,000 or less than 1% of the population. However, indigenous communities are a visible and sometimes vocal presence in several parts of the country. A small population of Chinese immigrants, some with origins dating back to the 19th century, and others of more recent arrivals, add to the country’s diversity.

History
In 1502, on his fourth and last voyage to the New World, Christopher Columbus made the first European landfall in the area. Settlement of Costa Rica began in 1522. For nearly three centuries, Spain administered the region as part of the Captaincy General of Guatemala under a military governor. The Spanish optimistically called the country "Rich Coast." Finding little gold or other valuable minerals in Costa Rica, however, the Spanish turned to agriculture, at first based on coerced indigenous labor. Indigenous communities quickly declined under this arrangement (through both disease and flight to several remote zones of refuge), leaving Costa Rica’s small landowners the challenge of surviving without coerced labor. The small landowners’ relative poverty, the population's ethnic and linguistic homogeneity, and Costa Rica’s isolation from the Spanish colonial centers in Mexico and the Andes all contributed to the development of a relatively autonomous and individualistic agrarian society. An egalitarian tradition also arose. This tradition survived the widened class distinctions brought on by the 19th-century introduction of banana and coffee cultivation and consequent accumulations of local wealth, and has served as a constant spur to social reform whenever the tradition and the reality have grown too far apart.

Costa Rica joined other Central American provinces in 1821 in a joint declaration of independence from Spain. Although the newly independent provinces formed a Federation, border disputes broke out among them,
adding to the region's turbulent history and conditions. Costa Rica's northern Guanacaste Province was annexed from Nicaragua in one such regional dispute. In 1838, long after the Central American Federation ceased to function in practice, Costa Rica formally withdrew and proclaimed itself sovereign.

An era of relatively peaceful democracy in Costa Rica began in 1889 with elections considered the first truly free and honest ones in the country's history. This began a trend that continues today with only two lapses: in 1917-19, Federico Tinoco ruled as a dictator, and, in 1948, José Figueres led an armed uprising in the wake of a disputed presidential election. With more than 2,000 dead, the 44-day civil war resulting from this uprising was the bloodiest event in 20th-century Costa Rican history, but the victorious junta drafted a constitution guaranteeing free and independently-supervised elections with universal suffrage and the abolition of the military. Figueres became a national hero, winning the first election under the new constitution in 1953. Since then, Costa Rica has held 15 presidential elections, the latest in 2014.

The years since 1948 have been peaceful in Costa Rica. The government has continued to promote its democracy and to publicize its national health and educational programs. *Ticos* are often heard to say that there is an army of teachers but no soldiers in Costa Rica, and they are proud that they have the highest literacy rate in Central America.

**Government**

Costa Rica is a democratic republic with a very strong system of constitutional checks and balances. Executive responsibilities are vested in a president, who is relatively weak by Latin American standards. There also are two vice presidents and a 20-plus member cabinet. The president and 57 Legislative Assembly deputies are elected for 4-year terms. In April 2003, the Costa Rican Constitutional Court annulled a 1969 constitutional reform which had barred presidents from running for reelection. As a result, the law reverted back to the 1949 Constitution, which permits ex-presidents to run for reelection after they have been out of office for two presidential terms, or eight years. Deputies may run for reelection after sitting out one term, or four years. In October 2007, the country ratified the U.S.-Central American-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) by a slender margin in its first national referendum, and the treaty went into effect in January of 2009.

**Political Conditions**

Costa Rica has long emphasized the development of democracy and respect for human rights. The country's political system has steadily developed, maintaining democratic institutions and an orderly, constitutional scheme for government succession. Several factors have contributed to this trend, including enlightened leadership, comparative prosperity, flexible class lines, educational opportunities that have created a stable middle class, and high social indicators. Also, because Costa Rica has no armed forces, it has avoided military involvement in political affairs, unlike other countries in the region.

In May 2006, the former President Oscar Arias of the National Liberation Party (PLN) assumed office. Arias listed passage of the CAFTA-DR, along with fiscal reform, infrastructure improvements, improving education, and improving security as primary goals for his presidency. In 2010, Laura Chinchilla became Costa Rica's first woman President. She was the sixth woman to be elected as President of a Latin American country. In 2014, Luis Guillermo Solís was the first member of the center-left Citizens’ Action Party (PAC) to be elected
President. Solís is a graduate of the University of Costa Rica. The 57-member unicameral Legislative Assembly has five principal party factions, with the governing party, PLN, having an 18-seat plurality.

**Economy**
Compared with its Central American neighbors, Costa Rica has achieved a high standard of living, with a GDP per capita of about U.S. $12,942 and an unemployment rate of about 9%. Consumer price inflation is high but relatively constant at about a 10% annual rate in the last decade. Both the central government and the overall public sector ran fiscal surpluses in 2007 before the recent recession, and have run moderate deficits in the years since.

**U.S. – Costa Rica Relations**
The United States and Costa Rica have a history of close and friendly relations based on respect for democratic government, human freedoms, free trade, and other shared values. The country generally supports the U.S. in international fora, especially in the areas of democracy and human rights.

The United States is Costa Rica's most important trading partner. The U.S. accounts for almost half of Costa Rica's exports, imports, and tourism, and more than two-thirds of its foreign investment. The two countries share growing concerns for the environment and want to preserve Costa Rica's important tropical resources and prevent environmental degradation. In 2007, the United States reduced Costa Rica's debt in exchange for protection and conservation of Costa Rican forests through a debt for nature swap under the auspices of the Tropical Forest Conservation Act. This is the largest such agreement of its kind to date.

The United States responded to Costa Rica’s economic needs in the 1980s with significant economic and development assistance programs. Through provision of more than $1.1 billion in assistance, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) supported Costa Rican efforts to stabilize its economy and broaden and accelerate economic growth through policy reforms and trade liberalization. Assistance initiatives in the 1990s concentrated on democratic policies, modernizing the administration of justice, and sustainable development. Once the country had graduated from most forms of U.S. assistance, the USAID Mission in Costa Rica closed in 1996. However, USAID completed a $9 million project in 2000-01 to support refugees of Hurricane Mitch residing in Costa Rica.

Between 30,000 and 50,000 private US/North American citizens, including many retirees, reside in the country and more than 700,000 US American citizens visit Costa Rica annually. A few vexing expropriation and US citizen investment disputes have hurt Costa Rica's investment climate and have occasionally produced bilateral friction.

Ticos are rightfully proud of their country and the peaceful and happy lives that they lead. If you are traveling to Latin America for the first time, you probably will be struck by how much is familiar on the campus at the University of Costa Rica and in San José: cell phones are ubiquitous, many facilities are modern, and students on campus dress in ways that their peers do all over the world. At the same time, you will likely find that there are differences in the way students interact with faculty and staff, with their family and elders, and among themselves. This section outlines some of these differences as a way of introducing you to cultural norms and expectations in Costa Rica.
Cultural Adjustment

The cultural experience is rich and unique and calls for a series of adjustments by the student. It is a two-way process in which your family and community will learn about the US and you about Costa Ricans. Adjustment requires time, patience, and persistence. Here are some points to remember during your initial adjustment:

People may not seem open when you approach them to ask questions. “Confianza” (mutual reciprocity) is important for establishing working relationships and requires informal conversations, so people will get to know who you are.

Explain yourself to each person. This may be frustrating, but again, you establish personal rapport through one-on-one relationships. Make up your mind to master and enjoy the process. Family life/gender roles may be different from the North American lifestyle you know. For example, the television may be always blaring; lots of kids may follow you around; men may not do dishes; and you may not have space to work at home. You will have to figure out where you can work effectively. Kids can be great for learning the language, helping you find a place, and telling you about the area. Adult attention is focused on children; so take an interest in them as well. Especially in the rural areas, a good way of learning about life is to help the men or women with their chores—it is also a nice gesture as a family member.

Machismo: If you are a young single female you must prepare yourself for catcalls and comments by some males. You will find it helpful to remember that some Costa Rican men do this even to older women. Such behavior is usually harmless. Your best tactic may be to ignore it, although you may find this difficult. If you have a friend or a child who likes to accompany you, you may not feel so conspicuous or alone. Machismo can be a problem for males as well. They may feel pressured into behavior with which they are not comfortable.

Ticos are interested in the U.S. way of life. They will ask you questions about yourself, your family, holidays, and customs. Be sensitive to local cultural norms. Norms in rural areas may, and probably will, differ from those in San José!

Cultural Considerations

When you first arrive in Costa Rica the greenery and lushness of the Central Valley and the superficial similarities with the United States may mislead you. San José has a modern façade, many US businesses, traffic problems, and smog, all of which you may find familiar. However, beneath the surface, you will discover much that is unfamiliar—the language, politics, interpersonal relationships, thought patterns, and attitudes. You will feel rather than see most of these differences. Though intangible, they are both real and pervasive, and you will have to come to terms with them in order to be reasonably comfortable.

Some of the differences you will understand easily. For example, people in Spanish-speaking countries often eat a big meal at noon and dine later in the evening. In Costa Rica, some families do not even eat dinner (though all host families either do or understand that our students will expect a dinner meal). You will also find that Costa Ricans express positive emotions more openly.
than most US citizens do and may tend to be more reserved in expressing their negative feelings. Handshaking, kissing, and hugging are common forms of greeting and leave-taking among friends, relatives, and in some cases even among people meeting for the first time. Female friends usually greet each other with a light kiss on the cheek or by grasping forearms. Men and women normally greet each other with handshakes and kisses on the cheek or by grasping forearms, depending on their familiarity. Other differences are subtler yet profound, and they can become aggravating if you are not open to new ways of doing things.

Cultural sensitivity and open-mindedness will help to make your experience a valuable one. Such sensitivity is needed in terms of language and is also relevant to your relationships with your family as well as to your appearance and behavior. For example, most Latin Americans consider themselves to be Americans in that they reside on the continent America. It may be discourteous for a US student to refer to him/herself as an *americano/a* when referring to his/her status as a citizen of the United States since, in that context, the term excludes Costa Ricans as Americans. In Spanish you should refer to yourself as *estadounidense* or *norteamericano/a* when questioned about your nationality.

Another difference is that the conversational distance between two people in Latin America is typically smaller than in the United States. You may find yourself talking to someone and occasionally taking a step backward, only to have your acquaintance take a step towards you. This occurs almost unconsciously as you and the other person attempt to adjust to your respective comfortable speaking distances.

Latin Americans generally place much less importance on punctuality than North Americans do, particularly on social occasions. If you arrive at a Costa Rican family’s home for a party at the designated time, you will probably be the first guest there and may find your hosts unprepared. The first guests usually show up about a half hour after the designated time. For office appointments, however, it is unwise to show up late. Being familiar with such details will make a difference in how you are treated in Costa Rica as well as in your comfort in adjusting to a different culture. (Be aware: ACM does not observe “Tico Time” in regard to the starting time of classes, field trips, or meetings. If your class is scheduled to begin at 7:30 a.m., you are expected to be there and ready for class at 7:30 a.m. Be careful in calculating your travel time in San Jose – rush hour times in San Jose are usually between 6 and 8 a.m. and buses may not operate as expected.)

As is true for foreign students coming to live and study in the United States, you may encounter prejudices either in your home or on the streets. Just as in the States, you may find both racial bigotry and homophobia. Since Costa Rica is a predominantly Catholic country, Costa Ricans tend to be more traditional and less accepting of gay and lesbian lifestyles than many in the US; however, no one who behaves in a discreet way should have problems. Women will also notice more overt sexism in Costa Rica than in the United States. Men frequently make comments to women on the streets, especially when they are unaccompanied or are wearing short skirts or shorts. The majority of Ticos are warm, friendly people who will accord you as much respect as you show them.

You may not find it easy to shed the feeling that your own way of thinking and doing things is the right way; yet one of your principal goals should be to develop a cultural humility and openness to Costa Rican culture which will allow you to learn from your hosts. It is also important to be patient with yourself as you go through the process of cultural adjustment. Acceptance by and friendship with Costa Ricans will result from your willingness to adapt to and become an active participant in their way of life. This includes speaking Spanish even when the people you are with speak English. It may also mean adhering to more conservative customs of etiquette, dress, and speech in order to be accepted by the older generation.
This does not mean you should try to transform yourself to conform to the Costa Rican way of life. It does mean that you will need to be considerate and sensitive. For example, it means being responsive to your Costa Rican family’s concern about the hours you keep, even though at college no one has given your personal schedule a second thought. It means attention to the tone and level of your voice and your language in public places. It means openness to hearing a wide array of political opinions, some of which may be contrary to your own views. It also means conforming to Costa Rican standards in clothing and general appearance; U.S. students have a reputation for untidiness. Extremes in long hair and beards and ragged denim jeans are generally not acceptable to many Costa Ricans. During your community engagement practicum, it may be especially important for you to dress more formally if you are going to work with Costa Rican institutions.

The language and customs of Costa Rica may be different from those with which you have grown up. You have come here to learn about them, rather than to read about them from afar. Experiencing the language means to hear it and use it daily in numerous situations in which you are a real participant, and in which your behavior has real consequences. This is what we mean when we talk about language “immersion.” By the same token, when we speak of cultural “immersion” we refer to the full participation of a student in different social and cultural situations, in which the values, beliefs, and attitudes of both student and the target culture meet and must be taken into account in order to get along in the target culture.

Food
Part of the cultural experience involves the daily act of eating. Since cultures do not mold themselves immediately or perfectly to fit one individual who comes to study, live and travel within them, you should understand that when it comes to eating, you will probably have to make some adjustments to your typical diet.

While your family will be concerned about filling your dietary needs, we ask that you be as flexible as possible in adapting to their diet as it would be culturally insensitive to expect them to modify their traditional foods in order to adapt to your diet. Some Costa Rican families are deliberately trying to eat less meat; however, the majority still consider meat, in some form, to be an important part of most meals. If you are a vegetarian, we will try to place you with a family that is familiar with different vegetarian diets. However, we will ask you to be flexible, to help your family to understand your specific needs and to share recipes with them. Although your host family receives a monthly stipend for your room and board, the essence of the family stay is to nurture your cultural growth. On some occasions, as when you travel with the ACM group, we will be eating food ordered for the entire group, and it is very likely
that even a vegetable dish will be prepared with meat broth. It is understandable that cooks have learned and
been trained to cook in ways that are appropriate and appreciated in their culture. We ask that you keep an
open mind when faced with these situations and remember that they are a part of the culture you have come to
experience firsthand.

When you are ready to leave a restaurant, ask for *la cuenta*. A 10% tip is automatically figured into the bill at
restaurants (as well as a 13% sales tax). It is therefore unnecessary to leave a tip unless you really want to do
so. The typical dish of rice, beans, fried plantain, meat, fish, cheese or egg, and a salad is called a *casado* and
is generally a good buy. A hint for vegetarians: *carne* often implies beef; so if you ask for a dish without *carne*
be sure to specify whether or not that also means pork, fish and chicken.

**We do not recommend that students eat food sold on the street, especially slices of fruit.** The
possibility of contamination is high and not worth the risk of dysentery or hepatitis. (Remember: “Peel it, boil it,
cook it, or forget it.”)

**You will be given a stipend to pay for your daily lunches via direct deposit before departing for Costa
Rica. More information will be shared during your orientation at Colorado College.**

**Extra-curricular Activities**

Studying in a cross-cultural setting is an absorbing experience which requires a total commitment. The ACM
staff will attempt to make the experience valuable for you, but one of the purposes of these programs is to give you
responsibility for your own learning. Although the ACM provides a high quality academic program with classroom
work, assigned readings, papers, and exams, the program staff is also committed to experiential education and
encourages students to become involved in social activities, sports, and in university and community events.
The ACM has an agreement with the University of Costa Rica which allows students to participate in aerobics,
yoga, mountaineering, karate, drama, dance, and other classes. A small number of students have also
participated in choirs, bands, and activities sponsored by student organizations at the university. In San José,
some students also participate in different kinds of volunteer work for a few hours each week. The staff will try
to help you get involved in extra-curricular activities and to answer any questions you may have. Please utilize
their expertise and connections by reaching out to the ACM staff for help in facilitating these experiences.
Additionally, you will receive a monthly email from the student services coordinator with information about
events and opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities.

**Courtesy in Costa Rica**

A person’s understanding of courtesy is culturally-based. A US citizen’s understanding of what it means to be
courteous is not necessarily the same as a Costa Rican’s. The following list highlights some differences:

Drivers in Costa Rica normally do not stop for pedestrians. Stepping off a curb without looking may result in
serious injury. Drivers make turns at high speeds, frequently without signaling. Do not assume drivers will
respect your rights. **WALK DEFENSIVELY!** The ACM staff worries more about traffic accidents than about
any other hazard.

Titles are more commonly used than in the US. Honorifics like *don, doña, Dr., profesor*, reflect the sense that
being polite includes using appropriate titles of respect. The social hierarchy these titles reflect may not interest
you except as a sociological phenomenon, but you should be aware of it. As a show of cultural sensitivity and
respect, you may want to address your host parents as doña Flor and don Pedro, for example, and you should address your professors by their titles until or unless given permission to address them otherwise.

The notion of keeping to the right when walking in supermarkets or on the streets is not well established in Costa Rica. People will approach you on the sidewalk three or four abreast and only make way for you at the last moment.

What we would perceive as name-calling is often used as an affectionate greeting (for example: gordito, machito, negrita, chinita). These terms are often based on physical appearance only and are not intended to offend.

It is customary for family members to greet each other in the morning with “Buenos días” often followed by “¿Cómo amaneció?” It is important to return this daily courtesy to your family.

When someone is eating, the custom is to convey the hope that the person is enjoying the meal. The standard expressions are: ¡Que le aproveche!; ¡Buen provecho! These expressions communicate an interest in the other person.

Greetings tend to be much more effusive: for example, female friends kiss each other on the cheek, as do male and female friends; acquaintances shake hands frequently. Certain expressions, used with regularity, convey enthusiasm for the other person: ¡Gusto en verlo!, ¿Cómo amaneció?, etc.

When a person enters someone else’s home, he or she usually says con permiso (with permission); the expected response is adelante or an equivalent expression. Con permiso is also used when ending a conversation and moving on to speak to someone else in an office or a social setting or when leaving the room or the table.

In March 2012, Costa Rica passed an ambitious anti-smoking law that bans smoking tobacco in public places.

Time is not as precious a commodity in Costa Rica as in the United States. Banks and governmental agencies often allow customers to wait longer than is usual in the US.

Fellow bus passengers are often more helpful than their counterparts in the US. If you are trying to get a bus driver to stop and cannot get his attention, others will whistle or call out for you.

In ministries, agencies, offices, etc., you may be invited to have a ritual cup of coffee. This courtesy is uncommon in the U.S.

**Men and Women in Costa Rican Society**

North American men and women traveling abroad for the first time may be surprised at the rigidity of gender roles in other societies. Expectations for behavior based on gender extend not only to the people of the country in question, but to visitors as well. This section of the handbook attempts to prepare ACM students for the differences between U.S. and Costa Rican societies and to give you a brief overview of the customs and attitudes of many Ticos. We will return to this subject in depth during program orientations; however, some preliminary information may be useful. Please bear in mind that the following are generalizations and that you will encounter exceptions as you form relationships with Costa Ricans.

The structure of the Costa Rican family has been undergoing a constant process of change during the last two decades. Several factors have come to play in the modification of the more traditional family structure in which
the father played the role of bread-winner and decision-maker, while the mother filled the role of a financially
dependent housewife. A significant increase in financial stress due to inflation has led many women to find a
way of contributing to the family income. The presence of women in the Costa Rican labor force increased
from 18.4% in 1970 to 41.7% in 2008, and women are now present on all levels, though they are still
somewhat behind men in administrative and managerial ranks. The greater economic independence of women
combined with the creation of the “law to promote the social equality of women” in 1990 have contributed to
this change. A significant increase in the incidence of divorce attests to this process of change in the
traditional family structure.

In your host family’s home, you are likely to encounter a mixture of more “traditional” roles and very “modern”
one. Whether or not your host mother has a job outside the home, she will often continue to carry the main
responsibility for housekeeping and child rearing. You may also find that host siblings of your own age are less
independent than you are, and that they require parental approval of their friendships and activities. Marcar, a
courting tradition in which the man must ask the woman’s parents for permission to date, is still customary
among some Costa Ricans.

Three main stereotypes are often applied to North American women (known as gringas) in Costa Rica:

The easy gringa: A gringa is often stereotyped as an “easy catch”; in other words, she is easy to seduce.

The approachable gringa: Costa Rican men often see a woman from the States as more approachable than a
Tica. A Tica tends to be reserved and cautious when approached by a man she does not know.

The wealthy gringa: North Americans, both male and female, are seen as being wealthy. The ability to travel
internationally and the possession of U.S. dollars are seen as signs of wealth.

These stereotypes are the result of many factors, including the influence of television, radio, movies, and
magazines, all of which convey images of U.S. culture. Occasionally, the behavior of a visitor from the United
States seems to confirm these stereotypes. Be aware of the messages your behavior sends about you, your
home school, and the ACM.

Before You Go
Upon first arrival in Costa Rica, you may be struck by new and different sights, sounds, and smells as well as
comforted by more familiar sense impressions. And while you can never really prepare yourself for the full
experience of studying abroad, you can arrive with some knowledge of Costa Rica today, its challenges and its
successes. You’ll undoubtedly find Ticos more knowledgeable about the U.S. than you are about Costa Rica.
The more you can inform yourself in advance about Costa Rica and prepare yourself for the program, the more
you can learn and benefit from discussions with instructors and other students. Your overall experience will be
richer for it. At the very least, you should want to counter the stereotype of the American abroad as someone
totally self-absorbed and almost willfully ignorant of what is going on around you.

The following are texts that may help you get a feel for the history and culture of Costa Rica before you
depart in August. Some of these selections are academic, and some of them are just for fun.

Recommended Readings

http://www.happyplanetindex.org/assets/happy-planet-index-report.pdf
http://www.clubdelibros.com/libros-digitales.html

Recommended Videos

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wa4VbLoTxyo&feature=youtu.be
Travel Guides
You may find a travel guide useful, and those produced by Lonely Planet and Fodor’s tend to be especially handy. Several publishers offer versions specifically for backpackers. Check out your local bookstore or online retailer for options.

Cultural Learning
In the first weeks when you arrive on site it is not uncommon to experience culture shock, surprise, dismay, and even anxiety at the cultural differences in a new location and the unfamiliar situations in which you find yourself. The on-site orientation program is intended to help ease this adjustment, and you will in all likelihood find yourself adapting to the new culture and situations in a surprisingly short time. You’ll also likely discover that being able to settle in and “learn the ropes” can give you an enormous sense of self-confidence.

Research has shown that many students go through a three-step adjustment process in acclimating to their host country. In the first stage (once they have gotten over any feelings of jet lag), 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 once the initial euphoria has worn off, they may focus on the ways in which everything is different or “foreign.” 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 analytic approach to both locations and to find good and bad things in each.

As a student studying abroad, you will undoubtedly feel uncomfortable at times, especially in the beginning, and likely hear your fellow students expressing similar responses. This is not unusual, and we anticipate that after a time these feelings of discomfort and insecurity will dissipate. We encourage you to speak with the program director and other on-site staff about your concerns and to raise any questions about the host country and the new culture to which you are learning to adapt.

Homestays
Living with a local family provides an excellent opportunity not only to learn about the culture, but to learn about yourself as well. It will allow you to observe and reflect on a way of life. Your family can be a wonderful source of cultural information. The most interesting insights often involve subtle differences, and you must develop your ability to recognize such differences through persistence and patience. The amount of time you spend with your family will influence the growth of this ability.

Socializing with your host family and asking questions is the best way to learn about local customs. Asking about the culture and listening to explanations is an ongoing process, and occasionally a frustrating one. Explaining your lifestyle, preferences, and customs is the other side of this coin.
Be patient with yourself and your Costa Rican family as your relationship develops. It takes time and work to overcome the feeling of being a guest or an outsider and to begin feeling like a member of the family. Before the semester begins, think about what you expect from the family situation and how much you are willing to give. Being able to laugh at the many mistakes you will make in trying to understand the culture speeds the adjustment process as does the ability to be open about things you do not understand.

The ACM emphasizes that students should not be given special treatment during their home stay. Students are expected to adapt to the family setting and to rules applying to all of its members, not vice versa. Most Costa Rican families often cannot afford to travel in Costa Rica and very rarely go out to the movies or for dinner. Typically, they spend leisure time visiting relatives, engaging in community activities, or being at home. Thus you should not expect the host family to entertain you with trips to exotic parts of the country. The family is, however, responsible for creating a positive environment that will encourage you to participate in the culture, and you should feel welcome to take part in daily activities.

In San José your host family will provide you with a room, laundry service, breakfast and dinner during the week, and all meals on weekends and public holidays when the ACM office is closed. During the practicum stay, your host family will provide you with all meals. With regard to the food, the family will serve the typical Costa Rican dishes they customarily eat. Some Costa Rican families consume a lot of fruit and vegetables. For those that do not, fresh produce is available at any of the local farmers’ markets (ferias del agricultor) and supermarkets in the metropolitan area.

Please understand that your host families take great pride in preparing food for both you and the family. If you find yourself in a situation where you are served something that you either cannot eat or suspect would not agree with your stomach, we strongly advise you to make an appropriate refusal in which you politely decline. Host families are instructed to discuss your dietary needs and preferences at the beginning of the program, but you should not expect a family to alter their normal eating habits to accommodate your needs. Enjoying the fabulous cuisine available to you in Costa Rica is a component of your cultural immersion. Try to be open to the new tastes offered as a part of being in Costa Rica!

The following list contains advice which may help you to avoid unnecessary problems with your Costa Rican host family:

- Personal hygiene is very important in Costa Rica and Costa Ricans bathe daily. They expect you to follow this custom.
- It is unacceptable to walk barefoot in the house. You might want to bring a pair of flip-flops or slippers designated for indoor use.
- Telephone use: Local telephone service is expensive in Costa Rica with every local call incurring a separate charge. Therefore, ACM policy does not encourage the student to make calls from the house of the host family. If you make such calls, you should always use a phone card. Public telephones are always available and inexpensive, and one can call anywhere in the country for less than ten cents.
• Please do not ask to make collect calls to the US from your Tico family’s home. Calls are sometimes charged to the residence by mistake (even when a calling card is used), and needless hassles and unpleasantness can result.
• If you plan to stay out late or not to arrive for dinner, you should notify the mother of your family well ahead of time, so that she can plan accordingly.
• Host families will wash all clothing at least once a week. Some families consider women’s underwear personal and prefer that the student wash it herself. Women should ask the mother of the household to show them the sink, or pila, for washing, and to provide them with soap so that they can wash their personal laundry by hand.
• Controversial topics relating to politics, religion, and alternative lifestyles should be avoided at the dinner table. As you will learn, many Costa Ricans still maintain traditional values which may contradict some beliefs held by the average US college student. There are Costa Ricans with whom you can discuss such topics, but it makes sense not to bring up potentially divisive issues with your host family.
• Please be sensitive and careful in your relationship with the host family’s children. In this society, children are disciplined only by their parents. In rural areas in particular, parental discipline can be louder and more abrupt than you may be used to.
• Learn to listen carefully for “dos and don’ts” that are not explicit. Costa Ricans generally use non-confrontational language and always try to stay on good terms (ser amables) with others. One example of this is the indirect language used to indicate social/cultural norms. If your host mother says, “On nice sunny days, we like to hang our towels out,” she probably expects you to understand, “Please hang your towel outside so it can dry.”

ACM cannot guarantee that your host family can host you before or after the program. If you stay with your San José host family outside the program dates, you will need to pay them. Also, if you leave your luggage with the family for a period of time after the termination of the program, expect to pay them for storage. Similarly, if you return from your practicum site during the four-week component for personal reasons (not related to your project or to your health), you will be expected to pay your host family. We encourage the host families to contact us if a student spends extra time with the family without offering to pay. We will then request that the student make the appropriate payment. If the payment is not made, then ACM will pay the family and invoice the student. We have a good relationship with our host families, and it is important to maintain it.

If you receive a visitor from the United States, you should not ask your host family to host him or her. This is not a component of the expectations for host families. You can help your guests find independent accommodations or ask ACM staff for recommendations. Please do not put pressure on your host family to house your guest(s). Please be considerate of your family at all times.

**Social Life While Living with Your Costa Rican Host Family**

Neither the ACM staff nor your host family is interested in micro-managing your social life during your stay in Costa Rica. We will only become involved if we perceive your behavior is a serious threat to your security, or to the security and tranquility of your host family. It is crucial to remember that for these four months, you have chosen to live in an environment very different from a college dormitory, and for good reason. Your Spanish will improve exponentially simply due to living with a family, and we hope you will form friendships that will last a lifetime. Keeping this choice and its implications firmly in mind will avoid most problems that might emerge from living with your host family.

In any host family situation, questions and misunderstandings are normal. They should be treated as such and discussed openly whenever possible. The ACM expects you to make a significant effort to learn about the culture, to be respectful of its customs and to adapt to your host family’s home. However, if problems arise in the development of your relationship with your host family, the Director and the Coordinator of Academic
Services need to be informed immediately. The ACM staff is always willing to help and counsel you with any family issue.

Be mindful of the fact that during this program, you will be living with two different Costa Rican families. You will undoubtedly notice differences in the homes and lifestyles of these two families. These differences may be a result of geographic or climate reasons or may be a function of the socioeconomic status of your host family. Especially when living in rural areas outside of San José, you can usually expect to live in a more humble environment where some features you take for granted elsewhere (such as soundproofing to make your Skype conversations private) are not present in the home. You will also likely find differences in access to technology, ATMs, or supermarkets. Adjusting to these differences is a part of this program and we encourage you to approach those differences as another component of your sociocultural experience.

Sadly, the Program Director has been notified in the past of students who are unwilling to curtail their social life, and particularly their use of alcohol to reflect their new situation as a member of a Costa Rican family. If your use of alcohol becomes a problem for your family (loud late night returns home, vomiting, etc.), they are under no obligation to keep you in their home, and the Program Director will not attempt to persuade them to do so. Unfortunately, it is also difficult for us to place you with another family if you have already demonstrated your inability to live within the rules of a Tico household. The homestay is a crucial part of our program. If a student’s behavior indicates that he or she cannot be placed with a family, the Program Director may consider dismissing that student from the program.

**Public Transportation and Travel**

One of the advantages of studying in Costa Rica is the relative ease with which you can travel throughout the country. The quality of the main roads ranges from poor to good, and buses serve almost every village that can be reached by a passable road.

In the capital you will travel by foot, taxi, or bus. Bus service in San José is good, although buses are frequently crowded. Fares range from about 50 to 75 cents per ride; there are no transfers. Taxis are plentiful and reasonably priced; a trip from the center of San José to the ACM office is 2.5 km and costs about $6. Most registered cabs use taximeters, so be sure to ride in a red taxi that has “SJP” (San José Público) painted on the doors and on the license plate. **Walking alone, (or in pairs in lonely places), is not recommended after dark. It is better to take a taxi to the door of your house after a night out, and to travel together in the taxi as far as possible (for women especially).** A woman should never sit in the front seat next to the taxi driver as this may lead to unwanted attention from the driver.

You will be traveling by public transportation from your urban host family’s home to the ACM office for your classes from Monday to Friday. You will be responsible for covering these transportation expenses in San José during the week as well as any expenses that may arise if you travel on weekends, so it is important for you to budget accordingly. Depending on where the homestay is located, the commute to/from the ACM office might be close to an hour each way. As mentioned above, the bus system in San José is considered safe and fairly reliable. A member of your family will accompany you to and from the ACM office until you are familiar with the route.

You may wish to use your days off to visit beaches, national parks, and other features of Costa Rica. Additionally, many students have had friends or family plan to visit you while you’re in Costa Rica. Please remember that it is not appropriate to miss classes in order to travel independently or guide visitors from home. Students in the past have reported that it’s often more beneficial and effective to wait until you’re in Costa Rica to plan weekend excursions so that you will have met other program participants and can plan to travel with others on the program.
ACM staff will provide you access to the ACM Independent Travel Form, which you will be expected to complete anytime you are leaving your program location to travel independently. We require this form not to track your whereabouts but to ensure a channel of communication in the case of any emergencies.

**NOTE:** Addresses in Costa Rica are not usually given by street and avenue number; instead, familiar buildings, churches or landmarks are used as points of reference. Distances are measured in meters. One block equals about 100 meters. Most blocks are not actually 100 meters in length, even though that is the way distances are described.

**Insurance, Health, and Safety**

While studying off-campus offers new educational opportunities, it can also present challenges and risks that are different from those on your home campus. Just as you prepare for a new mode of learning on the program, you should also think about living in a new environment that may contain new kinds of risks. You need to be aware of your health and your responsibility for monitoring new or ongoing medical concerns. You will not have the same support systems or forms of assistance that you have turned to on your home campus or in your home town. You will have days that are exciting and rewarding and also days where everything seems strange and exhausting. The ACM Costa Rica Director, Student Support Services Coordinator, ACM Chicago staff and new friends can all serve as great support systems. Here are some guidelines to keep in mind as you prepare for your semester in Costa Rica.

For information about health and safety in Costa Rica as a whole, two very useful websites are those of the U.S. Department of State and the Centers for Disease Control. You should share this information with your doctor or the physician who signs your Medical History form and your parents. You will want to make sure that you have the recommended vaccinations and are aware of and take precautions against the various health risks, as recommended by the CDC. These can be found at:

- [https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/costa-rica.html](https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/costa-rica.html)

(The Consular Information Sheet contains information about visa requirements, safety and crime, and road conditions among other things, while the Background Notes are more similar to an almanac entry, providing a summary of Costa Rican politics, history, the economy and basic statistics).

Once you have been registered for your medical insurance (see below), you will also have access to country-specific health and safety information on their website.

**Insurance**

As part of off-campus study, it is important that students be proactive in taking care of their health and safety prior, during, and after their journey. Planning for health and safety is just as important as choosing the program best fit for your needs and interests. Students will receive pre-departure information from their program, and can obtain additional information about their destination from the U.S. Department of State’s Students Abroad website. Please read this information carefully, and take time to learn about political situations, living conditions, medication restrictions and disability accommodations, and any other health and safety issues relevant to your host country.
As you prepare to leave campus, we hope that you will also consider the potential emotional stress of off-campus study. This experience can be a very powerful and positive developmental time that may ultimately lead to increased levels of self-awareness. However, the life changes associated with off-campus study can also be stressful and confusing, and may potentially exacerbate existing physical and emotional conditions. If you have any concerns, it is very important that you meet with the staff at Boettcher Health Center or other health care providers to discuss how off-campus study could affect your situation. Addressing your health issues prior to studying off campus will help you identify those resources that will and will not be available at your program site.

As a reminder, if you currently receive accommodations through the CC Accessibility Resource Center, please make sure to meet with that office well in advance of departing the U.S., as well as consulting closely with your study abroad provider to learn more about what medical or accessibility accommodations are available, and to develop a plan.

International SOS & University Health Partners (SOS+UHP)
Colorado College covers all students traveling abroad on a CC-faculty led block or semester (except the Latin American Semester on which students are covered by IFSA-Butler’s CISI insurance) under our International SOS/University Health Partners (SOS+UHP) policy, as well as students participating in one of the Colorado College bilateral exchange programs.

International SOS provides worldwide assistance and emergency evacuation services for study abroad participants. The services provided by SOS range from telephone advice and doctor referrals to evacuation by private air ambulance. Colorado College students have access to country-specific information on the SOS website, including recommended vaccinations, safety and security information, and more. The CC membership number for SOS is 11BSGC000027. Enter that number in the membership field at the top of the SOS website to access country-specific information. Note that SOS+UHP only provides coverage outside the United States and, therefore, does not provide coverage for any block or semester taught within the United States.

University Health Partners (UHP) provides $500,000 of health insurance abroad with no deductible. UHP covers prescription medicine that is prescribed in the foreign country at 100% and does not exclude pre-existing conditions. This will be your primary health insurance while you are on a CC course overseas.

Important notes:
Students are covered by the SOS+UHP insurance one day before the official course begin date to one day after the official course end date. If you plan to travel independently before or after your course(s), you will need to purchase insurance to cover you during your independent travel. We recommend the International Student Identity Card (ISIC) at the Premium or Explorer levels (not the Basic level which does not cover pre-existing conditions).

You should maintain health insurance coverage in the United States while you study abroad as study abroad insurance only covers you outside the United States. This will cover you before departure, during any unexpected trips back to the United States, and again when you re-enter the United States.

If you feel that additional coverage for health insurance or emergency coverage would be helpful for your situation, and your program does not fully cover an area or a time period that you might need, we strongly recommend that you consider purchasing the International Student ID Card Explorer insurance card. For less than $200, students are covered for up to a full year (outside the United States only). This is also helpful if you plan to travel independently abroad, either before or after your study abroad program.

Make a plan before you need it as to how you will navigate the health system where you will be studying, because it may be very different from home, and when you are sick is not the time to try to navigate it.
Health
While you are in Costa Rica, you need to be aware of your health and your responsibility for dealing with medical concerns. Pay particular attention to sanitation, food and water, especially in rural areas. Costa Rica has a good system of water and sanitation, with potable tap water in about 95% of the country. However, check with the staff and your host family in rural areas.

The challenges of adjusting to a new culture are an important part of what you will be experiencing in Costa Rica. Adjusting to this new environment can be especially difficult when you are away from friends, family, and college faculty or staff who know you well. You will have days that are exciting and rewarding and also days when much seems strange and exhausting. Program staff, host families, and new friends can help you recognize and talk through these pressures and staff can also recommend counselors if you feel they might help.

Medications and Other Medical Preparation
Health will be a special concern while you are living in an unfamiliar place without access to your regular physician or health service. In order to be sure that you will receive proper care from a physician who does not know you, you will have to provide an accurate and complete medical history. For allergies, ACM will need to know exactly what you are allergic to, what the reaction is, and the remedy you generally use. Any health information you provide to the ACM office is, of course, confidential. It will be released only to the program director.

If you have any pre-existing medical problems, bring a letter from the attending physician that describes the medical condition and any prescription medications (including the generic name). While vaccinations are not
required to travel to Costa Rica, the [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov) provides a list of recommended vaccines and medicines for disease prevention.

If you take one or more prescription drugs regularly, you will want to be sure you can continue this medication while abroad. Speak with your physician about the possibility of obtaining a supply to take with you. (And please make sure to keep it in its original container in your carry-on luggage with a copy of the prescription.) We recommend that students bring a 6-month supply of their prescription medications. If you cannot get a supply to take with you, you will want to verify that this medication can be obtained in Costa Rica. **You should not plan to have drugs (of any kind) sent to you while abroad.**

### Medical Services
Good medical facilities in the Costa Rica are widely available. ACM’s insurance provider CISI has certain “preferred providers,” but if students choose to visit a “non-preferred provider” they can still be reimbursed for costs later by CISI. ACM staff will assist with all medical appointments and visits.

The medical and dental facilities in San José are good. ACM has a variety of practitioners with whom we have worked in the past and to whom we are able to refer students for any necessary condition. Health services are also available outside the urban area and treatment for most minor problems can be obtained without returning to the capital. The cost of medical treatment (including medically-necessary dental needs) is covered through your insurance policy. You can buy most medicines over the counter, but they are as expensive as in the United States, if not more so. If you are suffering from a medical problem, please reach out to ACM staff to get assistance. They know the system well, and will be a helpful resource and support system.

### Psychological Counseling
If you require regular sessions with a counselor, please include this information on your Medical History Form so that we can help to make arrangements in advance. Our staff and our partners at is experienced with the resources available in Costa Rica and the benefits available to you through our health insurance provider.

### Safety
In San José you will be living and studying in a larger city than most of you do on your home campus. In the city, you will travel by foot, bus, or taxi. Public transportation is inexpensive and available to most parts of the city and country but may be crowded.

San José is well-known for its high rate of car accidents. Students should exercise extreme caution as pedestrians, especially early in the program when the traffic patterns are unfamiliar. In practice, **pedestrians do NOT have the right of way.** Even when crosswalk signs show the walk signal, look out for cars. Driving with Costa Rican friends in private cars is not encouraged. Students are not permitted to have or drive motor vehicles. This rule is strictly enforced and any violation of it may result in suspension from the program. Your host family and program staff can advise you about how to ensure your safety as you travel around San José and more generally in Costa Rica.

### Crime and Random Violence
Crime has become a problem in San José, as it has in most large cities in the world. Crimes against property are, however, much more common than crimes of violence. Theft is common; assault is not. Just as you would be careful with your backpack or wallet on subways and buses in New York City or Chicago, you should do the same in San José. Thieves are notorious for opening or cutting off purses (while they are being worn), slitting open backpacks, ripping gold chains off a person’s neck, and taking wallets from pockets. North Americans are often easy targets in San José, especially on crowded

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**ACM ALUMNI ADVICE:** The #1 thing you can do to facilitate your own safety is simply to be aware of your surroundings and trust your instincts.
buses, since they are usually unfamiliar with the city. Always remember to take proper safety precautions, including the following:

- Always carry your wallet in your front pocket and keep your hand on it in crowded areas. It is wise not to carry large amounts of cash in your wallet. Also, do not carry a driver’s license or other important items that you do not need.
- Carry your backpack or purse in front of you with your arm over it and be aware of what is happening around you.
- Make photocopies of the pages of your passport with personal information and your stamp of entry. You will leave one copy with the ACM office in case your passport is lost. You should also keep copies in your wallet, backpack, and other luggage.
- It is wise to have at least one locked suitcase at your Costa Rican household for keeping valuables or things of personal significance.
- Avoid walking around in the dark and/or solitary areas at any time of the day or night.
- As in most U.S. cities, women should try not to be out alone late at night, and all students are advised to take taxis home in pairs or groups at night.
- Try to look self-assured; never look lost.
- Check your map before going to a new place, so you won’t have to consult it on the street (since this makes you look like a tourist).
- Always be aware of your surroundings
- Look out for one another
- Don’t leave your drink unattended

If you are confronted with a thief or assailant, under no circumstances should you resist or attempt to flee. It is best to simply cooperate, and then to report the incident as soon as possible to the ACM Program Director or other available ACM staff member.

Women need to be particularly careful, especially returning home at night. Please pay close attention to the Costa Rica’s health and safety recommendations shared during orientation. In your home country, you know what the potential danger signs are; you should take special care until you learn the comparable signs in Costa Rica.

**Motor Vehicles**

You may not acquire or operate any kind of motorized vehicle while you are a participant in the ACM program, including motorcycles, motorbikes, or scooters. You will probably find, as do a great many residents of San Jose, that public transportation and walking are the most efficient means of getting around.

**Risky Activities**

Whitewater river rafting is increasingly popular in Costa Rica, and there are a number of excellent whitewater rivers. Ziplining is also a popular activity in Costa Rica’s rainforests. However, you are advised to check into the policies and security measures of several rafting tour and ziplining agencies before choosing one. Inquire about the skill and professional training of the river or ziplining guides, about the quality and maintenance of the equipment (rafts, oars, life vests, helmets), about precautions they take to avoid accidents and how they prepare participants for the experience, and about considerations of weather and water levels. Demand clear answers. Please take this advice very seriously.

The student health insurance that ACM provides does not provide coverage for certain activities, and as a result ACM prohibits students from engaging in those activities. This is for your protection as well as to prevent the potential for extremely expensive medical bills that may result from an accident resulting from these activities. **Prohibited activities include:** hang gliding, parachuting, bungee jumping, racing (by horse, motor vehicle, or motorcycle), parasailing, and mountaineering that involves ropes or guides.
Communication and Emergencies
All students are required to have a mode of communication where the visiting faculty director and/or ACM staff can get in immediate contact with you should there be an emergency. The emergency phone number for the ACM is 312.561.5911. Please see all other contact information above.

Enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) to receive security messages and make it easier to locate you in an emergency.

Independent Travel
You also need to be mindful of your personal safety as you travel independently on weekends or during the break. You are expected to inform the director and your host family of any travel plans and your expected time of return. You will be provided access to ACM’s Independent Travel Form to submit anytime you travel away from the program site without program staff. This form allows ACM to contact you or provide you with resources in case of emergency or change to program itineraries. When traveling, always use your hotel safe and keep baggage locked and secure. Monitor media and local information sources and factor that information into any personal travel plans or activities. We encourage you to travel with a partner or in a small group.

You must tell the ACM Student Services Coordinator and your host mother if you plan to travel on the weekend and provide the name and telephone number of the hotel/hostel where you will be staying. You do not need permission but we need to be able to reach you in the event of an emergency call from the U.S. or a national emergency in Costa Rica, such as an earthquake. You will be given access to ACM’s Independent Travel Form for this purpose.

- If you do not know the telephone number of the hostel or hotel ahead of time, please call your host family and the ACM Student Services Coordinator once you reach your destination.
- Do not travel alone. It is always best to be with at least one other person should problems arise.
- Make your travel plan so that you get to your destination before it gets dark and do not have to travel at night.
- Carry a notarized photocopy of your passport with you, and your list of ACM emergency phone numbers at all times.
- Take a taxi to downtown San José bus stops rather than walk downtown with luggage, as that makes you a target for theft.

Never leave any possessions unattended. This goes for the bus stop in San José as well as in the countryside. It is common for Ticos to place their belongings in a line alongside the bus to mark their place; however thieves frequently steal belongings left on the curbside. Keep your hands on your things!

Take your possessions on the bus with you. If it is absolutely necessary to stow your gear under the bus, be sure that you personally see your luggage put in the compartment below. A common practice of thieves is to pretend to be workers of the bus line, taking bags from passengers and putting them below. But after they put a few below, they take your bag from you and run away.

On a similar note, when the bus stops along the way to let people off before reaching your destination and the compartment below is opened, watch to see that your bags are not taken out.
Once seated on the bus, you should never give your luggage to anyone even if they look official. There is no reason why anyone would need to take possession of your luggage.

You will face risks in Costa Rica, just as anywhere else. Part of what you will learn on this program is how to recognize dangers and danger signs that are different from those you know at home. In most cases you can learn how to recognize and avoid these risks. In any case, let people know if you are feeling concerned or unsafe. Program staff, host families, and others can help you learn to deal with the risks in Costa Rica, just as they can help you learn to understand the history and culture of the country.

**Alcohol and Drug Use**

**Alcohol**

One significant area of difference between Costa Rica and the U.S. has to do with consumption of alcohol. While there is not the rigid enforcement of a drinking age in Costa Rica, you will also find that Ticos rarely drink to become intoxicated. Rather, alcohol is consumed in moderation on social occasions and with meals. Public drunkenness and rowdy behavior are frowned upon and will likely serve to identify you as an American thus potentially singling you out for further unwanted attention. Please keep in mind that your judgment is likely to be impaired with alcohol, and that you may lose the ability to evaluate situations with the same caution and sensitivity you would normally use.

**Drugs**

Costa Rica is not a haven for drugs users. Costa Rican authorities now make raids, stop people on the street, take unkempt-looking people into custody without explanation, and generally let people know that they mean to put an end to illegal drug use in Costa Rica. Anyone caught using illegal drugs can expect a long jail term, with little chance of early release. To date no ACM students have been questioned about drug-related activities and we hope to maintain this record. *You are on your own if you violate Costa Rican law. The ACM cannot and will not intercede on your behalf, nor will the U.S. Embassy.* All drugs that are illegal in the United States are also illegal in Costa Rica, and even some that are becoming legal in some parts of the U.S. (i.e. marijuana) remain illegal in Costa Rica.

Marijuana and other drug use can be very dangerous and can result in health implications and academic or legal consequences. Any accusation of an ACM student regarding drug possession or use could have severe repercussions on the program, the staff, and the students. Therefore, the possession or use of any illegal drugs may result in immediate dismissal from the program.

If you are arrested because of suspected involvement with drugs, the ACM program staff and American Consulate or Embassy will be able to do very little to help you. It is particularly important that you realize that ACM cannot function in a foreign country in the same way that your home college may function in dealings with civil authorities. In short, in case of trouble there is little ACM can do to insulate you from the effects of Costa Rican laws. If you are arrested on a drug charge, you may or may not be allowed consultation with the American Consulate.

**Legal and Ethical Issues**

**Pre-Columbian Antiquities**

It is illegal to take or send any pre-Columbian antiquities out of Costa Rica. This includes all artifacts, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant (pottery shards, stone tools, gold, jade, etc.). Many foreigners and Costa Ricans disregard this law, but the law serves a vital function in protecting Costa Rica’s cultural heritage, and the ACM expects full compliance from its students.

While it is legal to buy and sell antiquities within Costa Rica, provided they do not leave the country, archaeologists affiliated with our programs strongly urge you to refrain, for ethical reasons, from trafficking in artifacts in any way. Since pre-Columbian artifacts are the only surviving physical vestiges of the prehistoric, indigenous cultures of Costa Rica, they have enormous historical, cultural, and scientific value which is lost forever if artifacts are removed from their original context and treated as commodities.
Any excavation of archaeological sites without official permission from the National Museum is strictly prohibited.

**ACM’s Presence in Costa Rica**

In this environment, foreign students are received with great friendliness in both rural and urban areas. Because the quality of ACM students has been excellent in the past, the ACM enjoys a high level of cooperation from both private and government organizations with which the students work. We take all reasonable precautions but firmly believe that Costa Rica provides valuable educational resources and a peaceful, receptive environment for our academic programs.
Contact Information

ACM Chicago Office
11 E. Adams
Suite 800
Chicago, IL 60603
Phone: 312.263.5000
Fax: 312.263.5879

Emergency: 312.561.5911

Emily Gaul
Assistant Director of Off-Campus Study Programs
egaul@acm.edu
(312) 561-5919

Marlee Stein
Off-Campus Study Program Coordinator
(312) 561-5933
mstein@acm.edu

Joan Gillespie
Vice President and Director of Off-Campus Study Programs
(312) 561-5906
jgillespie@acm.edu

Inger Bull
Director of International Programs at Colorado College
(719) 227-8280
ibull@coloradocollege.edu

ACM Costa Rica Office

Physical Location
300 metros al sur y 50 al este de la Iglesia Católica de San Pedro de Montes de Oca,
San José, Costa Rica
(Use the physical address for mailing packages via DHL or other courier services)

Student mailing address
Student's name
Associated Colleges of the Midwest
Apartado (P.O. Box) 2562-2050
San Pedro de Montes de Oca, Costa Rica
CENTRAL AMERICA

Javier Espeleta, Director
jespeleta@acm.edu
011-506-2225-0725 ext. 14 (Office)
011-506-8702-3836 (Cellular)

U.S. Embassy in Costa Rica (Rohrmoser, San José,
Ave. 0, Calle 120)
(011-506) 2220-3939

Office Hours
Monday through Friday, 8:00a.m. – 12:00
p.m. and 1:00 – 4:30 p.m.

Building Hours
Monday through Friday, 7:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
All students, professors and advisors must
leave the building by 4:30 p.m.
On-site Staff & Faculty

Javier Espeleta, Director
Supervises all administrative and educational program matters and coordinates the work of professors and staff. The director also serves as contact in case of emergencies and for general information about the program.

Jespeleta@acm.edu

Marco Castro Rodriguez, Academic Coordinator
mcastro@acm.edu
Manages the community engagements placements and teaches the accompanying course. He manages the program library and google sites among other academic student services. He also coordinates relations with the University of Costa Rica, including the Scholarship program for Costa Rican Students.

Mario Morera, Spanish Language Coordinator
mmorera@acm.edu
Coordinates all aspects of the Spanish language curriculum for the ACM Costa Rica programs. Teaches one or more Spanish language classes.

Iveth Duarte, Building Attendant
iduarte@acm.edu
Iveth is responsible for taking care of and maintaining the ACM building. She prepares food for all ACM events and supervises kitchen use.
**Program Policies**

The Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM) is a consortium of 14 residential liberal arts colleges in Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and Colorado. ACM programs reflect the academic standards and policies of its member colleges, and the standards and policies in the paragraphs which follow are applicable for all ACM off-campus study programs.

The ACM Off-Campus Study Program mission begins:

Our programs’ academic standards and curricula are rooted in the liberal arts. They emphasize the interdisciplinary educational approach, intimacy of small classes, focus on independent research, and discussion-based learning that characterize liberal arts education at ACM colleges. The programs accelerate and deepen students’ scholarly and personal growth through structured interactions between selected topics and distinctive locations. They offer educational experiences unlike those found in conventional classrooms.

You and all ACM students play an essential role in ensuring that the scholarly and personal growth sought as an outcome of this mission is accomplished in a dignified and respectful manner in conjunction with the people and customs of the host culture. As guests in the cities and countries of our various programs, all students are subject to the same laws and regulations as their host citizens and are responsible for knowing both ACM policies and local laws.

The ACM Code of Student Responsibility and its subsidiary policies exist to facilitate the educational process for you and the other students and to ensure a safe, fair, and successful experience for all students, staff, and faculty. While enrolled in an ACM program, your home campus may also choose to hold you accountable to their code of conduct. If enrolled in a host institution during their off-campus study experience, students will also be subject to the policies of that host institution.

**ACM Code of Student Responsibility**

The ACM Code of Student Responsibility reads as follows:

I understand that I am required to comply with all policies and procedures of the ACM including policies outlined here as well as program-specific rules introduced during the on-site orientation. My participation in an ACM program represents my college and the ACM consortium at all times. I know that my behavior must respect the values and norms of the host community while promoting the safety and wellbeing of other students and my program’s faculty and staff. I will strive to ensure that my behavior supports the educational nature of the ACM at all times.

Studying off-campus during your college career can be both very exciting and very challenging. Many students return to their home campus feeling dramatically changed, eager to embark on a new academic or career path, or with a clearer understanding of who they are as an individual. Off-campus study is a privilege; an option within higher education that not all students can select as a part of their collegiate experience. It often creates lifetime memories and presents multiple prospects for personal growth. In order to protect this opportunity for all students, however, ACM has instituted some policies and to ensure it remains accessible to the greatest possible number of students.

Please note that these policies and procedures comprise guidelines that can be changed by ACM at any time in its discretion. It is not and should not be construed as a contract, either express or implied.
ACM Policies and Procedures
On our website, you will find the following ACM policies and procedures for which you are expected to adhere to:

ACM Code of Student Responsibility
ACM Policy on Academics
ACM Housing Policy
ACM Policy on Alcohol and Drugs
ACM Policy on Sexual Harassment
ACM Policy on Dual Relationships
ACM Policy on Sexual Assault
ACM Policy on Non-Discrimination
ACM Student Conduct Procedures
ACM Policy on Tuition, Program Fees and Refunds
ACM Policy on Health and Safety Notification
Off-Campus Study Contract
ACM Photograph and Video Release
Evaluations and Surveys

Please read through these closely before signing the ACM Comprehensive Release form (this is included on the accepted student webpage). These policies were designed with your health and well-being in mind. They are intended to support you, your peers, and the entire off-campus study community as you develop personally, professionally, and academically on your Off-Campus Study Program.
Personal Information “Opt-Out” Form
In accordance with the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), as amended, 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. Provisions of FERPA allow the institution to define certain classes of information as “directory information,” and 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

Additionally, throughout the duration of ACM off-campus study programs, ACM representatives may take photographs, make video or audio recordings, or write articles about program participants and/or activities that involve program participants. Many student participants and associated faculty and staff may also take photos and videos, write articles, or maintain blogs for their own personal use, which they frequently share with the ACM. The ACM also shares short excerpts of student work, such as titles and overviews of projects and brief research abstracts. These images, recordings, excerpts, and accounts are regularly collected for the primary purpose of highlighting and showcasing the ACM via our website, posters, brochures, and other educational marketing materials. (Note: The ACM will never publish full accounts of student projects or research or use student photographs, video, or audio recordings without specific permission from the student in question.)

If you do not want the ACM to release your directory information, use your likeness in photos or recordings, or share excerpts of your work without your prior consent, you may choose to “opt-out” by making a copy and signing the form below. Requests can only be made via this form, which must be completed and returned to the ACM prior to participation in the program, to be applicable to that semester/term and for subsequent periods of time. Students wishing to reverse this decision may complete and submit the revocation section of the form below.

I request the withholding of the following personally identifiable information, associated with my participation in an off-campus study program through the Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM). I understand that upon submission of this form, the information checked will not be released or used for ACM promotional purposes without my written consent or unless the ACM is required by law or permitted under FERPA to release such information without my prior written consent; and that the checked information will not otherwise be released or used from the time the ACM receives my form until my opt-out request is rescinded. I further understand that if any of the information checked below is released or used prior to the ACM receiving my opt-out request, the ACM may not be able to stop the disclosure of this information.

CHECK ALL BOXES THAT APPLY:

☐ Name
☐ College/university
☐ E-mail address
☐ Off-campus study program
☐ Semester/term of off-campus study
☐ Awards, honors
☐ Use of likeness in ACM recordings (photos, video, audio, written articles)
☐ Use of short excerpts of student work (titles, overviews, and abstracts)
☐ All items listed above

Name (please print)      Signature      Date
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RESCISSION OF OPT-OUT REQUEST

I, the above named student, hereby rescind my request to opt-out from the release of the information indicated above.

________________________________________________________
Signature      Date

