

# Field Safety Discussion Minutes

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Date: Friday, March 18, 2011

Time: 10:30 – 12:30pm

Place: SSC 2257

## Introduction

Purpose of meeting is to discuss various aspects of safety while in the field including planning ahead and things to think about. An informal discussion where individuals can share past experiences and insights.

Each individual introduced themselves and stated where they will be completing field work.

## Depart Smart

DepartSmart is an academic travel orientation course intended for use by students, faculty and staff involved in overseas academic programs. It was developed in Canada by The Centre for International Programs (University of Guelph), The International Centre (Queen's University), and York International (York University). Students, faculty and staff are encouraged to read through the material. Many of the modules contain worksheets and/or activities to help you prepare and organize your trip.

DepartSmart can be found at <http://web.viu.ca/studyabroad/departsmart/modules/welcome.htm>

## Getting Ready

### Learn About Your Destination

It is important to learn about the country you are traveling to. Read about the country's historical overview, recent unrest or conflicts, sensitive topics, taboos, gender considerations, access to religious sites, dress code, laws regarding matters such as alcohol use etc. Sources of information include guidebooks, contacts at UWO, research networks, Google scholar.

Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada provides information regarding trip planning such as country information, travel reports and warnings, traveler's checklists and lists of Canadian Government offices abroad (Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada [www.voyage.gc.ca](http://www.voyage.gc.ca)). They also offer a registration service for all Canadians travelling or living abroad. This service is provided so that the Government can contact and assist you in an emergency in a foreign country, such as a natural disaster or civil unrest, or inform you of a family emergency at home. If an evacuation is mounted you have to pay for it. Sometimes it is safer to stay put.

You can contact the Associate Dean of Social Science for contact information (researchers working in the area) as well as Western Research who can find contacts. This group can also inform you of specific agreements between UWO and other institutions within the country.

Research in SSC <http://www.ssc.uwo.ca/research/>

Research Western <http://www.uwo.ca/research/index.html>

## Health Care

SOGS provides its members with an extended health coverage plan. Covers prescription drugs, basic dental and vision care and travel assist coverage. Part-time students are not included in the SOGS health plan but are eligible to opt-in (same with post docs). Exchange and visiting graduate students are not eligible. 80% of your prescription drugs and extended health coverage will be co-insured through the health plan. Travel assist will provide reimbursement for emergency out-of-province and Canada hospital, surgical and medical expenses to a maximum of \$2,000,000 limited to 60 days per trip. Eligible benefits are limited to a maximum of 60 days per trip commencing with the date of departure you're your province. Coverage can be extended past 60 days, however, approval is required prior to departure. Travel Assist services are available 24 hours a day to enhance your out-of-Canada and province hospital and medical benefits. Should you experience a medical emergency while outside of Canada you should contact Travel Assist prior to seeking medical treatment. Upon return to Canada complete out-of-Canada claim form and submit with receipts. If the country you are traveling to has been issued a warning you may not be covered. Not all vaccines are eligible for reimbursement; find out early.

For more on the SOGS Health Plan: [www.uwo.ca/sogs](http://www.uwo.ca/sogs)

Be sure to carry your provincial health card (or equivalent) and your SOGS travel assist card.

Take extra medication in case delayed in country or medication is lost/stolen. Carry medications in original bottles and store in separate locations. May want to get antibiotics before you leave to take with you. Over the counter antibiotics in some developing countries may be fake or you may purchase incorrect item. Discuss with family doctor before departing on fieldwork. Take a copy of any prescriptions you have. Those using syringes should get a memo from their doctors explaining their condition and need.

Find out about access to good medical care in the region and local emergency phone numbers.

## Immunization

Find out about immunization required to enter the country and risks of contagious diseases. Get the required immunization(s) from a recognized travel clinic. Public Health Agency of Canada provides a list of travel medicine clinics. Dr. Hammerberg (London Travel Clinic) and Dr. Colby (London Middlesex Health Unit) are good sources regarding immunization information. Do this in plenty of time; they can very busy! Take immunization records with you.

Expatriates may not have the best knowledge/advice. Speak with doctors.

Avoidance is important ex. contracting Malaria from mosquitoes that are active at night. Cover up bare skin and use mosquito nets.

## First Aid

The Student Emergency Response Team (SERT) provides standard first aid training on campus for \$85. The course is two 8-hour days. This is not wilderness first aid; St John's Ambulance offers a three weekend Wilderness First Aid which is organized by special arrangement only. The Department of Geography will pay for first aid training for faculty and graduate students.

UWO Campus Police offer Rape Aggression Defense (RAD) training for women on campus. The course provides basic information of personal safety, awareness, avoidance and defensive techniques. No sessions are currently outlined on the Campus Police website, however, please contact Campus Police for more information as well as upcoming dates.

First aid kits are available for Geography students on a first-come-first serve basis (see E. Hill).

Learn, and carry with you, local emergency/fire/police phone numbers.

## Discuss Expectations & Back-up Plans

Discuss with your supervisor and others that have traveled to the area what you should expect; particularly if you have not completed field research before.

Important to have research back-up plans if it is not safe to complete your original research. Realize that there are many worse things that can happen to you than not being able to complete your original research.

Have realistic expectations. A lot of what you are doing as a graduate student is learning.

## Developing Communication Plans

Have a communication plan. Ensure that you have an emergency plan. Know what to do, who you need to contact and how.

Complete an Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risk (waiver) form. Purpose of form is to collect emergency contact information from you in case you need to contact UWO and/or UWO needs to contact you. UWO also wants students to understand that UWO is not responsible if they are negligent or engage in dangerous behavior and that UWO does not carry accident insurance for them. Also UWO is not responsible if something happens because of a 'force of nature'. The form includes:

- Name, date, field location, OHIP number, health insurance plan, type and number, emergency contact information, health information (allergies, drug sensitivities, regular medications and other information that a doctor may need).
- This information is uploaded via a Secure File Transfer to Registrarial Services and Campus Police.

In Geography we have faculty and students complete a Safety Plan with your supervisor. This is your emergency plan and is intended to help individuals in the planning process. More complicated and potentially dangerous fieldwork requires more extensive safety plans. Safety plan includes:

- Fieldwork supervisor's/participant's: name, contact information in the field, emergency contact information, medical conditions.
- Location of fieldwork: geographical site, nearest community, nearest emergency services and contact numbers
- Date of departure and return
- Nature of fieldwork and possible hazards (local diseases, weather hazards (ex. hypothermia), wild animals, legal risks (ex. photographing restricted installations), crime risks (ex theft, carjacking, stalking, civil insurrection), health risks (unavailability of necessary prescriptions)
- Chain of leadership (supervisors, workers, trained first aiders)
- Emergency procedures: what to do if there is an emergency, who to contact and how (ie evacuation plans). You may require a cell phone, satellite phone if in more remote locations and/or helicopter evacuation. (A cell phone may work in relatively civilized areas, but away from main road corridors and towns, cell phones may not work. A satellite phone might be the best means of emergency communication (be aware that the Global Star system does not work north or south of about 70 degrees latitude). Make sure that everyone in the party knows how to use the satellite phone).
- Travel insurance requirements
- Immunization requirements
- Inspection of equipment and personal protective equipment
- Adequate training (e.g. navigation and map reading, what to do in case of confrontation with bears, dangerous snakes, water safety etc.)

Leave a detailed travel itinerary and contact details with family and friends so they can get hold you. A day-by-day itinerary may be impractical/impossible as fieldwork schedules commonly change but the idea is to let someone know where you are and when you are expected back.

Important to carry an Emergency Information Card with your emergency contact information, allergies, medications, insurance information, contacts within the community and emergency service numbers (ie what are the local emergency/fire/police phone numbers).

Always carry your passport with you! Make copies of your passport and bring along but keep in a different place. Leave a copy of passport with family or friend. Do this for any Visas, birth certificate, health insurance, plane tickets and any other important documents (ex contact information, itinerary, bank accounts).

Explore the various options for local communications (ex. project partners)

## Personal Safety

### Arrival and Accommodation

Try to arrive during daylight hours.

Stay in safe accommodations; resources include supervisor contacts, local partners, own intuition (observe other people and the advice of locals).

Ensure that doors and windows lock and are safe.

### **Walking, public events, parties etc.**

Be well aware of your surroundings. Trust your gut; if something doesn't feel or seem right, it likely isn't.

Learn about special gender consideration, street-smart movement, unsafe neighborhoods or regions, pickpockets, public demonstrations etc.

Important to know someone that you can trust; supervisor should have contacts in the community where you are working.

Learn about the local culture, appropriate social behavior (ex. 15 years ago it was illegal for women in Malawi to wear pants). Be aware of body language issues; what message are you sending?

Keep money/valuables out of sight. Some people carry a 'muggers' wallet with little money in it.

Read about how to identify corruption and contraband markets, how to refuse money or requests for gifts or money etc. Many have found it is helpful to be polite and feign ignorance.

Know where you are. Have a detailed topographic map with you, and know how to use it. A GPS unit is a nice accessory but they do not always work (batteries, deep ravines, forest).

At all times, try to ensure that someone knows where you are. It may be possible to leave a detailed day-by-day itinerary with a responsible person at home. However, fieldwork schedules commonly change depending on weather or other conditions so a definitive schedule may be impractical. It is usually possible to notify someone of your movements on timescales of a few days.

### **Drinking, Drugs etc.**

Avoid drugs and alcohol; impacts your judgment and the judgment of others.

Know the local laws; if you are around people doing drugs you could be arrested too. Just because police leave a group of locals doing drugs alone, you may be targeted. Learn about local stereotypes/images (ex Malawi where women drinking in bars are considered to be prostitutes).

Be very careful and cautious regarding sex (both physically and socially). Imagine the worst case scenario.

### **Transportation**

Learn about public transportation standards, Canadian driver license recognition, traffic travel on the right or left etc.

Road safety is different in different countries; in some countries drinking and driving is not viewed the same way as in Canada. Often training standards are quite different.

Road safety is very important and dangerous driving is often a cause of injuries and deaths (ex. the dangers of mini buses in Malawi). Important to have a driver that you can trust. Cabs are generally the safest means of travel. Wear a seatbelt when possible.

## Keeping Healthy

Food safety and nutrition is important; know how food and drink has been prepared. Don't accept food from strangers (think date-rape drug). Make sure water is boiled properly. If you have vitamin deficiencies take vitamin supplements with you.

Learn about culture shock, what you should expect, its cause, symptoms and stages, some of the coping techniques and strategies to minimize culture shock.

May be along a lot of the time; develop support mechanisms (ex. someone local you can talk to, call home to talk to family/friends, books, music, comfort things, keep a journal).

Normal to doubt own research when in field alone, away from supervisor/colleagues. Suggested book: Improvising Theory (<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/l/bo5417893.html>) – a collection of emails from a novice fieldwork student to their supervisor.

Isolation due to language barrier: start learning the local language, even just the basics.

When you return home get a checkup.

# Resources

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DepartSmart <http://web.viu.ca/studyabroad/departsmart/modules/welcome.htm>

## Learn About Your Destination

Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada [www.voyage.gc.ca](http://www.voyage.gc.ca)

Research in SSC <http://www.ssc.uwo.ca/research/>

Research Western <http://www.uwo.ca/research/index.html>

## Health Care

Health Plan [www.uwo.ca/sogs](http://www.uwo.ca/sogs)

## Immunization

Public Health Agency of Canada [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/travel/clinic-eng.php#on](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/travel/clinic-eng.php#on)

William D. Colby Travel Clinic Inc. [www.healthunit.com/sectionList.aspx?sectionID=357](http://www.healthunit.com/sectionList.aspx?sectionID=357)

London Travel Clinic (Dr. Hammerberg) [www.londontravelclinic.com](http://www.londontravelclinic.com)

## **First Aid**

Student Emergency Response Team [www.sert.uwo.ca](http://www.sert.uwo.ca)

St. Johns Ambulance [www.sja.ca](http://www.sja.ca)

Campus Police RAD [www.uwo.ca/police/radtraining.htm](http://www.uwo.ca/police/radtraining.htm)