

Prologue

In our daily lives, few activities are more common or less unremarkable than driving, or being driven, to some location—work, school, a store, or home. And if we are not on the roads, we are walking next to and crossing roads as a pedestrian. Consequently, whether we consciously think about it or not, our safety on and along roads is always with us.

When students travel abroad to pursue an educational activity—study, work, research—road travel remains a constant reality. Unlike at home, however, students often do not possess the critical skills and awareness necessary to practice safe road travel in their new environment. It is incumbent on everyone involved in the education abroad enterprise to prepare students, educators, hosts, parents, and students alike. This handbook is intended to aid all of these individuals in the process of encouraging education abroad participants to be safe road travelers.

Road safety awareness in education abroad is not new. Study abroad advisers have been giving advice about a variety of road safety concerns for decades, including information about public transportation, driving requirements, and how to remember—in certain countries like Britain and Japan—to first look right instead of left for oncoming traffic. Study abroad orientation programs—the mainstay of preparing students for their overseas experiences—have also focused extensively on such issues as alcohol use and its relationship to safe behavior—including the mantra, “Don’t Drink and Drive.”

Still, as attention to health and safety issues in education abroad has intensified since the late 1990s, comprehensive materials and advice on addressing road safety have been conspicuously absent. It is arguably the case that road safety is among the top safety issues for education abroad; David Larsen, Vice President and Director of Education Abroad at Arcadia University, testified to that effect before a congressional committee in 2001 in the first ever hearing dedicated to the subject of safety in education abroad.

This handbook is designed to address the need for a systematic approach to preparing students for their overseas educational sojourn. It has distinct, complementary sections intended to aid study abroad administrators, faculty leaders of study abroad activities, and students. The handbook has been written and reviewed by a team of road safety advocates, study abroad professionals, and safety and security specialists. It is crafted in a way that its authors hope will inform and empower study abroad participants without alarming them.

The founder of the Association for Safe International Road Travel (ASIRT), Rochelle Sobel, and ASIRT’s executive directors, Laurie Wexler and Cathy Silberman, deserve the lion’s share of the credit for this handbook. They have been advocating for this handbook since I first met them in 2000. Their appreciation for the need to encourage safe road travel among our traveling student population—inspired by Rochelle’s own personal tragedy—is central to this project.

Aiding that vision have been study abroad professionals active in the education abroad health and safety efforts. Each is a member of NAFSA: Association of International Educators, the professional association under whose umbrella professional practice for education abroad is developed and disseminated. To this handbook, these individuals have brought the collected knowledge of how to convey the practice of safe road travel to stu-

dents who are about to go abroad, or are presently on an education abroad program. Their contributions represent the best practices of the profession.

It has been a special privilege for me to be involved in the writing of this handbook, to be active with ASIRT as a board member, and to have encouraged the engagement of education abroad colleagues in this necessary and worthwhile project. I trust this handbook will be useful to its readers – be they students, parents, faculty, or study abroad professionals.

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