



Memorandum

Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning)

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TO: Senate

FROM: Professor Morton J. Mendelson, Deputy Provost (Student Life & Learning)

SUBJECT: University-Related Travel by Students and University Staff Accompanying Them

DATE: December 8, 2010

DOCUMENT #: D10-25

ACTION REQUIRED: INFORMATION APPROVAL/DECISION

ISSUE: Update on the University-Related Travel Guidelines (“Guidelines”) since their implementation in September 2009.

BACKGROUND & RATIONALE:

The Guidelines, available on line¹, were implemented to provide information and University-wide standards for the approval of international travel activities and to support consistency, by providing a single set of rules for this growing and important area.

The Guidelines require those planning a student international travel activity to consider information relevant to the nature of the activity and the associated risks and to be guided by the Government of Canada Departmental of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) travel warnings, and avoid locations for which DFAIT has issued a level-3 (avoid non-essential travel) or level-4 (avoid all travel) warning.

Deans or their delegates were also asked to consider requests for exemption from students wishing to travel to a country or region under a DFAIT level-3 travel warning. To date, 11 requests have been received from students seeking such exemption.

The Travel Guidelines established three key requirements for students travelling for University-related travel activities (i.e., bilateral exchange, internship, independent study-away, graduate work or other activity): attend predeparture orientation sessions, register their travel, and carry sufficient insurance.

¹ www.mcgill.ca/files/secretariat/International-Mobility-Guidelines.pdf

The predeparture sessions were developed to provide students with information regarding travel abroad. General information regarding consular services, insurance and personal health and safety is presented in a plenary session, which is followed by regional breakout sessions. The goal of predeparture orientation is to ensure that students have access to the information that they need to prepare for, and have, safe and successful educational experiences.

A Minerva-based travel registry form is created for each student participating in an approved activity. Students complete the form prior to their departure, to provide the University with their travel plans, including an itinerary and basic personal information, which would be needed in case of emergency.

A travel warning protocol is being developed to ensure that University staff and students are informed promptly of DFAIT travel warnings and to assist with communication to offer assistance and determine the best course of action for students engaged in activities in an affected region.

**MOTION OR
RESOLUTION
FOR APPROVAL:**

N/A

**PRIOR
CONSULTATION:**

Prior to implementation: Senate (January 2009), Deans, Directors, Chairs, Student Associations (SSMU, PGSS and MCSS) and others who expressed special interest in this issue.

Since implementation: Regular review with members of the McGill International Education Network and with Faculties regarding administrative issues. The Enrolment and Student Affairs Advisory Committee has been consulted on the establishment of a travel warning protocol.

NEXT STEPS:

N/A

APPENDICES:

Appendix A: Report on Guidelines for International Mobility

Report on Guidelines for International Mobility

Morton J. Mendelson

Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning)

December 2010

A commitment to student mobility was included in the *Strengths & Aspirations* ([http://www.mcgill.ca/files/provost/Strengths and Aspirations June 2006.pdf](http://www.mcgill.ca/files/provost/Strengths_and_Aspirations_June_2006.pdf)) document that:

“The University will expand the range of international experience available to its students”. The University is intent on enabling students to gain international experience and conduct research on the international stage. However, the University is committed to the safety of community members. The strategic plan also stated that: “McGill will ensure that safety of all individuals—students, staff and visitors...is not compromised in the pursuit of excellence in research and teaching.”

McGill encourages students to include an international educational experience as part of their studies, but the University does not approve student travel to countries or regions of countries where the safety of students, which is of primary importance, would be compromised. Rather, the University set out, with the implementation in September 2009 of the University-Related Travel (International Mobility) Guidelines, to adopt best practices to provide students with access to the information they need for safe and successful educational experiences while they engage in academic activities abroad.

The Guidelines were developed to provide information and establish University-wide standards for the approval of international travel activities and to support consistency by providing a single set of rules for this growing and important area. The Guidelines apply to all University-related curricular activities (i.e., credit or non-credit course work, exchange programs, field work, and research) and co-curricular activities (e.g., University-sponsored internships), where international travel forms an essential part of the activity, whether or not the student is pursuing the activity for academic credit or recognition and whether or not the student receives University or third-party funding.

The Guidelines require staff members and students planning an activity to consider information relevant to the nature of the activity and the associated risks and to be guided by the Departmental of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) travel warnings and avoid locations for which DFAIT has issued a level-3 (avoid non-essential travel) or level-4 (avoid all travel) warning.

In the event that travel is discouraged or prohibited to the planned country or region, an alternate destination should be considered. Where the student deems the travel to a country or region with a DFAIT level-3 (avoid non-essential travel) warning to be essential, the student can request an exemption.

Requests for Exemption

A request for an exemption under the guidelines is considered, provided the student has the support of the Chair/School or Program Director and the approval of the Dean of the Faculty. The Deputy

Provost has been asked to consider 11 such requests, since implementation of the Guidelines.

Although academic units have not reported on requests denied at the unit level, all requests made to the Deputy Provost were well supported and received approval. The process seems to work well, ensuring due consideration of important issues: the rationale for the planned activity; the necessity for travel to the particular country or region; the factors, experience and measures undertaken to mitigate the risks; and the absence of a suitable alternative activity. No activities were delayed, but one student, who received approval, decided to heed the University's caution and did not to make the proposed trip.

The Guidelines set out three requirements for students: attend a predeparture orientation session, register their activity, and carry sufficient insurance.

Predeparture Orientation

Since the implementation of the Guidelines in September 2009, over 1,100 students have attended newly developed University-wide predeparture orientation sessions. The main objective is to provide students with basic information for travel abroad as well as specific information on health and safety. To achieve this, we enlist the help of academic staff and officials from DFAIT.

The plenary sessions begin with a presentation on consular services, travel reports and travel warnings by the DFAIT representative. This is followed by a session on personal health abroad and healthy travel tips given by a health-care professional from Student Health Services. The Plenary ends with a general information session that covers university resources, registration, insurance, etc. The plenary is followed by regional breakout sessions led by academic staff focusing on region-specific issues relating to intercultural effectiveness, health and safety. In addition, the health-care professional visits each breakout session to cover region-specific health issues.

Note that students attending international conferences or formally organized workshops held in countries listed by DFAIT at Level-1 (Exercise normal security precautions) or Level-2 (Exercise a high degree of caution) are not required to attend predeparture orientation but are required to register their travel and carry sufficient insurance.

A session was held in each of the fall semesters of 2009 and 2010 for students going abroad in the following winter, as well as in spring 2010 for students planning to travel in the following summer or fall. In addition to these sessions, special make-up sessions were held for students who, for a valid reason, were unable to attend the full session. Table 1 presents the attendance for the various sessions, broken down by the purpose of the activity. Post-session feedback indicated that students found the sessions helpful and the opportunity for discussion very valuable, which may account for the increasing attendance over time.

Table 1
Predeparture Orientation Attendance

Type of International Activity	<i>(Make-up Session)</i>		<i>(Make-up Session)</i>		Oct-10
	Oct-09	Dec-09	Mar-10	Apr-10	
Bilateral Exchange	159	10	175	22	239
Field Study	17	10	53	12	41
Graduate Work	6	8	25	25	10
Independent Study-Away	8	12	39	15	13
Internship	6	4	128	11	12
Other	7	8	42	17	23
Total	203	52	462	102	338
Semester total		255		564	

Minerva Travel Registry

The Minerva Travel Registry collects and stores, in one place, the student's personal information and travel plans, including emergency contact information, in-country address, and travel details.

Once the activity has been approved by the academic unit or research supervisor, a travel registry form is created in Minerva for each student travelling abroad. Based in Minerva, the form is prefilled with information from the student record system, and enables students to update their record in addition to providing details regarding their travel plans. Forms can be created for individual activities, such as internships or can be generated for a whole class when the student registers for a course that includes an international component. For group activities, the organizer can complete registry sections for the whole group: e.g., itinerary, host address, etc. Students are asked to provide personal information, on site contact information, and the name of their supervisor or program administrator.

Use of the travel registry is on the rise; 764 forms were created for students travelling in the winter 2009 semester, and 1,059 were created for the following summer. Unfortunately, of these, about half of the forms in each semester were left incomplete by students. Thus, although some of their travel details were provided, students omitted some of the requested information. Moreover, the students did not accept a set of conditions required to complete the form. Several fields in the registry are currently under review, and discussions with administrators using the travel registry are ongoing. Information will be sought from students who left forms incomplete, so that we can improve the process.

Requiring students to register their travel encourages them to review their insurance coverage, the inoculations that might be required, and other aspects of travel and to update contact information in case of emergency. For those responsible for activities, the travel registry has increased efficiency by eliminating duplication, and information is accessible, even in the field, to those who need it. Supervisors can access a complete list of all students in a particular activity or region and comprehensive reports can be produced. The key benefit of the travel registry is knowing, at any time, where McGill students are in the world and how to contact them in case of emergency.

Travel Warning Protocol

DFAIT issues travel warnings when the security of Canadians visiting a particular region abroad may be compromised. These warnings provide the Government of Canada's official advice regarding travel to a country or specific region(s) of a country.

Over the past year, there were three such travel warnings that affected McGill students: the H1N1 outbreak in Mexico in winter 2009; demonstrations in Bangkok, Thailand in winter 2010; and the eruption of Mount Merapi in Indonesia in fall 2010. In all three cases, the travel registry facilitated communication with students as events unfolded. Students received advice and, in some cases, arrangements were made with partner institutions and assistance provided for completion of academic work by students upon return to McGill.

As a result of these discrete events, a travel warning protocol was established to systematically deal with such incidents going forward. The Office of International Education in the Office of the Deputy Provost checks DFAIT Travel Reports daily and brings warnings that may affect our students to the attention of the faculty student affairs office or graduate program supervisor. Warning messages are also copied to the Dean of Students and, if relevant, the graduate program director. The protocol will ensure that those concerned within the University are apprised of DFAIT warnings and that appropriate messages are communicated to students in affected areas.