

Student Study Guide: Alcohol Awareness in Study Abroad
www.globaled.us/safeti/alcohol

The Center for Global Education, Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA)

This companion study guide is for students using the Center for Global Education’s **Alcohol Awareness in Study Abroad** video. It begins with a list of student alcohol awareness basics as well as some background on the scope of the issue. Watching the video and reviewing this list are good ways to start planning for a safe and rewarding study abroad experience.

1) Know your BAC

Knowing the impact of drinking on your blood alcohol content may help you avoid drinking to a point at which your judgment is seriously impaired (i.e. greater than a .05 BAC). Men and women going abroad should review these BAC charts so that they know where impairment begins and how it impacts their capacity to behave responsibly.

BAC Chart for Men Approximate Blood Alcohol Percentage									
Drinks	Body Weight in Pounds								
	100	120	140	160	180	200	220	240	
0	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	Only Safe Driving Limit
1	.04	.03	.03	.02	.02	.02	.02	.02	
2	.08	.06	.05	.05	.04	.04	.03	.03	Driving Skills Affected – Possible Criminal Penalties
3	.11	.09	.08	.07	.06	.06	.05	.05	
4	.15	.12	.11	.09	.08	.08	.07	.06	
5	.19	.16	.13	.12	.11	.09	.09	.08	Legally Intoxicated – Criminal Penalties
6	.23	.19	.16	.14	.13	.11	.10	.09	
7	.26	.22	.19	.16	.15	.13	.12	.11	
8	.30	.25	.21	.19	.17	.15	.14	.13	
9	.34	.28	.24	.21	.19	.17	.15	.14	
10	.38	.31	.27	.23	.21	.19	.17	.16	

BAC Chart for Women Approximate Blood Alcohol Percentage										
Drinks	Body Weight in Pounds									
	100	120	140	160	180	200	220	240		
0	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	Only Safe Driving Limit
1	.05	.05	.04	.03	.03	.03	.02	.02	.02	Impairment Begins
2	.10	.09	.08	.07	.06	.05	.05	.04	.04	Driving Skills Affected – Possible Criminal Penalties
3	.15	.14	.11	.10	.09	.08	.07	.06	.06	
4	.20	.18	.15	.13	.11	.10	.09	.08	.08	Legally Intoxicated – Criminal Penalties
5	.25	.23	.19	.16	.14	.13	.11	.10	.09	
6	.30	.27	.23	.19	.17	.15	.14	.12	.11	
7	.35	.32	.27	.23	.20	.18	.16	.14	.13	
8	.40	.36	.30	.26	.23	.20	.18	.17	.15	
9	.45	.41	.34	.29	.26	.23	.20	.19	.17	
10	.51	.45	.38	.32	.28	.25	.23	.21	.19	

2) Know the Consequences of Excessive Drinking

Annually, approximately 1,700 U.S. college students between the ages of 18 and 24 die from alcohol-related injuries, including motor vehicle crashes. Thousands of students have suffered unintentional injury, assault and sexual abuse while drunk. Other consequences of excessive drinking include **unsafe sex, academic problems, health problems, suicide attempts, drunk driving and vandalism.**

According to one study (Hingson et al., 2002), more than 100,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 report having been too intoxicated to know if they consented to having sex. The researchers also found that 25 percent of college students report negative academic consequences of their drinking including missed class, falling behind in school and poor academic performance. Others end up having encounters with the police while 31 percent of college students met criteria for a diagnosis of **alcohol abuse** and 6 percent for a diagnosis of **alcohol dependence** (see [Knight et al., 2002](#)).

3) The Buddy System - Don't Drink Alone

Your friends trust you to look after them if they get drunk and their judgment becomes impaired. Just as your friends expect you to look after them, you should be able to rely on your friends to look after you if you get drunk while out in a foreign country. The buddy system means getting your buddy (a friend or classmate) home safely and vice versa after a night on the town. Students going abroad should keep in mind that they lack the social support system of family and friends that they have access to while at their home campus within the United States.

4) You Are in a Foreign, Unfamiliar Country

However fluent you may be in the local language, you don't know the culture and local laws as well as you do your own. When your judgment is impaired your ability to make wise decisions about proper behavior becomes compromised. Being in a foreign country or unfamiliar situation only heightens risk for unwanted and unsafe scenarios.

5) Know the Signs of a Problem

Failure to complete major school assignments, inability to get out of bed after a night out, poor attendance, poor academic performance and disciplinary action are all signs that you may be having a problem balancing school and your social life. Other signs of a problem include drinking in situations that are physically dangerous (i.e. while driving), continued drinking despite having ongoing relationship problems that are caused or worsened by drinking, mood irritability and defensiveness, memory lapses, poor concentration, bloodshot eyes, lack of coordination, or slurred speech. Know the signs that you have a problem and heed them or get the help you need.

6) Alcohol Content

Though not true all over, beer, wine and liquor in some countries contains a higher alcohol content than similar products in the U.S. Know what you are drinking and how much alcohol it contains. Knowing what you are drinking and how it affects you may save you humiliation and personal injury.

7) Living Arrangements

The environment in which you are living also impacts the level of drinking you may be engaging in. Living in an apartment or house in a foreign country with other students who drink heavily will impact the amount of drinking that you do as well. Know the lifestyle of your roommates and don't feel the need to mimic it if it is destructive.

8) Disorientation

Living in a new place, in unfamiliar surroundings may contribute to your tendency to drink more than you would otherwise. Being abroad for the first time, in a new country without the support systems you have at home, may leave you feeling vulnerable. The transition to the study abroad experience is often difficult to negotiate. Don't underestimate the challenge of being in a new country, with an unfamiliar language, mores and social scene. If you are drinking to salve the pain of being away from familiar surroundings, family and friends, that isn't social drinking.

Drinking as a coping mechanism, as a means of dealing with the stress you may be under includes risks that will leave you even more vulnerable. If you need help, get it. There is no such thing as drinking a problem away.

9) Alcohol Served at Program Activities

On some occasions, alcohol will be served at program activities. Just because alcohol is served at a school sponsored event, does not make you immune to its effects. Don't forget to eat and drink moderately so you enjoy, rather than miss, the experience of being a student studying abroad.

10) Established Drinking Patterns

Although some drinking problems begin during a student's foreign study experience some students bring their established drinking practice with them when they go overseas. If you are aware that you have a drinking problem, be attentive to your behavior while abroad. Under the added stress of being alone in an unfamiliar country you may be more prone to heavy drinking, which will only further aggravate the sense of alienation you may feel.

A New Way to See an Old Problem

In these next sections of the Center for Global Education alcohol companion piece, we share what we know about excessive student drinking. Not all of this information is easy to digest but it is information you can use to stay safe while studying abroad.

Getting the Message

The Center's alcohol awareness video is designed to be an accessible way for students and administrators to learn about the risks of excessive drinking while studying abroad, while also providing strategies to reduce such risk. Small numbers of US students studying abroad have suffered serious injury including rape and a handful has died while participating in overseas programs. Excessive drinking by students is often involved in these tragic events. The legal availability of alcohol to students under 21 years in study abroad settings challenges administrators and the students themselves to develop strategies that better prepare students to resist the temptation to drink to excess while abroad.

Making the Center for Global Education's alcohol awareness video and this study guide a part of your study abroad orientation program will help you to stay safe while studying abroad. Like your university's orientation materials focused on academic success, student mental health, housing and student services, alcohol awareness is critical to keeping yourself safe while studying abroad.

Reviewing the Research

For those who want to learn more about drinking by those studying abroad, there is limited research on the topic. One exception is a recent study by Pedersen et al. (2010) of heavier-drinking American college students which found that those studying abroad represent a large and diverse subgroup of the U.S. college population. Approximately a quarter million students completed study abroad programs during the 2006–2007 academic year. The number of students studying abroad has been steadily increasing over the past 20 years and shows no signs of slowing.

In their small but critical study, Pedersen et al. found that while foreign study experiences promote enhanced global perspectives, cross-cultural competencies, and increased self-confidence, students who

study abroad may also be at risk for increased and problematic drinking. Students may drink heavily while abroad due to lower drinking age limits, increased freedom and independence, difficulties adapting to a new environment, actual and perceived pressures within a new social environment, and pre-trip intentions to consume alcohol while abroad (See Borsari & Carey, 2001; Church, 1982; Pedersen, LaBrie, & Hummer, 2009; Pedersen, Larimer, & Lee, in press).

As with other heavier-drinking groups, heavier-drinking college students from the U.S. may self-select into study abroad programs with specific intentions to drink while overseas. Pedersen et al. found that research participants with no intention to study abroad drank less and experienced fewer alcohol-related consequences than participants intending to study abroad. Additionally, students reporting prior completion of study abroad programs drank more and reported more hazardous alcohol use than those not intending to study abroad.

The new research provides empirical support for the conclusion that study abroad students may be a heavier-drinking subgroup, necessitating intervention prior to students' going abroad. With a large body of prior research indicating that past behavior is among the best predictors of future behavior and the new research indicating strong associations between pre-study abroad intentions to drink and subsequent drinking behavior while abroad, prevention messaging as presented in the Center's video will be critical.

Student drinking in new contexts exposes students to numerous risks unique to study abroad including trouble with foreign authorities, disrupted travel plans and offending host families and other local people. **These problems may be exacerbated by limited access to resources and familiar coping strategies such as being close to friends and family.**

Pedersen et al. further found that students (particularly non-whites and males) who have completed study abroad programs generally report drinking more and suffering more negative consequences than those not intending to study abroad. Perhaps intervening with students post-return to the U.S. after trips can help reduce the newly established heavier drinking patterns they have developed.

The recent research indicates that those students intending to study abroad and those returning from study abroad trips exhibited elevated levels of alcohol use and related harm.

Alcohol-Related Consequences While Abroad

Exhaustive research has documented that heavy drinking by college students at U.S. colleges and universities is associated with serious negative outcomes including emotional, academic, physical, sexual, and legal problems (Hingson, Zha, & Weitzman, 2009; Muraven, Collins, Morsheimer, Shiffman, & Paty, 2005; Perkins, 2002; Wechsler & Nelson, 2006). Pedersen et al.'s research is critical in that the researchers offer empirical evidence of negative drinking consequences incurred while studying abroad as well.

The study abroad research suggests that novel environmental factors associated with heavy drinking in the foreign and unfamiliar setting may expose students to hazardous situations and undesirable outcomes. For example, "the increased availability of alcohol as a function of lower drinking ages, higher alcohol content of beverages abroad, and language and cultural difficulties in navigating drinking

establishments may cumulatively contribute to increased alcohol consumption levels while abroad” (Epstein & Rhodes, 2000; Pedersen, Larimer, et al., 2010). In addition, the novel experience of alcohol availability during orientation and other institution-sponsored social events (Epstein & Rhodes, 2000) may play a role in students developing the misperception that it is normal to drink (Pedersen et al., 2009) and that excessive drinking is a required part of the study abroad experience. A lack of familiarity with places visited, and of safety and escape measures, may pose additional risks, which become amplified when students drink heavily.

Sexual Risks While Abroad

Sexual risks related to drinking while studying abroad are particularly noteworthy. The association between excessive student drinking and unwanted sex are well-documented. And, as Pedersen et al. found, unfamiliar surroundings, impaired judgment of both the safety of immediate surroundings and the prudence of engaging in certain behaviors, and not appreciating local culture and legislation may further increase the potential for negative outcomes. Prior research that considered sexual consequences among college students during spring break trips (Lee, Lewis, & Neighbors, 2009; Sonmez et al., 2006) also applies abroad where travel to a foreign environment, decreased supervision, and increased independence all increase the risk of harm. Nonetheless, while the spring break research can provide some insights, there are no known studies that have examined drinking-related sexual consequences that students experience while studying abroad.

What the Domestic Research Means for Study Abroad

The extensive documentation of the negative outcomes of excessive domestic college student drinking suggests college students will face comparable drinking risks while studying abroad. Hummer et al. (2010) sought to identify the most frequent negative consequences of alcohol use while abroad and the manner of drinking (i.e., quantity of drinks per occasion or frequency of drinking occasions) associated with these risks.

Hummer et al. conclude, “Such information may assist student affairs professionals in developing effective, empirically derived frameworks for conveying to students risks and healthier practices of alcohol consumption while abroad.”

Still, study abroad students who plan to drink heavily while abroad as well as higher perceptions of other students’ alcohol use while abroad significantly increase drinking during their study abroad program (see Pedersen et al., 2009; Pedersen, Larimer et al., 2010). Other relevant factors, such as the ways students view alcohol as supplementing their experiences and how adaptive individuals are to their environment, may play important roles.

Social Anxiety in a Foreign Environment

Common sense and recent research suggests that students studying abroad may experience a degree of anxiety in social situations while abroad. This may be the result of a lack of familiarity with the language and culture in the student’s host country. Foreign environments can of course be challenging, requiring students from day to day to face social scenarios involving language barriers, meeting new people, and experiencing novel situations. At the same time, students studying abroad face decisions about alcohol

use. With social anxiety a common motivator for heavy drinking among college students, those studying abroad may face new and unexpected challenges.

The research points both to an “association between social anxiety and increased drinking and consequence levels” and also indicates “that the experience of social anxiety with concurrent expectations of stress-reduction from drinking may place individuals at greater risk for more frequent risky drinking behaviors” (Ham, Zamboanga, Olthuis, Casner, & Bui, 2010).

Discussing the Research Before You Go Abroad

Research regarding pre-trip expectations about the role of drinking in the foreign study experience is instructive in preparing for your travel abroad. In preparation for your trip you may want to think about your reaction to the following statements:

- 1 Alcohol will make my study abroad experience more fun.
- 2 I will drink more alcohol at each sitting than I drink now when/if I do drink.
- 3 I will drink alcohol more often abroad than I drink now.
- 4 I will interact with locals more often when I am drinking than when I am not drinking.
- 5 Alcohol will be present in the dorms and/or my host family’s house.
- 6 My best memories abroad will involve drinking.
- 7 Alcohol will relieve stress when I am abroad.
- 8 My professors will drink with me while abroad.
- 9 While abroad, drinking alcohol will enhance the acculturation process.
- 10 Alcohol will be readily available in my host country.
- 11 It will be easy to buy alcohol abroad.
- 12 In my host country, students don’t get in trouble for drinking.
- 13 My host country is a heavy drinking culture.

Reviewing the findings of the study abroad research with fellow students and administrators before you leave may help you better understand the risks, misconceptions and stresses of being a student in a foreign country. **Going abroad, you should know that research has found that students increased their drinking while abroad and experienced associated general and sexual negative consequences as a result of their heavy drinking. Not only did the manner of drinking influence the number of negative consequences, but also pre-study abroad expectations of the role of drinking in the study abroad experience, the degree of difference perceived between the two cultures, and social anxiety in a foreign environment played significant roles in determining the level of alcohol-related harm students experienced.**

Negative Drinking-Related Outcomes

With regard to both men and women, Hummer et al. found that approximately one fourth of those surveyed reported drinking impulsively and taking foolish risks while drinking. 44 percent of men and 37 percent of women surveyed reported having suffered at least one hangover in the prior month. Women were more likely to report fatigue from drinking, while men were more likely to behave

impulsively in ways regretted later, spend too much time drinking, wake up in unexpected places (blackout), and engage in embarrassing behaviors.

These consequences are notable. For example, “blacking out in a foreign country and taking foolish risks while drinking could increase the risk of being robbed; experiencing a sexual assault; getting lost on public transportation; driving while impaired, leading to traffic accidents or tickets due to different local driving norms and laws; finding oneself in an unfamiliar and dangerous part of town and offending someone due to language barriers” (Hummer et al., 2010).

Before going abroad, an especially important discussion to have with your fellow students concerns how drinking affects decision making and how the more one drinks, the more opportunity exists for alcohol to impair judgment, resulting in a greater likelihood of alcohol-related harm. Hummer et al. found that the frequency of drinking among study abroad students increased significantly from predeparture levels, whereas the average number of drinks consumed per occasion did not.

The increase in frequency of drinking during study abroad likely involves the increased availability of alcohol to students who may be underage under U.S. law. The ability to buy and drink alcohol legally and the physical proximity to alcohol outlets in a densely packed city may encourage frequent drinking.

Be aware of the finding that drinking in ways consistent with the local culture, such as a glass of wine with dinner, is not likely to cause any resulting negative outcomes; while having the same number of drinks per occasion as students typically consume at schools in the U.S. may lead to an increased number of negative consequences increasing. In sum, you’re not in Kansas anymore!

For starters, you, the student, are in a strange country with different laws and mores and a language barrier. Environments conducive to risky drinking, where the potential for negative outcomes is multiplied and access to familiar coping strategies is restricted, create a potentially dangerous situation (Pedersen, LaBrie, Hummer, Larimer, & Lee, 2010).

The Policy

Thanks to federal law and the legal counsel at your home school you should have already received your university’s alcohol and other drug policy. But you should be doing more than just reviewing the policy and watching this video.

Spend time thinking about the risks drunken students living in a strange foreign city pose to themselves and others and develop your own plan for looking after yourself and one another while abroad.

In the video you will hear from former study abroad students who regret the cultural opportunities they missed out on because they were drinking and focusing on the bar scene rather than the unique country or setting they were in. Good prevention messaging links healthy choices about drinking with academic achievement and personal success.

Studying abroad you may not be driving home after a night of drinking but you will still need to make wise choices about getting home safely with a friend or someone else that you can trust.

As the research confirms, the related risks posed by heavy drinking and getting drunk are as present in foreign study programs as they are on domestic campuses.

Given the often unfamiliar environment into which you are being propelled, take advantage of all the help your program and administrators are offering. The best message schools can send is one that promotes an alternative, healthful vision of work and study. In the end however, the choices remain your own.

The goal of this foreign study awareness material is to establish and maintain an environment that discourages excessive student drinking. If we have been effective in encouraging you to review this material before going abroad you will be safer than you would have been otherwise.

Some recommended best practices for you in going abroad include:

- Getting involved as peer educators, policy decision makers, and low key event planners.
- Being informed about the program's alcohol policies and the consequences of violating the policies.
- Seeking out social alternatives to out-of-control partying.
- Making prevention and awareness part of your holistic approach to being safe and having fun while abroad.

In case you forget, as at your home university, the study abroad program is designed to be an educational experience. And since administrators policing your drinking while you study abroad is simply not feasible, it is up to you to keep yourself, and your fellow students, safe while studying abroad.

Student Health

The health risks associated with excessive drinking while abroad are identical with those experienced by students who drink too much while state-side. Additionally, medical care available to students studying abroad may not be of the quality commonly available in the U.S., increasing the potential risk to students who engage in excessive drinking.

Keep in mind that you are older and wiser now, than you were as a freshman or sophomore. Back then you may have been more prone to fall victim to problems at fraternity or sorority and college athletic events. Even occasions for excessive drinking events like Oktoberfest should not be new experiences to students studying abroad.

Participation in a study abroad program is a privilege not a legal right. Using these materials to prepare for your trip will help. The more you have thought about the adventure you are about to depart on and about being safe while abroad, the better your experience is going to be. For example, while studying abroad, U.S. students are expected to follow local law, particularly in a place where due process is accorded criminal defendants. Customs may be another matter. Excessive drinking at European football (soccer) matches may be the custom for some but it is certainly not the sort of behavior U.S. universities want to encourage among their students going abroad. **Think before you drink.** When you drink, keep in mind the negative consequences to health and safety. Finding more constructive things to do than sit

in a bar and drink should be common sense for you and your fellow students studying abroad. After all, you are going abroad to experience the culture of the country you chose to study in.

Excessive student drinking is, of course, not simply a problem among U.S. college students. It is a common phenomenon in Europe, Australia, and elsewhere around the world. That said, it does appear that the problem of high-risk drinking is greater among U.S. students than students from elsewhere. Keeping in mind the tendency of U.S. students to engage in this form of over-the-top behavior and how foolish we look engaging in it may help you and your friends to stop before you lose control.

Good luck to you as you leave on your adventure. We hope that this video and study guide are helpful to you in developing a plan to stay safe while overseas. For more on the Center for Global Education and the safety focused programs and resources it offers please see the Resources section below.

We wish you a safe and enjoyable time during your study abroad program.

Resources

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<http://www.globaled.us/>

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The Center's SAFETI Clearinghouse had produced the following relevant articles on alcohol issues and study abroad:

Last Call for U.S. Students Studying Abroad?

Continuing Concerns About Alcohol Use and Abuse During Study Abroad

http://globaled.us/safeti/v3n1_epstein.html

A Discussion About Alcohol and Student Exchange

http://globaled.us/safeti/v1n2_rhodes_epstein.html

Study Abroad Programs: No Respite From the Drug Free Schools and Campuses Act

http://globaled.us/safeti/v1n1_abroad.html

Alcohol 101

The Century Council

1310 G Street, NW, Suite 600

Washington, DC 20005

<http://www.alcohol101plus.org/home.html>

Phone: (202) 637-0077
Fax: (202) 637-0079
Email: alcohol101plus@centurycouncil.org

The Higher Education Center for Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Violence Prevention

Education Development Center, Inc.
55 Chapel Street
Newton, MA 02458-1060

<http://www.higheredcenter.org/>

Phone: (800) 676-1730

Fax: (617) 928-1537

E-mail: HigherEdCtr@edc.org

Outside The Classroom

250 First Avenue, Suite 201
Needham, MA 02494

<http://www.outsidetheclassroom.com/>

Phone: (781) 726-6677

Toll-free: (877) 338-5001

Fax: (781) 726-6688

Other Resources & Research

Academic Programs Abroad, Eastern Michigan University

http://ep.emich.edu/abroad/health_safety.aspx

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