

Associated Colleges of the Midwest

Off-Campus Study



Parent/Guardian Handbook

2021 – 2022

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Introduction

Congratulations on your student's acceptance into an off-campus study program through the Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM). ACM is a consortium of 14 liberal arts colleges in the Midwest: Beloit, Carleton, Coe, Colorado, Cornell, Grinnell, Knox, Lake Forest, Luther, Macalester, Monmouth, Ripon, and St. Olaf colleges, and Lawrence University. As a consortium, ACM administers a portfolio of off-campus study programs on behalf of its member colleges with academic and student service standards comparable to those of the colleges' home campuses. Many ACM programs are also open to students from other colleges and universities, including members of the Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA), and some of those institutions choose to affiliate with particular ACM off-campus study programs to provide even greater benefits to their students.

Students' off-campus study experiences have the potential to become the highlight of their undergraduate careers, and it is ACM's goal to make the opportunity both personally enriching and intellectually engaging. Studying off campus can be demanding and at times frustrating; however, it can also be exhilarating and rewarding.

We applaud you for supporting your student's decision to study off campus. Only a small percentage of U.S. students take advantage of the opportunity to live and study off campus during their undergraduate years and your support for their doing so is an important component of their success. ACM's role in this is, in part, to prepare students (and their parents/guardians) for a positive experience. We can work together to encourage the academic and personal growth that lie at the heart of off-campus study.

This handbook is designed to provide answers to some of the many questions you may have begun to ask about participation in an ACM program – how finances will work, what the safety arrangements are, and how the credits will transfer. It is a general guidebook for parents/guardians of all students accepted into ACM programs, regardless of a student's home college or program. More specific information for each program and location can be found in the student handbook or on the [ACM website](#).

The ACM and Off-Campus Study

The ACM was established more than 60 years ago, and throughout its existence, off-campus study has been integral to its mission, which reads:

The Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM) enriches residential liberal arts education and strengthens members through collaboration.

Through our strategic initiatives and programs, we will:

- Encourage excellence in teaching and learning;
- Promote equity and inclusion and celebrate individual and collective diversity;
- Strengthen the connection between inquiry and practice;
- Amplify the expertise of faculty, students, and staff;
- Cultivate an open environment for innovation and exchange.

ACM member colleges endorse off-campus study for their students and see it as a vital part of the undergraduate curriculum. Experiential learning is a critical element in the curricula at ACM colleges, and our programs play a central role in promoting these.

ACM programs are typically small in size, similar to class sizes at the home colleges. Although the programs' goals vary, there are similarities among programs: each has dedicated on-site faculty and partner organizations; each encourages active, discussion-based learning; and each promotes place-based learning as an important feature of the program. Programs also incorporate internships, independent research projects and/or organized field trips as integral elements of the curriculum.

The ACM consortial office is located in Chicago, and off-campus study programming and support is a significant portion of our work. We provide students and the off-campus study offices on the home campuses with information and advising about ACM programs and help students prepare to study off campus after they have been accepted to a program. This support continues while students are on site and includes managing any emergencies that may occur.

Academics

Courses, Credits and Grades

Students study off campus as scholars, not as tourists, and the academic experience shapes the core of their time away from campus. Academic work completed through participation in an ACM program is recorded on the individual student's academic record at their home college. Although each college sets its own policies regarding off-campus study programs, students from ACM colleges (and ACM affiliate institutions) who participate in ACM programs remain fully enrolled at their home campuses, and the courses and credits taken off campus count toward graduation credit. At many ACM colleges, students are required to meet with their advisors as soon as they are accepted into a program to determine how the program courses can be used to fulfill their various college requirements and to ensure that the credits are appropriate for their individual academic program. After the off-campus study program has been completed and a student's grades assigned, ACM reports the results to the registrar at the student's home campus so that these may be added to the student's academic record. This record will include the total number of credits assigned for the program, as well as the title, number of credits, and grade for each course the student has taken through the program.

Please note that ACM staff members may not discuss a student's academic performance with a parent/guardian without the student's permission. This policy is in accord with policies in place at all ACM colleges regarding access to students' academic work and records. (For more information, please see the section titled "[Communication with ACM](#)")

ACM will bill students (through their home college accounts) at the end of the program for outstanding program costs and any additional program expenses such as medical costs, damage to program housing or equipment, loss of keys or equipment, loans, etc. ACM is only able to release grades once payment for all expenses has been received and a student has completed all program and student conduct requirements.

Finances, Scholarships, and Financial Aid

The total amount students are billed to participate in an off-campus study program varies from college to college, as does the availability of financial aid for off-campus study. These campus policies are often based on the specific curricular goals established at each college. Depending on the policies of your student's home college, charges for off-campus study may be based upon the program's cost or may be based upon the college's own tuition. Additional tuition charges and/or fees for off-campus study are likely to apply at most colleges. These additional campus charges typically relate to expenses for academic support services and the awarding of academic credit and/or financial aid. Therefore, students should check with their off-campus study office and Financial Aid office to find out how their

college charges students for ACM programs, what additional campus fees may apply, and how financial aid may be used toward the cost of their program.

ACM will bill the student's home college directly for all fees for off-campus study. These costs consist of two elements: education costs and a program fee. The latter typically covers housing, on-site orientation, and special program activities. Please note that the specific items covered by the program fee may vary among the programs, and it does NOT include travel or other personal expenses. A detailed breakdown of program costs, including estimates of those expenses not covered by the educational and program fees, is available on the [ACM Cost](#) pages. These costs are based on what past students have reported they have spent while on the program. The cost page clarifies which costs are included in the program fee and which are separate, additional expenses. In some cases, as indicated on the cost page, we can only provide estimates (e.g., airfare, food). Keep in mind that expenses off campus may be greater or less than the estimates as inflation rises or falls and may vary based upon each student's spending habits.

All students are required to pay a \$50 non-refundable deposit to the ACM to secure their place in the program; this deposit is credited to the program fee which the ACM bills to each student's home college. An additional \$200 refundable housing deposit is due and will be returned at the end of the term, minus any charges for damages or missing keys from the housing. The deposit can be paid online at www.acm.edu/deposit.

So that ACM staff can plan accordingly, students are asked to pay the deposit within two weeks of acceptance notification. Until this deposit is received, ACM is unable to reserve a student's place in the program. It is not possible to return deposits to students who withdraw from the program after being accepted. If a student does withdraw, ACM will bill the home campus for any fees. Please refer to the [ACM Cancellation Policy](#) on withdrawals for additional information, including a fee schedule.

Preparing for Off-Campus Study

Pre-departure Requirements and Orientation

In preparation for their time off campus, students receive a program-specific handbook; a pre-departure checklist; information about housing, coursework, program dates, and other program-specific details. They are also expected to participate in a program-specific virtual pre-departure orientation with other accepted students, ACM staff, and program faculty (this will be in addition to more general pre-departure meetings hosted by most home campuses). Information about safety, local arrangements, and various on-site activities will be covered again in an orientation meeting when students first arrive at the program site.

It is each student's responsibility to consult with their personal physician or campus clinic to review the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) which are available at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>.

International Students

If an international student studying in the US plans to participate in an ACM off-campus study program, there might be additional requirements they need to meet (e.g., CPT eligibility for the Oak Ridge Science Semester). ACM will do its best to work with the individual student so that they are able to participate in the program.

Travel

The ACM does not make travel arrangements for program participants. The program dates are published on the ACM website as well as in the program checklists but are subject to change based on varying factors out of ACM's control (e.g., policy/calendar changes at partner institutions). At all sites, students are required to get themselves from the airport or bus/train station to the designated meeting point for the program (usually the student housing location). Students are required to arrive at the program site on (or before, at their own expense and with prior permission) the official program start dates and depart on or after the end date. ACM makes no accommodation for late arrivals or early departures. Students are responsible for any lodging, food, airport transfers or other expenses resulting from early arrival or late departure from their program site.

We recommend that students planning to extend their time off campus through additional travel time in either the location of the program or elsewhere first verify the public health guidelines and regulations of all locations before making travel arrangements. ACM staff can provide information about the public health guidelines of the areas where our programs are located but cannot offer specific advice or services.

Reading and Viewing

As a way of understanding (and following) your student's experience while off-campus, you may wish to learn more about the program location through newspapers, books, films and online articles. Please keep in mind, however, that they are not necessarily perfect representations. ACM's program-specific student handbooks contain basic program site information for students that you may wish to explore as well.

Recommended Information File

ACM recommends that students and parents/guardians work together in advance of the students' program to compile a folder of important information that might be helpful during the student's absence. This file might include resources such as:

- Copies of passport, visa (if applicable), credit and debit cards, travel itineraries, and lodging information.
- Copies of student's health insurance card and information on how to file a claim.
- Contact information for ACM's Consortial Office, ACM program site, and the Off-Campus Study office of the student's home college.
- Any information you might need to facilitate necessary processes with the home college (housing sign-up, course registration, etc.)

Arrival and Getting Started

Arrival at the Program Site

Programs may vary in terms of arrival procedures, but students will typically need to navigate independently to their program housing, where they will meet program faculty/staff and other students at a designated time. Specific instructions for each program can be found in the student handbook and communicated to students via email two weeks before departure.

Programs begin with a required orientation session. This initial meeting is critical for students as it is the first time they meet the program faculty, staff and fellow students in person. During the orientation, ACM staff and/or the Visiting Faculty Director(s) will review the academic requirements for the program, housing arrangements and expectations, appropriate behavior, safety guidelines, actions that students can take to facilitate their own safety and emergency procedures and contact information.

Flexibility and Patience

We always encourage our students to approach their program with flexibility and patience. Arrangements change and sometimes we have to adapt our schedule due to forces outside our control such as enrollment changes, partner institution policies, and public health guidelines. Some aspects of the program may be somewhat different than what students expected. We ask students to be flexible and adapt with us, and they will likely find that remaining flexible will serve them well throughout their time off campus.

Patience is also important because students and their peers will be adjusting to new living and learning environments, and sometimes it takes some time for individuals to figure out how to manage those differences. We encourage students to be wary of making snap judgements about their peers and also to be patient with themselves as they seek to understand and adjust to their new environment. We also encourage students to create a community within the program and support others through the semester.

Culture Shock

During the first weeks in which students arrive on site, it is not uncommon for them to experience culture shock, surprise, dismay, and anxiety at the cultural differences in the new location and in the unfamiliar situations in which they find themselves. The on-site orientation is intended to help ease this adjustment. Students can and do adapt to the new situations in a surprisingly short time. Finding themselves able to settle in and adjust independently to a new environment is a component of easing culture shock.

Research has shown that many students go through a three-step adjustment process in acclimating to their new environment. In the first stage, they are likely to be excited and entranced by the novelty of being in a new location and delighted with most things around them. Everything is fantastic about the new location and students may think to themselves: “why don’t we have this back home?” In the second stage, after the initial “euphoria” has worn off, they may focus on the ways in which everything is different. 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 poorly organized, etc. They may experience some cultural misunderstandings, they may miss friends and family, and they may even say they want to come home. During the third stage, their view of home and their program location is more nuanced – they are likely to take a more analytical approach to both locations and to find positive and negative characteristic in each. They will likely have learned to approach their new environment with a critical eye and establish favorite places in their new location.

As a primary support person for your student, you may hear early and often what they are experiencing and thinking. We very much hope that you will provide them with the support and encouragement they need as they learn about their program location and the new context in which they find themselves. There are times when they will want to talk about their frustrations, but we encourage you to try to focus on the positive and ask your student what is going well and what they are enjoying. Your positivity can help turn negative feelings around.

Communications

Communication with your student

With cell phones, email, and social media so widely used, many students and parents/guardians are accustomed to instant communication. Parents/guardians sometimes ask their students to contact them immediately upon their arrival at the program site and may become concerned when they fail to call or email within 24 hours. Please be patient. ACM asks all Program Directors to notify us of students’ safe

arrival and we in turn email this information to students' emergency contacts. If your student does not arrive at the designated meeting point, ACM will contact you.

If your student is delayed en route to the program site and has contacted you, please ensure that they call ACM with an update on their arrival information. You can find ACM contact information the last page of this handbook, as well as on the website.

During the first few days of the program, as students get settled into their housing and are engaged with the orientation sessions, students may not have time for or access to instant communication. Our experience is that the first 24 to 48 hours are quite busy and students may not have time to call or send a message. You can expect that your student will contact you as soon as they are able.

Text messaging, email, and social media use are convenient ways to stay in touch and minimize the challenges created by time differences and individual schedules. Access to internet (and Wi-Fi) vary depending on the program site but are generally available at the student housing and partner institution sites.

ACM requires all students to have and carry a working local cell phone and provide ACM staff with the best number to reach them. We encourage you to discuss with your student how you will communicate and how often so that both of you have a mutual understanding of what is expected.

The immediacy of cell phone and email communications is not without its hazards. Perhaps chief among these is when a student's regular (or daily) communications with parents/guardians, friends, or a significant other back home interferes with the student's acculturation or time to make connections at the program location. While ACM acknowledges the support that parents, guardians, and home networks can provide students during the transition to a new setting, students must also have their freedom and ability to immerse themselves in their new environment in order to learn from the program site as well as their coursework.

Because students are encountering unfamiliar situations and may be unsure how to conduct themselves or assess specific situations, it is not unusual for them to call their parents/guardians to share their concerns before they have had a chance to analyze the situation and discuss the problem with the ACM faculty/staff. Parents/guardians may hear negative comments that reflect immediate reactions or frustrations that students encounter as a typical stage of acclimating to a new environment and cultural setting. At times, students may complain that "no one is helping" or that what they remember being promised to them has not materialized. As a first step, the ACM strongly recommends students discuss the problem with the on-site faculty/staff, who are likely to have the best perspective on the situation. This is often all that is necessary to resolve a problem. Learning how to problem solve in a new environment is an important element of the personal growth experienced through off-campus study.

Communication with ACM

Parents/guardians of students participating in ACM's programs often have questions about specific activities or events during the time their students are off campus. Please direct your concerns or inquiries to the ACM consortial office rather than attempting to contact the program faculty director(s). Communicating directly with faculty on site can be very difficult given the busy program schedule. The ACM Off-Campus Study team welcomes phone calls during regular business hours, Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (central time). If it is an after-hours emergency, an automated message will give you instructions on how to contact an ACM staff member. Contact information is included at the end of this handbook.

Please be aware that the ACM is prohibited from releasing certain information to anyone without the expressed permission of the student. In accordance with the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), a student's education records are maintained as confidential by the 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 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. The ACM has determined that the following student information is considered directory information:

- Name
- College/university
- Email address
- Off-Campus study program
- Semester/term of off-campus study
- Awards, honors

Students can sign a release form to give parents/guardians or others access to protected information. Having a release form on file does not mean the information will automatically be shared with parents/guardians or other authorized designees; information will be made available upon request from the authorized third party. The U.S. Department of Education is responsible for overseeing FERPA. For more information, see their FERPA website at: <http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>

In most cases, the ACM will not contact parents/guardians to provide medical, academic or disciplinary information without the student's permission. In the case of an extreme emergency, where student's health is in jeopardy or if there is a concern that the student poses a threat to themselves or others, the ACM will contact the student's listed emergency contact. As a general guideline, however, if a student is able to communicate about the situation, the ACM believes it is up to the student to decide whether, how, and when to discuss the particular situation with parents/guardians and others.

In certain circumstances (e.g., natural disaster near program site, terrorist attack, student strike) ACM might contact students' parents/guardians to update them on the situation.

ACM Communication with Home Colleges

ACM staff strive to maintain high levels of communication with all campuses sending students on any of our programs. Because colleges have different requirements for reporting or documenting incidents, ACM staff will communicate any reportable incident to the Off-Campus Study Director at the student's home campus.

In situations where an incident impacts multiple students on a program (e.g., illness not limited to a single individual, major program changes), ACM staff will notify all participating colleges of the situation in a way that does not identify specific students. Exceptions will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Health and Safety

Health

The best advice we can give our students about staying healthy during off-campus study is to continue to do what keeps them healthy at home. Maintaining physical activity, healthy eating habits, getting

appropriate amounts of sleep, and following routine practices like handwashing are the best day-to-day strategies to stay healthy. It is not the time for students to experiment with changes to their lifestyle, sleeping, or medication habits. Additionally, we suggest students remain patient and give themselves and their bodies time to adjust to their new environment which may include differences in time zones, mealtimes, types of food available, ambient noise while sleeping, etc.

Safety During Off-Campus Study

Our first guiding principle regarding our off-campus study programs is concern for the safety and well-being of our students, faculty, and staff. For this reason, we monitor conditions at our program sites before and during students' time off campus and provide students with safety information they will need to know while participating in the program. Should conditions at a program site deteriorate to threaten students' safety, the ACM will take the appropriate steps to place students out of harm's way.

When informing students about safety at program sites, our practice is to repeat the information early and often. Safety issues are addressed in the program-specific student handbooks, virtual pre-departure orientation, and are reiterated during on-site orientation when students first arrive. On-site faculty also meet with students periodically and when warranted during the program term to reinforce the protocols.

It is important to emphasize to students that even in a new setting with specific local concerns, the most significant safety risks they may face while off campus are the same risks they face on their home campuses – alcohol and traffic-related accidents and injuries. The ACM prohibits students participating in the Field Museum Semester and Newberry Seminar programs from operating any motorized vehicles, and this restriction is outlined in the [Off-Campus Study Contract and Comprehensive Release](#) that each student signs; students participating in the Oak Ridge Science Semester are permitted to bring a vehicle if they choose. For the Chicago-based programs, public transportation, such as trains and buses, is cheaper and often a faster and more convenient mode of transportation. Similarly, although we cannot regulate or prohibit students' consumption of alcohol during their free time within the program, we emphasize that their judgement is impaired while intoxicated and that they may be ill-equipped to evaluate the risks of dangerous situations.

For all of ACM's program sites, the process of monitoring conditions at the program location is ongoing. In gathering and evaluating information about safety and related concerns, the ACM is in contact with program faculty, program partners, and other off-campus study professionals and monitors local and national news sources. We review information to assess not only security conditions and safety risks at a given program site, but also potential health risks, crime, and other threats such as natural disasters which may result in cancellation of a program. This monitoring continues as long as students are on site. If conditions warrant, the ACM will relocate or cancel a program and make the necessary arrangements for students to return home (or to their home campus) as quickly as possible.

Medical Insurance & Facilities, Medications, and Ongoing Conditions

Accessibility to health and medical care is a major concern. You should consult with your insurance provider to determine where your student should go in the event they need medical care. In case of an emergency, students can go to the emergency room of the hospital closest to their housing. We encourage students to bring their insurance card with them if possible and identify a provider covered by their insurance plan BEFORE they arrive at their program site. All students participating in ACM off-campus study programs are required to carry their own health insurance. Please remember that medical insurance does not cover personal property. You may wish to purchase insurance for loss or theft of personal property such as cell phones, laptops, and cameras.

Medications and Ongoing Conditions

If a student is taking prescribed medication, the ACM recommends that, if at all possible, the student bring enough medication for the entire time off campus or be sure that they can use a local pharmacy at the program site to receive refills. If your student will be flying to their program site, all prescription and over-the-counter drugs should be kept in their original containers and properly labeled in order to avoid issues when clearing security. These types of medications should also be carried on rather than put in checked luggage. It may also be useful for the student to carry the original prescription and to know the generic or Latin name of the prescription so that an equivalent version of the drug can be located in an emergency.

Some ongoing medical conditions may require treatment while off campus. The ACM urges students to take copies of their medical records to be shared with medical professionals should the need arise. In addition, it is important for the ACM and on-site faculty to be informed in advance about such medical conditions, particularly those conditions which may require special accommodations in housing, diet, or academic arrangements. The ACM encourages students to completely and accurately fill out the Medical History Report and Emergency Contacts Form so that program staff/faculty can help arrange appropriate medical and/or mental health resources. Without detailed information ACM may not be adequately prepared to support individual student needs and arrange appropriate services.

Please note that all medical conditions cannot necessarily be accommodated at every program site and that, in certain situations, it may be necessary to seek an alternative program for a student.

Policies and Additional Travel

ACM Program Rules and Policies

The ACM has a listing of student expectations, policies, and responsibilities that apply to all program participants. These policies are available on our website at <http://www.acm.edu/policies>. Other policies that apply to particular program locations will be noted in the program-specific student handbook or will be outlined during the initial on-site orientation.

Each ACM program participant is also expected to read and sign the ACM Off-Campus Study Contract and Comprehensive Release Form which outlines expectations for student health and safety, student behavior, financial obligations, and other policies.

Additional Travel While Studying Off Campus

Students are often eager to visit as much of their program site as they can while studying off campus. While we are delighted for them to do so, we also wish to emphasize that off-campus study is an academic experience for which they will be earning credit and grades. Absences from on-site orientation, classes, or exams will be reflected in student grades. It is not appropriate for students to miss classes or internship hours in order to travel, and we strongly urge them to confine their travel to weekends and program breaks.

Similarly, if you plan to visit the program site, your trip should coincide with an academic break or occur before or after the program dates. This also means that you should not plan to visit the program during the initial on-site orientation period. We ask you to keep in mind that students are expected to remain at the program site until the end of the program—it is not possible to arrange final exam dates to accommodate students' travel interests, or, except in emergency situations, to allow them to return home early.

Thinking Ahead

Re-Entry

When they return from studying off campus, students may have mixed feelings about sharing their experiences with family and friends. Their experiences may have been intense and exhilarating. They are often eager to convey the flavor and detail of this experience with those closest to them. For many students, off-campus study has been a transformative experience, both intellectually and personally, and they want those around them to be aware of the importance of their time off campus. As one returning student remarked, “I can’t begin to tell you how different I am from who I was when I left campus.”

Communicating those intense experiences can be a bit of a challenge for many students, especially at first. When they have just returned to their hometown or home college, students may only be able to say: “It was great!” Many students need some time to reflect before they can encapsulate their experience coherently. Some find tools like journaling or blogging helpful while others may try to return to previous patterns of daily living. Patience from their support network can be very helpful for students trying to find their voice.

Some students may note that the adjustment to life back on campus presents its own “reverse culture shock”. This may be expressed as criticism of their home culture, a certain distance from friends and family, or simple homesickness for what they left behind. All of this may continue for a number of months. In time, students generally find ways to reflect upon the experience, integrate it into their lives, and, perhaps, make significant choices about the direction they will take in life based on the experience. Students who experience reverse culture shock in its strongest form report that they find it hard to describe their time away to family and friends, who may not be willing to take the time to listen to what they have to say. The single most important contribution you can make to this readjustment process is to listen.

A Final Note

One of the exciting features of off-campus study is the extent to which this experience enriches and broadens students’ perspectives of themselves, their home, and the world. For parents/guardians, it is a time to let your student learn about and adapt to new situations—new people, new experiences, new communities. The learning process is not always tidy, and there will undoubtedly be times when your student is dismayed or disappointed and wants to share this with you as much as the good times. This, too, is part of the intellectual and personal growth that is at the heart of studying off campus.

The ACM takes great pride in our programs and their role in undergraduate education. We work hard to provide the necessary support to make this experience as fulfilling as we can for all our students.

Contact Information

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In case of a program emergency after business hours, please call the ACM emergency line at **312.561.5911.**