
To Parents of Whitman OCS Students - Ukraine

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Wed, Apr 6, 2022 at 9:35 AM

Dear Parents of Sp22 OCS students,

I am writing from Whitman Off-Campus Studies in light of the current violence in Ukraine. We understand that parents and families of students studying off campus through Whitman this semester may have concerns during this unsettling time and want to share with you about the resources in place. Rest assured that the safety and health of our students abroad is a top priority for us at Whitman.

After Russia invaded Ukraine, we emailed all Spring 2022 OCS students on February 24 and March 9 addressing safety and cyber security concerns. I will summarize that messaging here. (I will forward this parent message to your students so that they have this same email.)

At this point in time, we do not believe that any of the programs Whitman students are currently attending in Europe or elsewhere this spring will be canceled as a result of Russia's attack upon Ukraine. We are fairly confident that our spring 2022 OCS students will be able to complete their studies abroad. But we also recognize that the situation is volatile and that there is no guarantee that the situation will not escalate.

The OCS program providers who we partner with and Whitman Off-Campus Studies are monitoring the situation. In addition to trusted media sources, we rely upon messaging from the US Department of State, AlertTraveler notifications, and local sources in the various host destinations abroad and in the US.

If the situation were to escalate and if students were deemed to be at risk, our study abroad program providers in the host countries and Whitman OCS would support students in making arrangements to return home. This is typically triggered when the US Department of State recommends that US citizens and permanent residents return home. All of the OCS programs Whitman works with have emergency evacuation plans and protocols for emergencies to support the students attending their programs during a crisis.

And we already have experience with this due to the pandemic. In Spring 2020 when all study abroad students returned home due to the outbreak of the pandemic, our study abroad partners did an outstanding job communicating with students in a timely manner about securing flights home and transitioning to remote learning so that students would not lose any credit. Based on this experience, we are confident that our providers would do the same again if any study abroad/OCS programs were canceled.

Resources and recommendations for your student on OCS:

- **AlertTraveler** is a global security and health alert system that Whitman OCS makes available to all of our students abroad or on US-based OCS programs. **Please remind your student to download the AlertTraveler app on their phone and activate AlertTraveler optional GPS function so that they will receive relevant safety alerts in any destination where they are located.**
- **OCS program provider staff** in the host country can answer questions for students who have safety concerns related to Ukraine or other matters, including specific local safety information and guidance regarding the suitability of independent travel outside the host country at this time. **Please remind your student to always check with local program staff and the US Department of State website prior to traveling independently and register their travel itinerary with their program staff in the event of an emergency.**
- **US Department of State Travel Advisories** at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel.html>. Note that since April 2021 most countries of the world have been designated as *Level 4 Do Not Travel* due to COVID because the US Department of State aligned their messaging with the Centers for Disease Control warnings a year ago. Because our students are required to be vaccinated for COVID, the more pertinent State Department Level messaging is the information related to non-COVID issues, such as crime, terrorism, etc. Typically if there is any State Department Travel Warning for non-COVID issues, it will be mentioned immediately after the COVID travel advisory information on the State Department country page.

- Students are recommended to sign up for the **US Department of State's STEP** (Smart Traveller Enrollment Program) to get alerts directly about their host country and other travel destinations. Parents are welcome to sign up for US Department of State country email alerts through STEP as well at: <https://step.state.gov/>
- **Whitman OCS staff** are available to address student concerns via email or set up a Zoom meeting for those who prefer a virtual conversation. We find that Zoom meetings can often be a more personal way to address student worries than email.
- **mySSP is a mental health support service** specifically for college students that Whitman purchases and is free for all of our OCS students. Through mySSP students can sign up for virtual counseling or in-person counseling in the host country. mySSP advisers can respond to concerns about everything from time management and cultural adjustment issues to anxiety. To access this service via chat, students should go to <https://myssp.app/ca/home> or call from outside the US 001.416.380.6578.
- **Due to potential cyber threats** against the west as part of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, students have been reminded to be attentive to their cyber security and make sure they have updated their antivirus software on all devices, and to take care not to use public wifi when accessing banking and other personal information. Students with questions about this may contact Whitman Tech Services at wcts@whitman.edu. **Please remind your student to take steps to protect their cybersecurity.**

In closing, I would like to mention that I have been in Europe since March 12 visiting our students in Copenhagen and Stockholm on the DIS programs. I am currently in Iceland visiting our newest partner program with School for International Training (SIT). I am happy to report that all three of these programs are functioning more or less as usual and the students appear to be having excellent learning experiences. Local staff is addressing the questions that students may have about the conflict in eastern Europe.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me or to Associate Director Barbara Hoffman at hoffmabb@whitman.edu if you have follow-up questions or concerns. We are here to support students and families during our students' study away semester or year and hope your student is having a rewarding experience so far.

All the best,
Susan

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Whitman College is located on the traditional Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla homelands. We pay respect to tribal elders both past and present and extend our respect to all indigenous people today. We honor their stewardship of the land and ecosystem and commit to continuing that important work.



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