
Important OCS June 1 Update - Your Program's Whitman Status Fall 21

1 message

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OCS Fall 2021 & FY 2021-22 Participants

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Whitman OCS

Dear Fall 21 and Academic Year 2021-22 OCS students,

We promised to update you about the status of Off-Campus Studies programs by June 1. I write to inform you that Whitman College has made the decision to affirm OCS approval for all approved Fall 2021 OCS students. There are some important new requirements and caveats to this approval, so please read this entire message carefully and let me know if you have any questions.

How we made our decision

Whitman considered the following as the primary factors in making our decision:

- The provider has a clear COVID plan with precautions to help keep the students and community safe, as well as a reliable contact in the US and in the host country who can provide us with information in an emergency.
- The quality of the medical infrastructure and resources in the host country.
- The fact that Whitman OCS students will be required to be vaccinated for COVID19 prior to departure.

Although the Department of State Travel Advisories are now at *Level 3 Reconsider Travel* or *Level 4 Do Not Travel* for most countries, Whitman College will permit students to study abroad in those countries because we are requiring that students be vaccinated for COVID19 prior to departure and if the student understands and accepts the risks of study abroad/OCS by signing the new *Travel Advisory Waiver* (see details below).

Reasons you still may not be able to study abroad

1. Your program could suspend operations between now and the program start date because of the pandemic.
2. Your host country could impose barriers (or not lift current barriers) disallowing entry into the country by international students or individuals arriving from the United States. Or you may simply not be able to obtain the visa necessary (if any) to enter your host country.
3. If you do not already have a passport or if your passport is not valid for as long as your host country requires (usually six months beyond your program's end date), you may have difficulty obtaining a new passport in time to study abroad because of reduced processing of passports during COVID.

Reasons you may no longer want to study abroad

1. You may no longer wish to attend the program because some of the freedoms that students normally enjoy during a semester away may not be available due to program modifications for safety reasons. Review your provider's literature and the COVID information on their website carefully to make sure you understand what your program's academics, field trips, extracurricular and housing will be like in Fall21. Pay attention to your program's COVID protocols and their expectations of students.

Typical program changes include:

- Quarantine for a period of time upon arrival and/or quarantine prior to departure for study abroad
- Independent travel by participants in their free time outside the host country and some travels within the host country will be prohibited or highly discouraged
- Some or all courses may be taught online or hybrid
- Cancellation or modification of program sponsored field trips and excursions
- Housing modifications (eg cancelling homestays or placement in singles)

2. You should not study abroad if you have a pre-existing health condition that would make you more vulnerable to COVID19. Please discuss the prudence of studying abroad with your medical provider.

Next Steps (Not necessarily in this order)

1. **Google Survey about your plans.** Please complete the survey [here](#) to let OCS know your intentions.
2. **Document proof of your COVID19 vaccination by July 1** with Whitman by uploading to the Whitman Google form, if you haven't already done so.
3. **Whitman group meeting on COVID updates for your OCS Program** (new requirement). Attend the required June program-specific group meeting with OCS staff to discuss the modifications to your program, review their COVID precautions, and discuss any concerns you may have. Laura Cummings, OCS Coordinator, will reach out to you about the meeting time. Students who do not attend their group meeting for their program or schedule a private one-on-one meeting by **June 30** will have their OCS approval withdrawn.
4. **Travel Advisory Waiver.** Read and sign the special Whitman OCS Travel Advisory Waiver for countries with a Department of State Level 3 or Level 4 Travel Advisory by **July 1** in your myOCS portal. You will receive the waiver through the myOCS portal in the coming days.
5. **Weighing Risk.** Discuss your study abroad plans with your family, including both the health risks and the financial risks keeping in mind that most programs will not refund room and board nor any fees nor will they purchase you a flight home if they have to suspend operations any time after the program begins. (Whitman OCS is not able to reimburse students for these financial losses either.)
6. **Admission Offer.** Accept or decline your program's admission offer and notify your OCS Adviser of your decision. If you decline the offer, check with your provider about whether they will refund your enrollment deposit. Whitman OCS does not reimburse for non-refundable enrollment deposits if Whitman has not cancelled the program.
7. **Predeparture Forms and Online Orientations.** Complete all Whitman OCS Post-Decision documents by **July 1**. Complete any documents or online predeparture orientation materials that your program requires by their stated deadline.
8. **International Flight.** Confirm the correct program start date and preferred arrival date with your program prior to purchasing your airline ticket. Flight booking tips:
 - Purchase a refundable ticket and, if that is not possible, wait as long as possible to purchase the ticket.
 - Purchase your flight directly from the airline as it will be much easier to make date changes later (if necessary) than if you use a third-party vendor like Expedia or Orbitz.
 - Find a flight that flies direct to your destination with as few stops as possible to minimize time in airports and changing planes and thereby reduce COVID risk.
9. **Whitman Predeparture Orientation Zoom Meeting.** Attend Whitman's required virtual Study Abroad Predeparture Orientation Meeting to be held in **July 7 at 4pm PDT**.

Note that this email message will be posted along with other important OCS Updates on our website for you and your family to reference [here](#).

We realize that this decision may not be easy and want you to know that Whitman OCS is here to help you consider what is best for you. We will support you as best we can regardless of whether you decide to study abroad or enroll on campus at Whitman this fall.

Sincerely,
Susan

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