

Update to Whitman Policy for Spring 2020 Study Abroad Students

March 15, 2020 at 5:13 p.m. PDT

Dear Spring 2020 OCS students,

I am following up on yesterday's message to strongly urge you to return home.

I am writing again because, in the past 12 hours, many more countries have taken drastic measures to protect their borders including cancelling all flights in and out of one country and revoking all visas held by US citizens in another. Additionally, I wanted to clarify a few points from yesterday's message to help guide you.

We wish to emphasize again that student safety, health and well being is a top priority at Whitman College and we are trying to help students navigate this extraordinary global pandemic as best as possible. We also want to be clear about the College's institutional limitations for assisting you during this crisis if you remain abroad.

Please review these important points:

- Whitman College strongly recommends that all OCS students return home at this time. (Depending on your location, there may or may not be a deadline for departure. We urge you to be calm, but make arrangements to depart in a safe manner as soon as possible.)
- We want to be clear that Whitman will not be able to intervene to assist you or bring you home, if you disregard this recommendation to return home and you are unable in the future to leave your host country due to cancelled flights, travel bans, local quarantines or illness.
- Healthcare systems have been quickly overwhelmed once coronavirus takes hold (such as in Italy) and travel restrictions limit movement in such situations.
- We therefore believe students who choose to remain abroad must understand that they will likely have limited or no access to healthcare for any kind of medical need in your host country, if that location has an outbreak of COVID-19.
- Whitman College will not be able to support you financially or provide you with room and board abroad if you are unable to leave your host country for an indefinite period (due to travel restrictions, coronavirus quarantine, etc.)
- If you opt to disregard this recommendation to return home, you do so at your own risk.

We know this situation is difficult and disappointing, and we want to assist you in making the transition back to the US as easy as possible.

Important Tips:

Credits: Nearly all OCS program providers are allowing students to complete their spring semester courses on-line so that students will earn all of most of their OCS credits for the semester. We urge you to take advantage of this opportunity, so that you can stay on track for

graduation. The Whitman Registrar has assured us that those credits will be treated as if they were earned on your program (and not counted as "on-line" courses). But, in the rare instance when a student does fall short on credits due to this situation, OCS and the Whitman Registrar will work with you to identify other credit options.

Flights: When booking your flight home, we recommend you talk to your airline about waiving the change fee, which they may be willing to do. Students who have financial aid may be able to receive assistance from Whitman for the return flight, if necessary. Please email Laura Cummings at CUMMINLL@whitman.edu with details about 1) the change fee for your original flight date and 2) the amount of financial assistance you are requesting.

As for the deadline, we want students to remain calm but urge you to return home as promptly and safely as possible, based on location conditions. You should consult your local program staff for guidance if needed.

We would like to know your travel plans for returning home soon.

Note too that we are asking all returning students to remain at home in their hometowns and not return to Walla Walla or Whitman College, in accordance with health authority recommendations to limit nonessential travel which could save lives.

Please let us know how we can help and I look forward to hearing back from you about your specific plans.

Warm regards,
Susan

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