

March 3, 2020

Dear Student,

The purpose of this message is to provide important information to Sewanee students who are applying to study abroad in the summer or fall 2020 about the recent health concerns with the outbreak of COVID-19 (also known as Coronavirus). The University Wellness Center, the Office of Risk Management, and the Office for Global Citizenship routinely monitor world health issues that could pose a threat to members of our community, including our students abroad, and we write to make you aware of the risks related to study abroad. Our greatest concern is the safety and well-being of our students, faculty, and staff, in this case while away from campus, and we hope the below information will assist you in a rewarding experience abroad.

Read below for information on COVID-19, regions of heightened concern, the University's decision-making processes on authorizing study abroad, and contingencies in case of cancellation. Those planning personal travel abroad in the coming months should also seriously consider the travel advice.

**Reasons for concern:**

From its initial outbreak in China, COVID-19 has spread rapidly to more than fifty countries. Because the virus is in its early stages of development, information about methods of transmission and data on transmission rates and mortality rates are still being determined.

It is important for you to be alert to the [symptoms](#) of COVID-19, which may be flu-like, ranging from mild to serious, and include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Difficulty breathing

Person-to-person spread is occurring, although it's unclear exactly how it is transmitted and how easily the virus spreads between people.

One of the reasons for heightened concern about COVID-19 is that we lack any vaccine to prevent this virus, and the [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC) advises that the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus. In general, recommended actions to help prevent the spread of any respiratory viruses are as follows:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

We encourage you to follow the above recommendations, whether you study abroad or remain at Sewanee.

**Current regions of heightened concern:**

The Centers for Disease Control use a three-level advisory system that looks solely at health concerns related to travel in particular countries and regions:

- Level one: practice usual precautions
- Level two: practice enhanced precautions
- Level three: avoid nonessential travel

The State Department employs a four-level advisory system that takes into account both political and health risks:

- Level one: exercise normal precautions
- Level two: exercise increased cautions
- Level three: reconsider travel
- Level four: do not travel

At this time, the CDC has labeled China, South Korea, Italy, and Iran as level three (avoid nonessential travel) and Japan as level two (practice enhanced precautions) due to outbreaks of COVID-19. The situation, however, is dynamic, and other countries in Europe and other parts of the world may be categorized as level two or three in the coming weeks and months.

### **Decision-making processes on authorizing study abroad:**

As an institution, we will not operate study abroad programs in countries or regions that are labeled level three or four by the State Department or level three by the CDC. For countries and regions labeled at level two by the State Department or the Centers for Disease Control, we will seriously weigh the risks associated with traveling and living in such a country before authorizing the operation of a study abroad program. Our review of country advisories will affect our decisions about the operation of the Sewanee-in-Cartagena and Sewanee-in-Spain programs in summer 2020 and the Sewanee-in-France and European Studies Programs in fall 2020. In the case of European Studies, the spread of COVID-19 may affect the operation of the program or some of the planned travel, for example to sites in Italy. We will also monitor the spread of COVID-19 in the United States and review any study away programs scheduled to operate in the United States during the summer or fall for safety concerns.

Many of you have applied to third-party providers such as IES, SIT, and DIS for study abroad programs that they offer. Our study abroad providers have excellent risk management teams that monitor country and regional situations where they operate programs. Their decision-making processes are closely aligned to our own, and we are confident in their determinations on whether or not to operate particular programs. Please note, however, that the University will not authorize participation in a provider program if the location is subject to a level three CDC warning or a level three or four State Department advisory. Of course, your tolerance for risk may be lower than the study abroad program providers, so we encourage you to read the advisories carefully and consider applying to alternative or back-up study abroad programs that may present less risk.

It is important to remember that the situation in various countries and regions is rapidly changing. We encourage you to monitor the conditions of your location and of places to which you may plan to travel on the [State Department Travel Advisory webpage](#) and on the [Centers for](#)

[Disease Control webpage](#). If you are studying or planning travel in Europe, you can also find Coronavirus updates from the [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control](#).

**In the case of cancellation:**

If the University cancels one of the programs that it operates, the Office of Global Citizenship will attempt to find substitute programs for students whose programs have been cancelled.

In the case of cancellations by third-party study abroad providers, the Office of Global Citizenship will work with students to secure refunds for payments made to the providers where applicable. In addition, to the extent possible, the Office of Global Citizenship will attempt to help students work with third-party providers to find substitute programs for students whose programs have been cancelled.

When no alternative program can be found for the student, the University will, where applicable and to the extent possible, refund deposits and payments made to the University-operated programs by students and their families. Typically, refunds will be made to the University student accounts. When a student must or decides to remain on campus for the fall semester, the University will also assist students to register for courses up through the period permitted by the Registrar's calendar.

We very much hope that students will be able to study abroad on programs of their choice in the summer and fall of 2020. We ask for your understanding as the University and third-party providers make decisions on programs that fall into appropriate risk levels. The staff in the Office of Global Citizenship will do all that it can to assist students in navigating this period of global uncertainty.

Sincerely,

Scott Wilson

Assistant Provost and Director, Office of Global Citizenship

Email: [swilson@sewanee.edu](mailto:swilson@sewanee.edu) and [geo@sewanee.edu](mailto:geo@sewanee.edu)

Phone: 931.598.1173 and 931.598.3551