

# Leaving People Behind

Similar to going away to university for the first time, studying abroad will have an impact on personal relationships. Be prepared for the changes that may occur. Consider some coping strategies to help you handle changing relationships. Think about potential changes in your relationships with your parents, siblings, close friends and romantic partners. How will you keep in touch with them? Close relationships take time and effort to maintain. Though you may be busy, it is important to nourish your roots at home. This will ease the transition to the new environment and make the return home less awkward. The next section "Wish You Were Here!" will provide both unique and traditional methods of communicating. One is sure to suit your style. Utilizing many will allow you to explore other talents while sharing with your loved ones.

Although it is not possible for everyone, the very best way to strengthen these relationships is to have your friends and family for a visit during your vacations. They can meet the friends you've made, see the place where you study and live and become a part of your experience.

## Involving Your Family and Friends

We strongly encourage you to share your study abroad experience with your family and friends. Print any materials from this website which you think they should see; it will show them what you are about to face and how you are preparing for it! This section is particularly relevant to them. It is natural for them to be worried. If your family or other loved ones are not travellers, use your trip as an opportunity for them to learn more about the world. Here are some suggestions to put your parents more at ease:

- Show them maps of your host country. Point out where you will be living.
- Give them tourist or cultural information about the country.
- Make sure your parents have copies of your contact addresses, phone numbers, e-mail, etc.
- Write! Phone! E-mail! They want to hear from you!

### You may wish to discuss the following with your family:

You are preparing to go overseas. Perhaps your family knows a lot about the world and has travelled from Toronto to Timbuktu to Tokyo. Perhaps they've never had the chance to travel. In any case, they're probably experiencing mixed emotions over your decision to go abroad. It is natural to feel pride, happiness, fear, and/ or a loss of control in this situation.

They have the potential to support you in this experience. They also have the potential to make it very difficult. One of the most popular questions students ask each other regarding study abroad is: "How do your folks feel about this?"

For some students it may be a spouse or children who are being left behind for a while.

### Activity: Addressing Your Family's Concerns

Take the time to reflect on some of the concerns and anxieties your family may have about your study abroad experience.

Now, speak with your family about these concerns. Tell them why you want to study abroad. Discuss with them how you have prepared for the experience. Have you discussed health, insurance and safety issues? What will you do in case of an emergency, whether at home or abroad?

### How to make the overseas experience better for your family:

- Tell them to write! A handwritten letter or e-mail from home is the highlight of the day for many a student studying abroad.
- If they are not writers, tell them to phone! Just tell them to keep any time differences in mind.
- Have them become your power of attorney so that they can help you by following up on administrative problems such as paying bills (it can be with



- your money), filling out your income tax forms etc.
- Tell your family to trust you! You have valuable experiences to contribute to the world and will gain many more by going overseas.
- Help them be supportive of this endeavour.
- Most importantly explain to them the importance of listening so that they don't miss out on a significant experience in your life!

### **To make your experiences more real for those at home consider:**

- Make talking tapes. Especially fun are those with sounds of your travels in the background. For example maybe a live traditional band, or the sounds of the forest where you walk.
- If you have a great photo from your experiences- send it as a postcard or as an e-mail attachment.

The following book is a good resource if your family is still concerned about your study abroad experience:

"Guardian Angel - How to be a supportive Parent or Guardian When Your Young Adult Decides to Work or Study Abroad" is available from The Canadian Bureau For International Education in Ottawa. Website: <http://www.cbie.ca> .

## **Keeping In Touch - Mail, Phone, Fax, E- mail**

Take a list of addresses from home (leave a photocopy with someone reliable). If possible, leave a mailing address and telephone number for your friends and family.

### **Mail**

Post Restante is French for General Delivery and is recognized in most countries. Therefore, if you do not know your exact address, but you know the town you will be in, you can have your mail addressed to:

Firstname LASTNAME  
Post Restante  
City, Province/State,  
Country, Postal Code

This way, you should be able to go to your town's post office and simply ask for your mail. Some post offices may alphabetize mail by first name, so if they cannot find your mail under your surname, ask them to try your first name. Capitalizing and underlining your surname should help to avoid any confusion. If the country you are in does not use the Roman alphabet, capitalize all letters in the address. This should make things easier for the postal workers.

### **Telephone**

Telephone systems vary from country to country. Ask someone who's been there before, or consult your guidebook to figure out the best way of phoning locally internationally.

**Canada Direct** is a telephone service which allows you to have your calls home handled by a Canadian operator and allows you to pay Canadian rates. Phone them at 1-800-561-8868, or visit their website: <http://www.canada-direct.com> before you leave to determine if this is of benefit to you and to obtain the Canada Direct number to call in your host country. However, having this will not necessarily allow you to phone Canada directly, especially in India.

**Family Contact Cards** from Bell Canada, are designed specifically for cardholders to call the home of the card owner. There are two advantages to using Family Contact Cards. The card owner is eligible for savings plan discounts, based on the time at the origin of the phone call and the card can be used in conjunction with Canada Direct. The disadvantage is that the caller may only call the home of the card owner.

Purchase prepaid calling cards in Canada that can be used overseas in order to call home without worrying about long distance charges. Prepaid calling cards

reduce the calling charges in local countries as well.

In many countries the telephone offices have post phone call payment systems. Patrons are issued a specific telephone booth in which the call destination and length are recorded. Patrons pay at the termination of the call.

Some countries have phone-mail services available. If you will be travelling around and will not have a fixed address, friends and relatives can leave messages on your answering service that you can access from any phone. You can also update your own personal message to keep everyone posted on your latest adventure.

**Web Phones:** Conversation is conducted utilizing a microphone, computer and the Internet. The costs of calls made this way are competitive. The disadvantage is that there is a delay in conversation. If cameras are mounted to the computers, the speakers can see one another during the conversation.

### **E-mail**

Most institutions have Internet access, so ask about setting up an e-mail account soon after your arrival. Check to see if you can have telnet access your e-mail while overseas. You may also want to set up a free Chickmail, Hotmail or Yahoo account, which is not location specific and therefore easily accessible through the Internet. Many cities and tourist spots have cyber-café's from which to telnet or access the Internet. Remember cybercafé's can be very expensive. Take a list of your friends' e-mail addresses, and surprise them with a quick update. Be sure to forward all of your e-mail accounts to the address you will use while abroad.

### **Faxes**

Faxes are available almost everywhere. As usual, check with those who have gone before, or in your guidebook, to find out the particulars of faxing from your host country.

E-mail and fax access will be essential for you to communicate with your academic advisor or a professor about course work or research you are undertaking at your host institute.

### **Radio Canada International (RCI)**

A great way to keep in touch with Canadian news. It's broadcast on short wave in most countries of the world. For schedules, times and frequencies of the broadcasts check the website at <http://www.rcinet.ca> or e-mail, rci@montreal.radio-canada.ca

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**While You Are Away**