

Get your ducks in a row – Bridging the gaps in health and safety for study abroad programmes

Ashley Mountfort, ATC¹, Rachel Helwig²

1 Resident Director, BCA Study Abroad, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

2 Assistant Director, Health & Safety and Program Services, BCA Study Abroad, Pennsylvania, USA

As opportunities for studying abroad increase, so do the possibilities of unforeseen incidents. Past incidents resulted in liable consequences. Many of those incidents were unnecessary and could have likely been prevented through applying risk management strategies. Reported incidents followed by liable consequences included a University of Washington trip to Ghana, St Mary's College trip to Guatemala, the National Outdoor Leadership School in the Himalayas, *Paneno v Centres for Academic Programmes Abroad, Ltd* and *King, et. al. v Eastern Michigan University* ^(1,2,3). Unique cases such as *Orson D Munn III et. al. v The Hotchkiss School* serve as reminders of rare, yet still possible incidents that may occur and potentially threaten a study abroad programme ⁽⁴⁾. While these types of events have encouraged education and travel providers to improve safety reviews in the planning process, it is important we are careful not to cross boundaries of professionalism and discrimination at the same time. Clitheroe Royal Grammar School's refusal to take a diabetic student on an overseas trip is one example case ⁽⁵⁾. *Bird v Lewis & Clark College* also reviews similar factors ⁽³⁾. All of these cases place emphasis on knowledge as a powerful tool in enforcing health and safety within international education efficiently and competently. Lack of knowledge from a leadership standpoint is not a valid defence ⁽⁶⁾. Hence, it is important that we as educators, authority figures, supporters and leaders continue to learn about new evidence and risk assessment strategies that arise in international education. In response to recent legislative changes in health and safety practices around the globe, it is essential that we understand and develop strategies for adhering to such guidelines in order to build and maintain security and stability for our roles and programmes. With that said, we can review various case studies as mentioned above and apply key factors that share significant points across the board, regardless of the country of origin or programme. It is equally important to emphasise legislation and institutional guidelines for identifying and managing risks. Additionally, we can make use of such resources available through numerous institutions and government agencies to guide decisions. As a result of this careful planning, we are then more equipped for handling worst-case scenarios while leading best-case experiences abroad.

Keywords: Health, safety, risk management, international, education

References:

1. DIAZ-DURAN, C. (2010, May 13). 7 Student Travel Nightmares. *The Daily Beast*. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2010/05/12/7-student-travel-nightmares.html>
2. Hanners, D. (2013, October 23). Minnetonka mom sues trekking company in college son's fatal fall. *Twin Cities Pioneer Press*, Intelligence on higher education. <http://www.twincities.com/2013/10/23/minnetonka-mom-sues-trekking-company-in-college-sons-fatal-fall/>
3. Hoye, W. P. (2006, February 18). LEGAL ISSUES INFLUENCING INTERNATIONAL STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS [Case Study]. Retrieved from <http://www.stetson.edu/law/conferences/highered/archive/2006/LegalIssuesStudyAbroadPrograms.pdf4>
4. Ruskin, W. A. (2013, April 5). [Student Bitten By Tick: Hotchkiss School On Hook For \$41.75 Million]. Retrieved July 26, 2016, from Gordon & Rees's Environmental and Toxic Tort Defense Insight website:<http://www.ettdefenseinsight.com/tag/connecticut-hotchkiss-jury-award-school-sponsored-trip-to-china-encephalitis-tick-duty-assumption-of-risk-negligence-school-sued-over-tick-bite-foreseeability/>
5. BBC News. (2000, October 19). School sued over diabetic ban. *BBC News*, Education. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/979472.stm

6. Lin, T. (2015, October 30). Getting head around health & safety reforms a must for SMEs. *Stuff.co.nz*, BusinessDay.
-

Biography:

Ashley Mountfort is the Resident Director for the BCA Study Abroad programme at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand. She was trained as a Certified Athletic Trainer in the USA before moving to New Zealand. As a study abroad alum, she carries the passion of promoting international education opportunities. Within her training and as a response to New Zealand legislation, she has co-led several sessions in health and safety for her roles in international education and youth work.