

Sexual Misconduct Abroad

The opportunity to study abroad is an exciting, positive, and memorable part of your undergraduate experience. While you begin learning about the host culture and the features of your chosen study abroad program, it is also important to prepare for safety by addressing a variety of potentially problematic issues that may be faced abroad, including sexual misconduct.

INSTEP-WFU expects all members of its community to act in respectful and responsible ways toward each other – whether on campus, in our home communities, or abroad. You should familiarize yourself with your home campus' Student Sexual Misconduct Policy.

The purpose of this information on sexual misconduct is to raise awareness of the issue, highlight some of the ways in which entering another culture may increase vulnerability, and advise students on available resources.

What is Sexual Misconduct?

The Wake Forest University Sexual Misconduct Policy defines Sexual Misconduct as, “any act of a sexual nature perpetrated against an individual without effective consent or when an individual is unable to freely give consent.”

Sexual misconduct includes, but is not limited to:

- Attempted or completed intercourse or penetration
- Sexual Touching
- Sexual Exploitation
- Sexual Harassment
- Sexual Intimidation, which includes stalking, cyber-stalking, and indecent exposure

What is Effective Consent? As stated in the University's Sexual Misconduct Policy, “the University's definition of sexual misconduct mandates that each participant obtains and gives effective consent in each instance of sexual activity. Effective consent is informed, freely and actively given, mutually understandable words or actions, which indicate a willingness to participate in mutually agreed upon sexual activity.”

Keys to Prevention

Among college students, the great majority of incidents of sexual misconduct are perpetrated by someone the victim knows, whether an acquaintance, classmate, friend or dating partner. Incidents of sexual misconduct are never the victim's fault. However, certain behaviors and knowledge can enhance student safety abroad.

Understand cultural norms. Each host culture varies tremendously in their attitudes toward men and women, response to crime, and resources available to victims of sexual misconduct. Prior to departing for your study abroad experience, it is important to become familiar with the cultural norms and general attitudes of your host culture regarding men and women, Americans, communication styles and cues, dress, and acceptable behaviors. Unknowingly, students studying abroad may communicate or dress in ways that may be misinterpreted by members of the host culture and increase their vulnerability.

Know the effects of alcohol and drug use. There is a strong correlation between substance use and sexual misconduct. A 2008 survey conducted by PREPARE found that at Wake Forest, more than three-fourths of the reported incidents of coerced sexual activity involved alcohol or other drugs. While it is never the victim's fault, using or abusing alcohol or drugs (including prescription drugs) can alter the way you perceive and interpret situations, affect your ability to make sound decisions, and make it harder to communicate your thoughts and wishes. Students studying abroad will likely have increased access to alcohol because of lower legal age limits for purchasing alcoholic beverages. “Binge drinking” behavior common across U.S. college campuses is not as

prevalent in cultures abroad where alcohol consumption in social situations may be more moderate. Students abroad may be unaware of higher alcohol content in drinks and therefore may become intoxicated more quickly. It is important that students are both careful of what they drink, and are sure to not leave their beverage unattended as to prevent the addition of any unknown substances to their drink by those around them. Knowing your limits and sticking to them is one of the most effective things you can do to decrease your risk of being involved in an incident of sexual misconduct.

Communicate effectively. Sexual partners have the right and responsibility to know their sexual limits and to be clear in communicating them to each other. It is important that each partner communicate clearly and clarify their partner's wishes if confusion or ambiguity arises at any time. Speak up about what you want and don't want, and encourage your partner to do the same. Although this can be difficult, NOT talking can contribute to confusion and misinterpretation of cultural norms or nonverbal behaviors (flirting, touching, kissing). When problems of sexual misconduct are not addressed, it is more likely that the misconduct will worsen and become more difficult to remedy.

Listen to your intuition. Whether in a culture similar to the United States, or one that is very different, students may experience an illusion of safety while abroad. Due to a general sense of adventure or a desire to fit into a new culture or setting, students may relax their personal boundaries. If you find yourself in a situation in which you don't feel comfortable, you have the right to say (or shout), "Stop – I don't want this!" or to leave the situation and get help. Many people who have experienced sexual misconduct later express having felt uncomfortable or afraid before the incident(s) happened, yet they dismissed these feelings because it would have been too embarrassing or difficult to act on them, and they weren't sure they trusted their own judgment.

Avoid situations that contribute to stranger rape.

- Pay attention to your surroundings and what's going on around you.
- Make sure that someone knows where you are at all times.
- Lock your room, windows, and doors at all times.
- Walk in well-lighted areas and with others at night, even when going a short distance.
- Study in populated areas, especially during weekends and holidays.
- Don't trust strangers for rides or other assistance if you can avoid it.
- If you think you are being followed, walk or run to an area where there are other people.

Resources for Help

Although each host country will vary in their response to crime and the provision of services available to victims of sexual misconduct, some of your best resources for crisis response and immediate support may be in your host country with you.

If you have experienced sexual misconduct:

- Remember, it's not your fault.
- Get to a safe place.
- Seek immediate medical assistance.
- Seek emotional support and information on health, safety and reporting options.
- Save any evidence (e.g. notes, gifts, objects, photos, printed email messages, and voice messages).
- Keep a journal of all incidents with specific information on date, time, place, event, and any witnesses.
- Don't walk or ride alone.
- Alter your travel routes and daily routines.

How to help a friend that has experienced sexual misconduct:

- Understand that people respond differently to sexual misconduct.
- Be a good listener.
- Encourage your friend to report the misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator or Police.

- Urge medical attention and urge law enforcement assistance in stalking situations.
- Offer your assistance.
- Continue your support during the recovery process.
- Seek emotional support and information on health, safety and reporting options for you and your friend.

Options for Reporting

Victims are strongly encouraged to report incidents of sexual misconduct. Because sexual misconduct may constitute both a violation of your home university policy and criminal activity, and because the your home university judicial system is not a substitute for instituting criminal or civil action, the INSTEP-WFU encourages students to report alleged sexual misconduct promptly to program officials and to the appropriate local law enforcement authorities. While abroad, it is important to remember that reporting options and procedures through local law enforcement authorities may vary by country and culture. However, whether occurring on campus, in our home communities, or abroad, INSTEP-WFU community members are encouraged to report incidents of sexual misconduct to the program. Additionally, please note that faculty and staff that are not considered confidential campus resources are required to report any knowledge of alleged sexual misconduct to the University as mandated by Title IX.

In addition to the reporting and support options provided by INSTEP-WFU, students should familiarize themselves with the reporting and support options provided by their home universities.