INTRODUCTION

Congratulations! Education abroad is an amazing opportunity and will change your life. You’ll learn more than you can imagine . . . in your classes, experiencing and exploring a new culture, and about yourself and how you fit into our world community. Many education abroad alumni say their experience abroad was the most transformative event in their lives so far. And you’re well on your way to starting the adventure of your lifetime—you’ve probably chosen a program, applied, been accepted, and are now in the final stages of getting ready for your time abroad. And there’s so much to do to get ready . . . getting your passport, packing, making sure your academics are all set, and beginning to imagine your day to day experiences in a new culture.

Sex, Sexuality, and the Education Abroad Experience

College is a time when many students are exploring their ideas about sex and sexuality, though this does not mean that all college students are sexually active. Whatever decisions you make about sex, it is important to make smart and healthy decisions. In preparing for your program abroad, you will likely attend a predeparture orientation and be given a lot of material. These materials will cover very important topics such as cultural adjustment and culture shock; maintaining your health, safety, and security while away from home; packing lists; advice on how to handle money, credit cards, and how to budget; understanding academic differences in your new host country; and dealing with reentry culture shock. Although all of these are very relevant and necessary topics, it is also important to think about the topics of sex, sexual health, and your sexual behaviors and how they connect to your experience abroad. These topics are at times lost in the shuffle of the bigger, more obvious issues, but it’s essential to remember that sex and sexual health can play a large role in the kind of experience you have abroad. These topics are often best explored privately or with close friends, family, and advisers on a more
individual basis. This guide will help you to get started thinking about these important issues.

The term “sexuality” refers to more than just the physical acts of sexual intercourse. In this booklet, sexuality refers to both your own concepts of sexuality as well as cultural, societal, legal, and religious aspects of sex and sexual behaviors. Your concepts of sexuality are a part of your physical, emotional, intellectual, gender, and social identity. This affects how you think of yourself and how you relate to others, as well as how they relate to you. Your sexuality is a part of you, informed by your own culture and values.

Information Is Power
This booklet briefly discusses several areas vital to a better understanding of sexuality and sexual health as it relates to living in a new culture. It is designed to augment the predeparture materials you will receive as you prepare to leave for your term abroad. You cannot be too prepared for an education abroad experience. You will find that once you arrive in your host country, you will discover new things about yourself, about new friends on the program, and about the new culture in which you are immersed . . . things you cannot learn from a book. This booklet is not a comprehensive guide to understanding sex or sexuality abroad or a substitute for proper sex health education, but rather a jumping off point for your own research.
REACHING YOUR GOAL

After reading this booklet, you should have a better understanding of some of the issues related to sex, sexual health, and sexual behavior while abroad. The goal now is for you to explore some of these issues in greater depth on your own. Education abroad is considered by many students to be a once in a lifetime adventure. The idea of living abroad becomes surreal and it doesn’t seem possible that anything bad can happen to you during your experience. But the fact is that anything can happen to you—anywhere—at any time. To maintain your overall well-being and happiness while abroad, educate yourself and be prepared for anything. Have fun and be safe!

Education Abroad, Travel, and Student Resources

Always check with your on-campus health center, counseling office, and women’s center for additional services and info.

The Center for Global Education Student Study Abroad Safety Handbook www.studentsabroad.com/

Columbia University’s Health Q&A Internet Service Go Ask Alice! www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/

Glimpse http://glimpse.org/

Journeywoman www.journeywoman.com/

Mental Health America Back to Campus Web site www.nmha.org/go/backtocampus

Mental Health America mpower Web site www.mpoweryouth.org/index.html

NAFSA: Association of International Educators Rainbow SIG section for education abroad students http://www.nafsa.org/member_services.ms/member_interest_groups/sig_rainbow