

Tuesday, March 7, 2023

Dear colleagues –

As a member of NAFSA/The Forum on Education Abroad/Pulse International, we know you take seriously the responsibility to safeguard the health, safety, and security of the people who participate in education abroad programs and the communities that host them.

For this reason, we want to bring your attention to a documentary currently being developed by former PBS producer Robyn Symon that intends to explore the “hidden dangers of Study Abroad programs.” She is working in collaboration with Protect Students Abroad, Inc., a nonprofit organization founded by two mothers whose respective sons died tragically while studying abroad.

We appreciate the filmmaker’s desire to foster dialogue around how best to provide parents, students, schools, and program administrators with the tools they need to make the most informed decisions and assessments of the challenges and opportunities involved in study abroad and welcome their perspective.

To that end, we would like to use this opportunity to affirm our associations’ shared commitment to student health and safety:

- Participant safety has, and will always be, of utmost concern to the study abroad community. This was evidenced by the actions taken to support and bring home students who were abroad during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic and prioritizing a safety-centered approach in resuming international travel following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on supporting students’ physical and emotional health abroad.
- International educators want parents, students, and institutions to have access to the information they need to make an informed assessment of the quality of study abroad programs and providers and the associated risks to participants.
- Together with our professional associations, we are actively engaged on an ongoing basis in creating systems that support a healthy, safe, and secure environment for all personnel and participants.
- We share a commitment to inclusion and accessibility in all processes to support participants’ health, safety, and security.
- These and other guidelines are outlined in the revised edition of *Responsible Education Abroad: Best Practices for Health, Safety, and Security (2021)*, a joint NAFSA/Forum publication that is free to all.
- As a community, we adhere to the *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad* published by The Forum on Education Abroad, recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission as the Standards Development Organization (SDO) for the field of education abroad.
- Many institutions have demonstrated a commitment to health and safety abroad by dedicating full-time professionals to supporting this function or by developing protocols

for faculty and administrator to utilize. The number of full-time professionals in the field of international health, safety, and security in higher education has increased by nearly 1000% over the past decade, supported by the development of Pulse International.

- Industry professional organizations offer myriad resources and trainings to promote student health, safety, risk assessment, and crisis response on an ongoing basis. In fact, the two founders of Protect Students Abroad will be part of a workshop at NAFSA's 2023 Annual Conference & Expo in May. In June, the Forum will host its 14th Annual Institute on Health, Safety, Security and Risk Management.

Our associations have contacted the documentary's filmmaker and other stakeholders to express our interest in a collaborative dialogue that will lead to better understanding for all parties and to ensure a balanced and fair documentary. If you would like to be a part of these conversations or have any questions about this project, please contact us. We value your perspective and appreciate your dedication to ensuring study abroad can continue to be a safe and enriching experience for so many.

Sincerely,

[NAFSA: Association of International Educators](#)

[The Forum on Education Abroad](#)

[Pulse International](#)

