



# Northeastern

## **Risk Assessment Committee for International Programs for Students** **4 October 2011**

### **I. Introduction**

As part of its strategy to become a global university, Northeastern University is committed to offering its students, both undergraduate and graduate, a broad array of exciting and distinctive international program opportunities. These opportunities include such programs as study abroad, international coop and service learning, global community service, research and scholarship with international partners and/or global locations, and joint and double degree programs with international partners.

In all of these endeavors, the safety and well being of students is the University's primary consideration. The Risk Assessment Committee for International Programs for Students is charged with ensuring, through action or recommendation, that the safety and well being of the students is the primary and overriding consideration for all of Northeastern's international opportunities for students.

### **II. The Risk Assessment Committee for International Programs for Students**

For academic year 2011, the Committee membership is:

Robert P. Lowndes, Vice Provost for Global Relations (Chair)  
Brian J. Burns, Director Audit, Compliance & Risk Services  
Ketty M. Rosenfeld, Director for International Co-op  
Denis J. Sullivan, Director for International Affairs Program  
Lisa A. Sinclair, University Counsel Representative

It shall be within the specific authority of the Committee to immediately suspend or terminate a program that has been otherwise authorized, whether such program is in the planning stages or is in active operation, if in the opinion of the Committee, any circumstance that presents a serious safety concern has developed in a location where University students are participating in a University sponsored activity. This authority

specifically includes the authority to recall program participants from remote locations provided that an evacuation can be conducted safely.

In undertaking its responsibilities, the Committee will monitor and utilize all sources of information that may or do relate to the safety and security of Northeastern's international programs. In particular, it will be influenced by three important indicators: the **US State Department's Travel Warning List**, the **US State Department's Travel Alert List**, and **Travel Health Warnings issued by the US Centers for Disease Control**.

Northeastern University policy is *a priori* that no students are allowed to participate in any program in any country that is on the Travel Warning List; however, an appeal for an exception to this policy can be made (see below). If a country in which Northeastern has an international program is on the Travel Alert List, or is the subject of a Travel Health Warning issued by the U.S. Center for Disease Control, the Committee will review the situation and determine whether the program should proceed or not.

The following provides information about the State Department's Travel Warning and Travel Alert Lists, and the Center for Disease Control's Travel Health Warnings.

#### **a) US State Department's Travel Warning List and Appeal Process**

The State Department's Travel Warnings are issued to describe long-term, protracted conditions that make a country dangerous or unstable. A Travel Warning is also issued when the U.S. Government's ability to assist American citizens is constrained due to the closure of an embassy or consulate or because of a drawdown of its staff.

##### **i) Filing an Appeal**

However, recognizing that the State Department's Travel Warnings vary as to issue and scope and can be variable from one country to another, the Committee allows that on rare occasions there might be compelling reasons to consider allowing a program in a country on the Travel Warning List to proceed. To facilitate this, therefore, any appropriate faculty or staff member, or student, can petition the Committee for an exception to University policy prohibiting participation in a program in a country on the Travel Warning List.

The petition to the Committee for an exception will be a two-part process, a formal written proposal followed by a hearing with the Committee. The written proposal should be sent to the Vice Provost for International Affairs and this will then initiate the consideration of the petition.

Because of the variability of situations leading to a country being placed on the Travel Warning List, the Committee does not have a list of questions to be addressed in the appeal. There are, though, two specific areas at least that the petitioner must address. First, and paramount, the Committee requires the petitioner to make a compelling case

that the particular travel locations and itinerary for students in the program are planned as to significantly limit the exposure to risks presented within the Travel Warning for the particular country. Second, given a satisfactory case on safety, the Committee requires the petitioner to demonstrate that the program provides a compelling international opportunity for the student participants and one for which there are not reasonable alternatives.

In addition to addressing the above two specific areas of interest, the petitioner must provide the following information to the Committee:

- The role of the petitioner(s) with the program concerned
- The type of program (study abroad, co-op, experiential etc.)
- The dates of the program
- Specific information about the experience, including level of supervision (including NU faculty and staff supervision of students), name and mission of host organization, and location
- What this experience has to offer academically or experientially over similar alternative programs in non-Travel Warning countries
- Housing plans
- Specific security measures
- What emergency/crisis planning is in place, and what is the exit strategy if necessary
- How is the program funded
- What resources and assets are available in the country to support the student (such as family, language, etc)
- Other factors decreasing personal risk
- Other factors that may be relevant to the decision

ii) Appeal Process.

After the Committee has deliberated on the petition, it will vote on the matter. In order to accept the petition, a vote of four members of the Committee is required. If the Committee votes for an exception to University policy, then it will make such a recommendation to the Provost for the Provost's final decision on the matter. If the Provost concurs with the recommendation, then the exception is granted specifically for the program concerned and only for the dates of the program, and it is not a recurring exception nor does it apply to other programs in that country. If the Committee does not vote for an exception, then the petition fails and the petition is closed without any further action. Under extenuating circumstances, the Committee can vote to postpone a decision to a later date, such a vote requiring four votes of the Committee.

All University students who participate in programs or experiences in Travel Warning Listed countries will be required to sign the ASSUMPTION OF RISK AND GENERAL RELEASE FORM FOR COUNTRIES WITH U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT

WARNINGS acknowledging the risks associated with their participation in the elective and releasing the University from all liability.

**b) US State Department's Travel Alert List**

The State Department's Travel Alerts are issued to disseminate information about short-term conditions, generally within a particular country, that pose imminent risks to the security of U.S. citizens. Natural disasters, terrorist attacks, coups, anniversaries of terrorist events, election-related demonstrations or violence, and high-profile events such as international conferences or regional sports events are examples of conditions that might generate a Travel Alert.

If a country is placed on the State Department's Travel Alert List in which Northeastern has an international program involving students, the Committee will immediately review the situation and determine whether or not the program should continue or not.

**c) US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Travel Health Warnings.**

A Travel Health Warning by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a notification that a widespread, serious outbreak of a disease of public health concern is expanding outside the area or populations that were initially affected and that the CDC recommends against nonessential travel to the area.

The purpose of a Travel Health Warning is to provide accurate information to travelers and Americans living abroad about the status of the outbreak (e.g., its scope, magnitude, and rapidity of spread), how they can reduce their risk for infection, and what to do if they should become ill while in the area. The warning also serves to reduce the volume of traffic to the affected areas, which in turn can reduce the risk of spreading the disease to previously unaffected sites. CDC recommends against nonessential travel to the area because the risk for the traveler is considered to be high (i.e., the risk is increased because of evidence of transmission outside defined settings and/or inadequate containment). Additional preventive measures may be recommended, depending on the circumstances (e.g., travelers may be requested to monitor their health for a certain period after their return; arriving passengers may be screened at ports of entry).

If a CDC Travel Health Warning is issued for an area where Northeastern has an international program involving students, the Committee will immediately review the situation and determine whether or not the program should continue.