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Introduction: What is in the handbook?

For community development students who decide to do their placement overseas, they are embarking on a journey that will benefit them both personally and professionally. The aim of this handbook is to help students prepare for their fieldwork placement. This handbook also discusses cross-cultural awareness whilst living in the host country.

There are many things to organise when you are preparing to go overseas, this handbook can be seen as a checklist. We also advise that you take this handbook and read it carefully, while you are on the airplane, or waiting for a connecting flight. Doing an internship or working for an NGO is a different experience to being a tourist in a new country. Students may or may not experience culture shock, but the best attitude is to go to your host country with cultural awareness and an open mind.

This handbook can be divided into three sections: the preparation required before departure, the period whilst on placement, and how to share your experience with staff and students back home. We hope that students will keep in touch during and after their placement and offer feedback, so that Victoria University can continue to improve its fieldwork program abroad. One exciting way to share your experience with other students is through the 'Postcards from the field' project. We hope you have a rewarding time in the host country!
Before the meeting, students will need to
1) Find a host supervisor
2) Obtain a Letter of Acceptance from the host organisation
3) Complete the Contacts and Information Form in the handbook

1) Once you have decided on the organisation where you wish to carry out your fieldwork, you must find a host supervisor. A host supervisor is someone who will oversee your placement, and act as a mentor during that time. The host supervisor should also be in touch with the Fieldwork coordinator.

2) When you meet with the Fieldwork coordinator you must provide a ‘Letter of Acceptance’ from your host supervisor confirming that they are expecting you. The letter should cover a brief description of what your role will be during your fieldwork placement, and the estimated time of the placement.

Please ensure that you organise the meeting with the Fieldwork Coordinator at least 1 month before you leave. This is to ensure that all the preparations will not be left until last minute. Bring your Letter of Acceptance and the completed Contacts and Information Form to the meeting.
1.2 Contacts and Information Form

1. Name Host Supervisor ____________________________________________
   Email Address _________________________________________________
   Contact Phone Number __________________________________________

2. Name of Host Organisation _______________________________________
   Address of Host Organisation _____________________________________

3. Number and address of closest Australian embassy/consulate ________

4. Number of local Doctor in host country____________________________

5. Number of local police station _____________________________________

6. Name of Health insurance provider _________________________________
   Policy number __________________________________________________

7. Emergency contact in host country _________________________________
   Any additional info ______________________________________________

8. Emergency Contact Details (in Australia)
   Name __________________________________________________________
   Relation to student _____________________________________________
   Contact number _______________________________________________
1.3 Application through Victoria University International

Students will also need to arrange to have their trip approved by Victoria University International. All information regarding applications, travel grants and insurance can be found at these links:

General information: http://www.vu.edu.au/current-students/student-exchange-program

Insurance and Enrolment: http://www.vu.edu.au/current-students/student-exchange-program/apply-to-study-on-exchange


Note that fieldwork placement students need to complete the Short Program Application Form (not the exchange form), which can be found on the website. For any other queries contact Joshua Thorneycroft:
Email: joshua.thorneycroft@vu.edu.au
Ph: 61 3 9919 1471.

1.4 Visas

Find out what kind of visa you will require whilst on your fieldwork placement in the host country. For some visas the application process can be lengthy, so make sure you start doing this well before you plan to leave. www.dfat.gov.au/visas/

In addition, don’t forget to REGISTER your travel dates and destination with Smart Traveller – www.smartraveller.com.au
The process of registering online with Smart Traveler only takes 5 minutes. This will ensure that the Australian Government can know where you are, in case of an emergency. You will also receive updates about travel warnings to particular places in your host country.
1.5 Finance: Start thinking about money matters

Before leaving it is a good idea to look up the exchange rate of the local currency of your host country. You can change money at the airport in Australia or once you arrive. Travellers are often advised to carry travellers cheques or US dollars, for times when it is difficult to withdraw money.

Another option is the Travelex ATM Cash Passport, which is a prepaid travel money card. It allows you to withdraw money at local currency from more than 1 million VISA ATMs worldwide. More info at: http://auspost.com.au/personal/travelex-cash-passport.html

Questions to think about:
• Do I have sufficient money in the bank to cover expenses whilst on my placement? (including accommodation, food, travel).
• Will there be ATMs near to where I will be staying?
• Will my bank or credit card be acceptable at ATMs in the host country?
• Will I need to have a credit card when I am overseas? (When booking domestic flights within your host country, a credit card will be very useful)

Be aware that credit card fraud can occur – try to avoid using the same ATM every time you withdraw cash.

1.6 Travel Insurance

Once you have approval from VU International, you are insured by the university. The insurance provided by VU only applies to the period of time that you are on your placement. If you are planning to travel before your placement or after, you will need to buy separate travel insurance.

NOTE: MAKE PHOTOCOPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS
• Photocopy your passport, travel itinerary, ticket, and insurance policy to take with you.
• Leave an extra copy at home with family, or friends.
• Take some extra passport size photos. If you need to reapply for a passport, or a visa extension, it is handy to have some extra passport photos with you.
1.7 Health

• Vaccinations
Before going overseas, it is important to find out which vaccinations you will need. Visit your local Doctor, as well as the Travel Doctor, as it is crucial that all your immunizations are up to date. We advise you to take a full travel medical kit, so you are equipped at all times.

www.traveldoctor.com.au
Address: Level 2 & 3, 393 Little Bourke St, Melbourne, Vic 3000
Ph: 9935 8100

www.travelvax.com.au
Address: 23 QV Building 292 Swanston St Melbourne CBD VIC, 3000
Ph: 1300 360 164

• Carrying medicines on board an airplane
If you are an asthmatic, for example, it is important to take a letter from your Doctor stating why you are carrying a ventolin inhaler on board.

• Allergies and dietary requirements
If you have any food allergies, find out about the local food of your host country. Or if you have particular dietary requirements (e.g. lactose intolerant, vegetarian, coeliac), be sure to prepare alternative arrangements before leaving. You don’t want to be stuck eating dried biscuits for two months!
1.8 Find a Phrasebook!

Phrasebooks are small and light, and very useful when you are overseas. Even if you will be speaking English during your placement, it is a good idea to familiarise yourself with basic phrases, such as ‘how are you?’, ‘what is your name?’ or ‘Good morning/evening’. People will warm to you even more, when they see you are making an effort to learn their language! Lonely Planet and Rough Guide Travel have an extensive range of phrasebooks.
1.9 What do I know about the host country?

Before heading off to your host country, we recommend that you do some research about that country in order to get a better understanding of the place.

Start by finding out about
- Recent political history
- Social issues - culture and religion
- The economic situation of the country
- The environment (earthquake prone area, etc)
- Local laws and customs

It is also important that you do some research into the particular city or region to where you are heading. For example, the state of Gujarat in India experienced communal conflict in 2002, between Hindus and Muslims. A student doing their placement in Gujarat, should be well-informed about the political situation in order to guarantee their safety.

Another example is that of Thailand and the red shirt/yellow shirt political conflict. Since 2008 the political situation has been unstable, often resulting in violent protests. If a student/foreigner was wearing a red or yellow shirt in the wrong place and at the wrong time, they could be arrested for involvement in political activity. We expect that all students doing their placement overseas research their host country, particularly the region where they will be.

Tatyana on placement with the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law & Development, Chiang Mai, Thailand
1.10 Informing family and friends

Pursuing fieldwork overseas is not just an individual matter, often you need to negotiate and make decisions with your family. Especially for those students who have partners or children, your decision to go overseas will affect and impact on those around you. As you prepare for your fieldwork placement in the host country, you will be finding out more about the region where you will stay. Although you may feel confident and excited about your impending travel, your family or friends may have doubts about security issues. Keep them well informed and assure them that you will be well supported whilst on placement in the host country.
Once you arrive, it is important that you give yourself time to adjust to settling into your host country. Some people find this the most exciting time, full of exploring and learning. Others find the first few weeks the most difficult, often because they are still acclimatising to a new environment. Try and find a map of the town/city you are in, so you can start getting used to the main city sites and meeting places.

Stay connected:
Buy a local SIM card for your mobile phone. When you are doing your placement you will be meeting a lot of new friends and contacts. Using a local SIM card is also a lot cheaper than putting your Australian mobile phone on international roaming. You may need to unlock your Australian mobile phone before your leave, so that you can use foreign SIM cards.

Stay healthy:
One of the keys to enjoying your fieldwork experience is looking after your health. Eat healthy food, and don’t forget to exercise. If you are on the look out for fresh fruits and vegetables, ask people where you can find local markets. It is likely that you will need to drink bottled water, due to local water that may be unclean. If you wish to cut down on the amount of plastic bottles, buy a refillable water dispenser (gallon) to keep in your room.

Stay safe:
It may sound obvious, but be conscious of your surroundings and use common sense. Here are some tips:
  • Don’t walk alone at night.
  • Only use registered taxi services.
  • Avoid wearing expensive looking jewelry or displaying an expensive camera to minimize the risk of being pick-pocketed.
  • In some places it is advised to carry a backpack on the front, or keep your belongings close to you.
Action Plan

5 steps towards staying healthy overseas
1. ________________________________
2. ________________________________
3. ________________________________
4. ________________________________
5. ________________________________

5 steps towards staying safe overseas
1. ________________________________
2. ________________________________
3. ________________________________
4. ________________________________
5. ________________________________
2.2 Cross Cultural Awareness

• Dress
The way you dress often impacts on how others receive you and how you fit into a certain environment. Many cultures consider appropriate dress code as a sign of respect. Take your cues from other locals who are working in your organisation or field. Don’t be afraid to ask people what is appropriate and what is not.

• Behaviour and Communication
In your host country you will be learning about another culture’s behaviours and forms of communication. There may be certain terms of respect in language that you must use when speaking to people older than yourself. Or you may find greetings a new experience; they can vary from people kissing on the cheek, bowing to one another, or shaking hands. In some cultures, people do not use their left hand to shake hands as it is considered dirty. Our advice is to watch and learn. You will learn a lot by observing how people in your host country interact with each other. At the same time, certain behaviours in your host country may be quite different to what you are used to in Australia.

• Male/female relationships
In your host country, the perceptions of male and female relationships may differ to those of your own culture. At the same time, you may find that some behaviours are acceptable for men, but not for women, or vice versa. You need to navigate your way through these cultural differences in order not to offend people. In Australia a man and a woman having a coffee together is perceived as normal, whilst in another culture it could immediately be perceived as more than friendship. Be respectful of the local norms with regards to relationships between men and women.
2.2 Cross Cultural Awareness (continued)

• **Alcohol and Drugs**
  Whilst on placement, you will need to be aware of general social attitudes towards alcohol. Depending on your host country, it may be acceptable to drink socially, or it may be unacceptable, particularly for women.

  In regards to drug use, Victoria University has a zero tolerance policy, as will your host organization. Penalties for drug offences in some countries may include the death sentence or lengthy imprisonment.

• **Time**
  In your host country there may exist a different concept of time and punctuality, to what you are used to in Australia. Try not to get frustrated with this, but instead adapt and learn from the experience. If your schedule for the day changes due to people not turning up, always have a plan B, so you can use your time productively.

  Also expectations of ‘time’ may vary in regards to your placement. You may have a certain expectation of how much you can achieve in 2 months on a placement, whereas your host organization may have a different idea of what they expect from you. If you have short-term goals, try to think of them in relation to the long term sustainable goals of the organisation.

• **Religion and celebrations**
  In your host country there may be religious festivals, public holidays, or certain prayer days that are part of the everyday routine. Sometimes during festival periods people leave work and return to their villages, causing businesses and services to slow down. In many countries, Muslim men go to the mosque every Friday for prayer, and it is acceptable that they leave work early. Your work schedule at the host organisation may be affected by these religious activities.

Often foreigners (tourists or otherwise) are seen as very rich people and are therefore overcharged at markets, food stalls, in taxis etc. Be patient and understanding about people’s economic situations. If you are eating or shopping with a local friend, there is a much less chance that you will be overcharged!
2.3 Psychosocial wellbeing: Culture shock

Although students doing their placement overseas have an amazing time, they can also experience homesickness or culture shock. Being away from your friends and family, and living in a culture that is very different to your own, can make you feel lonely or even isolated. It is very normal to experience this. Some people feel frustrated when they cannot communicate because of language or cultural barriers. Speak to your host supervisor or a friend about these issues. If things get too difficult, contact your Fieldwork Coordinator, who will discuss options with you. Do not feel embarrassed to ask for help.

It helps to keep in contact with friends and family while you are away. If you experience loneliness or homesickness, email, facebook and skype are all easy ways to stay in touch with people back home.

2.4 Emergency situation

Your Fieldwork Coordinator will need to see that you have a ‘risk aversion’ emergency plan in case you find yourself in an emergency situation. This could range from minor political disturbances to serious natural disasters. Find out whether your host organisation is in an earthquake prone area, and what the advised precautions are.

For security reasons, we do not advise or encourage students to get involved in political protests whilst on placement. It is not uncommon for demonstrations or large public gatherings to turn violent. Students should exercise responsibility at all times.

Due to political tensions between countries, which can be amplified by the media, there have been times when Australians have felt at risk being overseas. If there is any anti-Australian or anti-Western sentiment brewing and you are concerned for your safety, contact the consulate or embassy.
Opening of new preschool celebration in Ahmedabad, India

Annie, Sharnee and friends in Ahmedabad, India
 KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH VU

3.1 Postcards from the field

An extra component of the fieldwork placement abroad is ‘Postcards from the field’. Students are required to share a key lesson learnt, with a photo of their fieldwork attached. This is an exciting initiative where students can learn from their friends, and also share their own stories and experiences. It is also a great way to stay connected with other students on placement overseas. Please check out www.postcardsfromthefield.com.au

3.2 Debrief with Fieldwork Coordinator

After finishing their placement, students are required to make an appointment with their Fieldwork coordinator back in Melbourne for a debriefing session. This is gives you a chance to give positive and/or negative feedback about your program with the host organization.

Students can begin working on their report, while their memories and experiences are still fresh in their minds. Every year Community Development students are given the opportunity to speak about their fieldwork experiences at the Symposium. This is a great way for students to share their experiences with each other.
# Helpful Websites

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| www.studentflights.com.au     
  www.statravel.com.au                | Start looking for flights to your host country.                          |
<p>| <a href="http://www.dfat.gov.au">www.dfat.gov.au</a>                      | On the DFAT website, you can find information about travel warnings, Visas and passports |
| <a href="http://www.interfaithcalendar.org/">www.interfaithcalendar.org/</a>          | A calendar of all the main religious holidays and festivals of the year. |
| <a href="http://www.lonelyplanet.com">www.lonelyplanet.com</a>                 | A traveler’s guide: you can find the best places to visit, depending on your travel budget. |
| <a href="http://www.beyondblue.org.au">www.beyondblue.org.au</a>                | National depression initiative: on this website you can find out more about depression and anxiety, and ways to deal with these issues. |
| <a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/weather/">http://news.bbc.co.uk/weather/</a>        | Find out global weather forecasts.                                      |</p>
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<td>Letter of Acceptance (from host organization)</td>
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<td>Completed Contacts and Information page</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting with Fieldwork Coordinator</td>
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<td>Approval from Victoria Abroad</td>
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<tr>
<td>Valid Passport</td>
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