Introduction

BY PATRICIA C. MARTIN

This new publication is an outgrowth of the NAFSA book Crisis Management in a Cross-Cultural Setting (2001), which originally served professionals who work with international students and scholars in the United States as well as education abroad professionals who support students from U.S. institutions studying abroad. With this book, NAFSA now has two distinct publications to serve these professional constituencies (see Crisis Management in a Cross-Cultural Setting: International Student and Scholar Services, 2015).

Joseph Brockington was an editor for this book. The education abroad field was deeply saddened when Joe passed away in August 2015, and we dedicate this book to his memory. It was my privilege to work with Joe on many projects, including coediting the third edition of NAFSA’s Guide to Education Abroad for Advisers and Administrators, along with Bill Hoffa, and more recently giving multiple conference presentations to raise awareness and promote best practices concerning water safety. The Forum on Education Abroad recognized Joe posthumously for his contributions to the field with the Peter A. Wollitzer Advocacy Award in 2016.

Joe’s vision and voice are felt throughout this publication. His contributions are too numerous to count, but of particular significance to this publication are his contributions in the areas of risk assessment and mitigation. I was honored when asked by NAFSA to continue as editor.
for this book, and I have endeavored to bring the original concept of this publication forward while working with the contributors to add and refresh content to make it current. I offer a special thanks to the authors who worked with multiple editors, over a multiyear period, for their commitment and patience throughout this process.

The information put forward here builds on decades of contributions by leaders in the education abroad field. There have been several critical junctures in our field that led both to advances in our understanding of the issues and action toward improving policies and procedures. Among these notable events are the establishment of the NAFSA Education Abroad Knowledge Community (EA KC) Health and Safety Subcommittee, the establishment of The Forum on Education Abroad and its work on the development of standards for the field, and the successful collaboration of the U.S. State Department and the Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) with the education abroad community. These and many other important initiatives are discussed in the chapters to follow.

One particularly key moment was the coming together of education abroad professionals from provider organizations, colleges, and universities, including the then-NAFSA SECUSSA leadership (now called the Education Abroad Knowledge Community), for a discussion of the health and safety concerns facing our field. This led to the establishment of the document titled Responsible Study Abroad: Good Practices for Health and Safety (2002) by the Interorganizational Task Force on Health and Safety (first edition 1997), which later became the Interassociational Task Force on Health and Safety.

According to the late David Larsen, vice president and director for the Center for Education Abroad (1988–2008) at Arcadia University, this conversation and the resulting seminal document represented the first time that study abroad program providers worked together on the common goal of safety, rather than worrying about their relative competitive advantage. This cooperative effort also led to the key concepts that (1) we are stronger and more effective working together, and that
(2) identifying risks and addressing them does not inherently make us more vulnerable. Rather, it is our responsibility to be transparent about the risks associated with international travel and to work to educate students, parents, and program providers to address those risks with the goal of responsible practices. We must also continue to acknowledge that no one can guarantee the safety of individuals, and that we all (students, parents, programs) have a role to play in responsible education abroad.

Joe always said that a crisis is what happens when you don’t have a plan. Crisis management must be threaded throughout the planning and administration of education abroad programs. This includes the thorough development of crisis planning, response, and communications; consideration of legal issues, risk mitigation, and insurance; the regular refreshing of procedures; and training of staff and faculty.

In this book, Joanna Holvey-Bowles explores important safety considerations when planning education abroad programs. Joe Brockington lays out concepts of risk assessment and strategies for mitigating risks in education abroad programs. Inés DeRomaña and Stacey Bolton Tsantir offer detailed crisis planning and response plans. Julie Anne Friend’s chapter on “When a Student Dies Abroad: Preparing for the Ultimate Tragedy,” which first appeared in NAFSA’s International Educator magazine, provides a thorough and sensitive discussion of what to do when the unthinkable happens. Friend’s chapter on the regulatory landscape of education abroad provides a historical context to the U.S. regulatory environment that frames our work today. She also provides a review and analysis of the laws that affect our work in the chapter on mitigating organizational liability. In the final chapter, I discuss the insurance needs in the education field and the ever-evolving array of available insurance products. Throughout the book the definition of “institution” is meant to be interpreted in the broadest way to include any and all academic, provider, or other related institutions that are engaged in planning and conducting education abroad programs.
The complexities of the education field require ongoing training on risk management considerations. Assessing ongoing training needs should be an important annual planning and budget consideration for every international education office, and all staff should be trained to understand and share a risk perspective in their work.

This book is intended to complement professional training in the area of crisis management. There are many opportunities for training offered by professional associations, offices of the U.S. government, program providers, insurance and risk management companies, and private and non-profit companies. Professional development opportunities are available at meetings and conferences, or virtually as webinars.

There have been recent attempts at gathering and creating aggregates of information on health, safety, and security incidents that have affected individual students participating in education abroad programs. One such effort is the sharing of insurance claims data as part of The Forum on Education Abroad’s Insurance Claims Data and Mortality Rate for College Students Studying Abroad report (2016).

Learning from actual events abroad is critically important. Developing professional networks with colleagues with similar institutional and student profiles, especially those that have similar missions and education abroad opportunities for their students, provides an important opportunity for benchmarking and for sharing experiences and best practices. When reviewing programs and other education abroad opportunities, administrators should ask questions about risk management procedures and records of incidents.

Some institutions have full-time education abroad risk managers, but in most cases the director of an education abroad office, or other designated individual, holds this responsibility. Our challenge as education abroad professionals is to not be overwhelmed by all of the professional knowledge needed and the policies and procedures that must be put in place.

All members of the education abroad community have important roles to play in establishing and administering appropriate crisis management
plans and procedures for their institutions. As we develop a wide variety of programs, in a growing number of destinations, to meet the educational mission of our institutions and to provide these opportunities to our students, we must keep health, safety, and security considerations and crisis management at the fore of our work.