

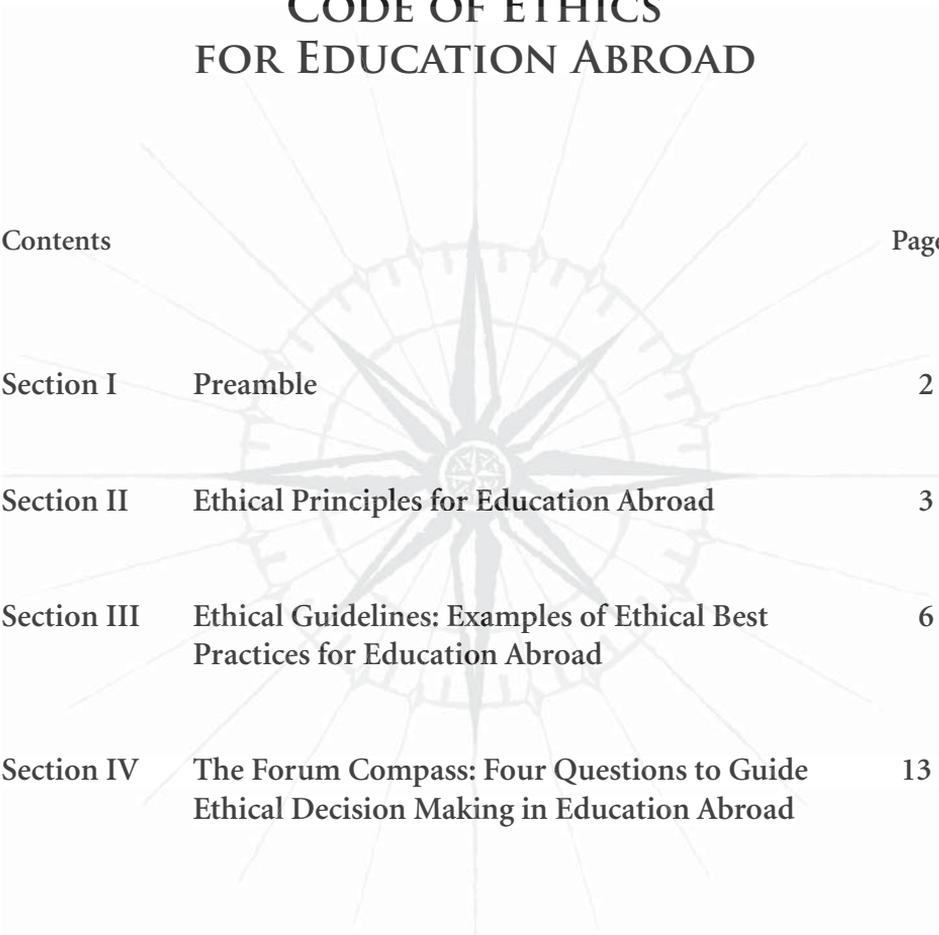


**CODE OF ETHICS**  
FOR  
**EDUCATION ABROAD**

THE  
**FORUM**  
ON EDUCATION  
**ABROAD**

# THE FORUM ON EDUCATION ABROAD

## CODE OF ETHICS FOR EDUCATION ABROAD



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## CODE OF ETHICS FOR EDUCATION ABROAD

### SECTION I PREAMBLE

The Forum on Education Abroad was formed by institutions and study abroad provider organizations committed to academic excellence and superior professional program management in higher education abroad.

These guidelines are aspirational and reflect the best practices developed by the Forum in its role as a Standards Development Organization and adopted voluntarily by its members. Forum members, indeed all institutions and organizations within the field of education abroad, are encouraged to combine the principles of this Code of Ethics with their own codes of ethical practices. They are encouraged also to adopt the more concrete best practices, query-based self-evaluations, and toolbox resources of the Forum's Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad. In doing so, the field of education abroad will continue to be distinguished by the hallmarks of integrity, idealism, and commitment to the common good.

The purpose of the Code of Ethics is to provide a guide for making ethical decisions to ensure that those in the education abroad field provide services in accord with the highest ethical standards, with the ultimate goal of ensuring that students' international educational experiences are as rich and meaningful as possible. The Code of Ethics is not meant to substitute for specific institutional and organizational policies and practices, but rather to inform the development of them. As part of their dedication to the Forum's mission, member institutions should be committed to ongoing reflection and periodic review of the extent to which their own organizations meet and fulfill the ethical principles articulated in this Code of Ethics.



## SECTION II ETHICAL PRINCIPLES FOR EDUCATION ABROAD

### 1. Truthfulness and Transparency

Truthfulness and transparency are essential to ethical education abroad practices. The fundamental premise is that education abroad practices should be open and clear, and that decision-making processes should be appropriately disclosed and periodically reviewed. This includes but is not limited to:

- transparency of institutional education abroad policies and procedures with respect to: program development; partnership agreements; criteria for program approval/recommendation; eligibility and permission to study abroad; applications; admission; fees; financial aid; academic, grading, and credit policies; student codes of conduct; petition and appeals processes; and grievance policies.
- disclosure of the decision-making processes that guide practices, policies and education abroad operations.
- clear and consistent communication appropriate to relevant constituencies.
- complete and accurate marketing, advertising and promotional materials that avoid unfair and misleading statements.

### 2. Responsibility to Students

As an educational endeavor, education abroad should keep students' academic objectives, personal growth, and best interests foremost in mind. This includes but is not limited to:

- helping students make well-informed decisions about education abroad programs.
- preparing students thoroughly for participation in education abroad programs.
- supporting students appropriately throughout their education abroad experience and after their return.
- focusing on program quality, academic integrity, and student health and safety.
- protecting students' rights and privacy as required by law and ethical considerations.

### **3. Relationships with Host Societies**

By its very nature education abroad engages host societies in myriad ways. In so doing, institutions and organizations should demonstrate:

- sensitivity to and respect for differences between local cultural norms and those of the home culture.
- awareness of the program's impact on the local community, a commitment to creating sustainable local relationships that are mutually beneficial, and an effort to minimize any negative effects on the host society.
- effective orientation of students, faculty and staff so that they are aware of applicable host and home country ethical and legal practices, and understand the host society, in order to avoid actions that negatively impact that society or the image of the home country.

### **4. Observance of Law and Good Practice**

In all administrative, business, and financial arrangements, all applicable U.S. and international laws should be observed and principles of good practice followed. These include but are not limited to:

- protecting the rights and privacy of all employees.
- allowing for free and fair competition among programs and avoiding the denigration of programs offered by other institutions or organizations.
- respecting intellectual property rights.
- paying fair and locally-appropriate wages to employees, providing adequate training, and avoiding discrimination in employment practices with respect to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, gender, disability, age, ancestry, marital status, or sexual preference.
- on the part of U.S. institutions, adequately supporting education abroad opportunities and operations to ensure a competent level of service to students.
- establishing and maintaining safe conditions for living, working and studying abroad, and informing students, faculty and staff of any conditions beyond the institution's or organization's reasonable control.



## **5. Conflicts of Interest**

All potential conflicts of interest involving education abroad should be reviewed by an appropriate third party to determine whether such conflicts exist, and if so, whether they may or may not be cured. A potential conflict of interest exists when the financial or non-financial interests of an institution or organization (or an employee of either) may be seen as competing with the interests of the student. Those conflicts that cannot be waived or appropriately managed after full disclosure to all concerned parties must be eliminated.

## **6. Gifts, Gratuities, Discounts, Rebates and Compensation**

Provider organizations and institutions should neither accept nor offer compensation (such as honoraria and consulting fees), gifts, gratuities, discounts, and rebates if it could be reasonably inferred that they would impact either party's ability to make objective and fair decisions about any aspect of education abroad operations, including but not limited to affiliation, approval of study abroad programs, and student enrollment in such programs.

## SECTION III

### ETHICAL GUIDELINES: EXAMPLES OF ETHICAL BEST PRACTICES FOR EDUCATION ABROAD

#### 1. Truthfulness and Transparency

- In marketing, advertising and promotional materials institutions and organizations should focus on what they believe to be the strengths of their program, avoiding disparaging or misleading statements about programs offered by other institutions or organizations. Marketing, advertising and promotional materials should clearly set out the program's limitations, as well as its strengths.
- Program materials should be updated regularly, as information changes, and every effort should be made to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information, especially key information such as program price, what the program price includes or excludes, program dates, and the availability of academic courses or special opportunities described in the promotional materials.
- Agreements with providers of education abroad services, and criteria for education abroad program approval/recommendation should be disclosed fully, together with any benefits to the institution or its staff, such as service on advisory boards or provider-funded site visits, etc.
- Materials such as those listed below in Section III.8 should be made available upon request.

#### 2. Responsibility to Students

- Education abroad organizations and institutions should maintain easily accessible, written codes of student conduct. Students should be made aware of and be directed to such codes early in the program selection/application process.
- Institutions that limit student participation to approved programs should have frequent assessment of these programs that includes consideration of the evolving interests of the home institution as well as student input and feedback.
- Students should be informed of the processes of program assessment and evaluation and how they can participate in them
- Students should be required to sign a statement of student rights and responsibilities.
- Grievance procedures should be transparent, consistent, communicated clearly to students, and readily accessible to students and the general public. Grievance procedures should provide access to an avenue outside of the education abroad office.



- Education abroad offices and staff should assist students in understanding what reasonable accommodations can be provided for students with special needs.
- Institutions and provider organizations should appropriately disclose to students that there are limitations on their rights while they are abroad and that some rights protected under U.S. law are not recognized or protected by other nations. Students should be advised that they have individual responsibility to inform themselves about the limitations of U.S. laws and the impact of foreign laws or restrictions on their rights.
- Institutional and organizational policies and practices regarding the awarding or transfer of student financial aid for study abroad should be transparent, consistent, communicated clearly, and readily accessible to students and the general public.
- Institutions and provider organizations should be proactive and provide assistance and financial aid advice to make education abroad financially accessible to as many students as possible.
- Institutions and provider organizations should ensure that employees involved in marketing, recruitment, and administration of education abroad are appropriately trained in financial aid regulations and policies and are sensitive to the need to consult counsel with respect to uncertainties about anti-competitive practices.
- Any and all financial aid and scholarships awarded by education abroad programs to individual students should be applied in a manner that benefits the student.
- Grants awarded by provider organizations or institutions should be used to reduce students' loan requirements first, rather than reducing existing grant awards.
- Federal, state and institutional aid should be made available to all education abroad students consistent with federal and other applicable laws.

### 3. Relationships with Host Societies

- Staff, faculty, and students should have knowledge of local laws and the cultural setting, such as formal and informal differences in the practice of speech, religion, political participation, gender relations, etc.
- The creation and enforcement of any student code of conduct should embrace both U.S. and local societal and cultural norms.
- Students must be advised that they are subject to local laws and should expect no immunity or other special treatment by local authorities.

- Institutions and provider organizations must ensure that students receive orientation about local cultural, social and educational practices.
- Institutions and provider organizations should understand local business practices prior to program development and avoid arrangements that violate laws or accepted business practices of the U.S. or host country.
- Education abroad organizations should seek to offer reciprocal opportunities that benefit both the sending and receiving country's educational institutions, students and broader communities. Special attention should be paid to the potential economic, political, and personal risks faced by institutions and colleagues in countries where international educational cooperation may create controversy or conflict.

#### 4. Good Practice

- Institutions and provider organizations should operate according to established written protocols, policies, and procedures which, along with job responsibilities, should be documented in handbooks and/or other written materials and reviewed and updated on a regular basis.
- Provider organizations should have a written policy pertaining to which records (including electronic records) about students will be kept, what will be done with such records, who will have access to them, how long they will be kept, and how they will be discarded.
- Students should be informed about the level of in-country support, if any, that will be available to them.
- Institutions and education abroad organizations that allow research by students involved in education abroad should follow their own institution's protocols for conducting human subject research, including involving the Institutional Review Board(s), Human Subjects Committee(s), or like entity, as well as any applicable process within the host country.
- In program evaluation, students should be informed of how evaluation data will be used, and have the option of participating anonymously or of opting out of the evaluation process entirely.
- Provider organizations should respect college and university procedures with respect to campus visits and other on-campus activities such as study abroad fairs; campuses should make such policies clear and publicly available.



- Education abroad program providers should have procedures in place to allow institutions to opt out of receiving email, phone, and direct mail from them.
- Employees and education abroad program directors should receive appropriate initial and ongoing training relevant to their responsibilities.
- Institutions and education abroad organizations should
  - provide employees with a safe working environment;
  - foster an environment of respect for all employees;
  - be sensitive to diversity issues, needs, and responsibilities;
  - not tolerate sexual harassment or other harassment of employees.
- Employees should have access to a process for expressing a grievance or for pointing out instances of perceived internal wrongdoing without fear of reprisal.
- Institutions and education abroad organizations should support and protect employees acting in good faith in execution of their responsibilities.
- Institutions and education abroad organizations should insure employees against liability for program related activities, except in the case of intentional malefaction or gross negligence.

## 5. Observance of Law

- Institutions, provider organizations and individuals engaged in education abroad should take reasonable steps to inform themselves of applicable laws of the host country. This may include, but is not limited to, awareness of and compliance with pertinent laws relating to privacy, labor, currency exchange, taxation, and bribery.
- Statutory requirements such as the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act should be considered as a minimum standard. Where institutional policies establish a higher standard, they should be applied.
- Organizations' legal counsel and/or risk management should review existing and proposed agreements between organizations and institutions, as well as contracts relating to agreements for specific individual education abroad programs.
- Institutions, provider organizations and programs should not unlawfully discriminate in employment or admissions on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, age, ancestry, familial status, or on any other basis. They should maintain and make available an explicit written non-discrimination policy.

- All contracts regarding employment should comply fully with applicable law and, where a choice of laws offers differing standards, the higher or more protective standard should be applied.

## **6. Conflicts of Interest**

- Institutions and provider organizations should develop and implement a conflict of interest policy and procedures for addressing conflicts of interest.
- If conflicts of interest cannot be resolved, individuals should recuse themselves from the relationship or the decision-making process and/or institutions should not participate in the proposed transaction.
- Individuals should not accept gifts, services, or other favors under circumstances from which it might be inferred that such actions were intended to influence or impair the performance of their duties or their ability to exercise objectivity in their professional responsibilities.

## **7. Gifts, Gratuities, Discounts, Rebates and Compensation**

- Institutions and individuals should guard against allowing gifts, gratuities, hospitality, or compensation of any kind to improperly influence decision-making or create the appearance thereof.
- Institutions and organizations should have a process for reporting payments such as reimbursements, honoraria, or consulting fees for work conducted on behalf of provider programs.
- No paid travel should be accepted by an employee of an institution if offered by an education abroad program provider or other third party, unless substantive work, such as program assessment or program development, is required.
- Institutions should have a process for reporting any gift from an education abroad program provider or other third party that has an apparent value exceeding \$50.00.
- Any rebate, commission, or discount provided by a provider organization should be used to defray costs to students.
- Provider organizations and institutions should neither accept nor offer gifts or gratuities, unless these are purely nominal.



## 8. Formal Program Site Visits

Formal site visits for review of and familiarization with education abroad programs are essential for maintaining and improving program quality, and for providing accurate and essential information to students. Clear communication regarding the site visit should be established in advance between the program provider or institution and the visitor. Such communication should include but not be limited to:

- the specific purpose and goals of the visit;
- the qualifications of the visitor and resident staff, e.g. director, advisor, faculty;
- the duration and schedule of the visit;
- the opportunity for unmediated contact between the visitor and students/faculty/administrators;
- the cost-sharing between the program and the visitor;
- the gifts, hospitality or honoraria provided;

Formal program site visits should also consider:

- The visit, hospitality, or any honoraria do not imply, require or guarantee endorsement or approval of the program;
- Depending on the length, intensity, and purpose of the visit, an evaluation should be conducted according to pre-determined criteria;
- Confidentiality and dissemination of any reports or assessments resulting from the visit should be agreed upon in advance by the visitors and the host program;
- Any negative comments about specific personnel should be made to the program operator or provider confidentially and separately from the main report;
- The program sponsor should be offered an opportunity to respond to any site-visit report as appropriate;
- The visitor should not abuse the hospitality of the local program and culturally appropriate behavior is to be expected at the program site;

Materials that the visitor may solicit include

- student programs and course evaluations,
- orientation materials,
- syllabi and course materials,
- faculty and staff backgrounds,
- information on co-curricular and student life programs and resources,
- health and safety information,
- emergency plans,
- director's reports (if they are appropriate and not internal documents)

Appropriate activities include visits to classes, facilities, homestays, internship placements, co-curricular activities, and field study events.

## 9. Service on Advisory Boards

Service by individuals on advisory boards provides valuable feedback to institutions and organizations and helps to provide quality oversight of education abroad programs. Institutions and education abroad organizations should have in place policies for the protection of confidential information and non-disclosure of proprietary information that may be received during the advisory board service. In relation to advisory board service, conflicts of interest, or the appearance thereof, should be guarded against by:

- full disclosure of the specific purpose, goals and terms of the service, by both the organization or institution being advised and by the individual to his/her employer;
- full disclosure of how costs are to be borne among the organization, institution and the individual serving on the advisory board. Unless the advisory board plays a substantive, time and labor-demanding role in providing advice and counsel to a study abroad provider, costs of advisory board membership should be shared by the provider and the advisor's institution;
- full disclosure of the hospitality and/or honoraria provided, by both the organization or institution being advised and by the individual to his/her employer;
- agreement that advisory board service does not imply, require or guarantee endorsement or approval of the program or organization by the institution employing the individual serving on the board.

The role of a governing board differs from an advisory board in its influence, responsibility, and accountability to an organization, moving beyond providing advice and counsel. As such, the guidelines for service on governing boards are subject to ethical considerations which are guided by generally accepted principles of ethical board management, and thus not included here.



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## SECTION IV

# THE FORUM COMPASS

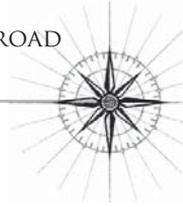
## FOUR QUESTIONS TO GUIDE ETHICAL DECISION MAKING IN EDUCATION ABROAD

1. Is it true, fair, and transparent?
2. Does it put the interests of the students first and contribute to their intellectual and personal growth?
3. Does it reflect the best practices of the field?
4. Does it foster international understanding?

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