

## **Skidmore College Policy on Risk Assessment for Students' International Travel**

### Background

In 2021, the US Department of State (DOS) adjusted its Travel Advisory Levels to more closely mirror Travel Health Notices issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This shift was a direct consequence of the ongoing COVID pandemic. The result was that many countries around the world were issued a DOS Level 4 Travel Advisory – Do Not Travel. At the time, Skidmore College's policy did not permit students to study abroad in destinations for which the DOS issued a Level 4 Travel Advisory. The DOS issued a statement with the 2021 change indicating that the shift in Levels "does not necessarily indicate a change to the current health situation in a given country. It reflects an adjustment in our system to give more weight to CDC's existing assessments." (From [DOS website FAQ section](#))

This shift in the way the DOS assesses risk and assigns Travel Advisory Levels required Skidmore to reevaluate the use of DOS and CDC as the main sources for assessing risk for our students studying abroad. It necessitated a change in policy around travel to and study in countries issued DOS Level 3 (Reconsider Travel) and Level 4 (Do Not Travel) Advisories and CDC Travel Health Notices, Level 3 Warnings (Avoid Non-Essential Travel) and Travel Recommendations Level 4 (Very High) and Level 3 (High). While DOS and CDC continue to play a central role in assessing risk, moving forward Skidmore employs a more holistic approach to evaluating locations with elevated risk levels, particularly as it relates to COVID-19.

The International Study Risk Management Team (ISRMT) reviews programs in countries that the DOS and CDC have indicated pose elevated risk and makes a final determination based on using a variety of sources, including but not limited to:

- DOS Travel Advisories (including specific concerns such as terrorism, crime, health, natural disaster, etc.)
- CDC Travel Warnings (including specific health risk and mitigation factors in-country)
- World Health Organization (WHO)
- Skidmore's insurance carrier assessment
- DOS Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC)
- International partner and host governmental assessments

### Current Policy

This policy applies to any student pursuing any international activity funded, credited, or otherwise supported by Skidmore and affiliated partner institutions abroad. The purpose of such travel might include, but is not limited to, participation in an off-campus study program or other educational experience, an internship, research or volunteer opportunity, a conference, meeting or presentation, or participation in an athletic or cultural event.

- Students may travel to and study in countries, regions and areas that carry a DOS Level 1 or Level 2 Travel Advisory or a CDC Level 1 or Level 2 Health Notice. Typically, students are required to petition to travel to and study in countries, regions and areas that carry a DOS Level 3 or Level 4 Travel Advisory, CDC Travel Health Notice/Recommendation 3 or 4 and/or are under current Department of Treasury-Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctions.

- **Given the recent changes above, individual petitions for study in countries, regions and areas with DOS and CDC Level 3 or 4 designations will not be required. In lieu of student petitions, the International Study Risk Management Team (ISRMT) will review all countries carrying a Level 3 and 4 and determine which countries and programs will be open to students.**
- If the ISRMT determines that study in or travel to a particular country is not approved for students, OCSE will notify the affected student of the decision. At that time, OCSE will work with students on alternative plans.
- The ISRMT will continue to monitor the status of the countries in which student study and travel has been approved and will reassess approval and disapproval of travel if there are significant changes to risk factors on-site. It is possible that the Travel Advisory Level of a country could change while a student is studying in or traveling to that country. If the level changes to a DOS Level 4 Advisory, Skidmore will inform students of the change, provide guidance around enhanced safety protocols, and determine if students are required to depart that country. Departure from their country of study may also be required if the CDC level rises to a Level 4 Warning or Travel Recommendation. In emergency situations, Skidmore College and/or the program provider will determine the best course of action. Once a determination is made, students will be required to adhere to the decisions reached by Skidmore and/or the program provider. In the case that the program and Skidmore do not agree on a final decision, Skidmore's decision will prevail.
- All final decisions will be reviewed by the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Vice President for Finance and Administration.
- **Note:** Students may not travel independently to a DOS or CDC Level 4 country, region or area at any time while participating on a Skidmore-sponsored program or activity unless prior approval has been granted.

Since conditions in a country can change quickly, it is important that you are aware of the current travel advisories and adhere to them. In order to do so, you **must** take the following steps:

- Review the U.S. Department of State Travel Advisories for the location in which you will be studying at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html>
- Enroll in the U.S. Department of State Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) at <https://step.state.gov/step/>. This program will allow the following:
  - Receive updated Travel Advisories from the U.S. Department of State.
  - Receive important information from the U.S. Embassy about safety conditions in your destination country.
  - Help the U.S. Embassy contact you in an emergency, whether natural disaster or civil unrest, in order to provide advice or assistance.
  - You can also elect to follow the U.S. Department of State on [Facebook](#) or [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#).
  - International students should also register with their country's embassy or consulate.
- Review the Center for Disease Control Prevention Travel Notices and Destination information at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/>.