

Study Away & Sexual Respect

As you prepare to study away, it's important to reflect on what aspects of sexual respect that you may be used to at Macalester you can take with you, which aspects may require some adaptations for your new environment, and what your strategies and resources might be in case sexual respect is not upheld.

Sexual assault, stalking, and interpersonal violence happen here and away.

- Sexual violence can happen anywhere, but another layer of complexity is added onto an already difficult situation when students are confronted with these issues while studying away.
- Beliefs about gender, sexuality, and sexual violence vary in different local contexts. Members of your host community during study away may have different ideas about what constitutes assault, harassment, and even consent.

If you are sexually assaulted, it's never your fault.

- Sexual assault is *never* the fault of the victim/survivor.
- In a study away context, some students who have been assaulted start to believe that they made an error in judgment that allowed an assault to happen. Common reactions include: "I should have understood the cultural context better;" "Maybe that type of behavior is considered acceptable here;" or "Am I being culturally insensitive?" While these reactions are understandable, it's important to remember that regardless of where (home, Mac, or away) an assault happens, *it is still not your fault.*

Know what to do if you - or a friend - is assaulted.

- Please keep in mind that even if you follow every piece of advice exactly, sexual assault can occur. If you are a victim of sexual assault or harassment while abroad, we encourage you to share your experience with someone. For many people, the first step in the healing process is to talk about it with someone they trust.
- Sexual violence, while a reality for some study away students, is not the norm for study away students. From our experience, most students have extremely positive interactions while studying away. However, should the need arise, it is best to know in advance what resources you have both on site and here in the U.S.
- *Even while you are abroad, you remain an important member of the Macalester community. You can always contact one of the people or offices listed in the Resources section below to help guide you in your decisions or support if you should experience sexual assault or harassment.*

What steps can you take now?

Empower yourself

- Learn about values, beliefs, behavior, dress and other issues related to dating and gender relationships in the host country (e.g. observe the behavior of your local peers).
- Explore safer locations, modes of transportation, and resources when traveling in the area.
- Reevaluate the risk of behaviors in the local context (e.g. is the alcohol content in drinks the same as what you're used to? Also remember that your alcohol tolerance doesn't transfer to new environments. Which local public transportation is the safer option?)
- Consider if you may need to adapt some behaviors such as avoiding eye contact, smiling or engaging in conversation when necessary.

Plan how to react in potentially risky situations - for yourself and others.

The below examples are offered as ways for you to be a helpful bystander to a friend or fellow student. Your identity and the context of the situation always influence which options feel available and safer—there's no one "right" way to be an active bystander. Nearly all of these strategies can be adapted and used as ways to react if *you* are put in a situation that feels unsafe or uncomfortable.

- **Direct:** Sometimes you may deal with a situation directly (which is not synonymous with confrontational). Talk with local friends about ways to adapt them to your situation.
 - "I feel uncomfortable with the way you are talking to my friend, so we are going to leave."
 - "Please stop. Would you want someone to talk to your friend/relative/etc. like that."
 - "Hey, let go of their arm, you are really hurting them. Just chill out for a few minutes, ok? It's not ok to act like that."
- **Distract:** This can be an especially helpful method in intercultural situations. Since you don't need to explicitly refer to whatever is making you feel unsafe or uncomfortable, you don't need to worry about how others will react.
 - Use an excuse to leave:
 - I'm not feeling well. (To your friend) Can you please take me home?
 - Our homestay family/residence hall has a curfew. We need to leave now if we're going to make it back in time.
 - I completely forgot that we have a big project due tomorrow morning. We have to leave now if we want to get it done.
 - Call your friend on their cell phone until they pick up and say you need to talk with them right away.
 - Interrupt the conversation:
 - You *have* to go see what's going on over there. I couldn't believe it.
 - Did I see you on campus the other day? You look familiar.

- Did you hear about that big accident down the street? I think the police are on their way here now.
- **Delegate:** This can be a good option for responding to situations that you are more unclear about. Maybe you are worried about a change in a friend's behavior, but you're not sure what is going on.
 - Ask another person present to check in. This could be a mutual friend or someone that's specific to the location of the incident (RA, restaurant/bar staff, neighbor, etc.).
 - Talk with program staff about the situation. Depending on the immediacy of the situation, this could be a call to a staff member's cell phone or the emergency number provided by your program.
 - Talk with another supportive person about the situation. It could be someone you know in the place you are studying, someone at home, or someone at Macalester.

Recognize risk factors, especially those specific to study away.

Common risk factors for study away students are:

- Stereotypes of college students from the U.S. that include assumptions about sexual experience and desire.
- Newness to their host community.
- High visibility in the host community.
- Lack of familiarity with location and surroundings.
- Not speaking the local language well.
- Travelling to new places, usually by public transportation.
- Curiosity about the host community.
- Lack of knowledge about danger cues.
- Cross cultural communication issues (i.e. how is saying "no" interpreted in the local context?)
- Second-guessing your instincts.
- The addition of alcohol or other drugs to any of the other risk factors listed above. Remember that sexual assault is *never* the fault of the victim/survivor, *especially if* they are incapacitated by alcohol or other drugs.
- Pay attention to your instincts. During study away, you should try to step outside of your comfort zone, and some uncomfortableness is normal. But this should not be at the expense of your own safety. If you feel that you're in an unsafe situation, try to get yourself out of there.

Practice Sexual Respect

- While it may sound obvious, it's important that you practice sexual respect as well. Different cultures may have different expectations regarding communication related to personal space, touching, consent, and safer sex practices. Words or phrases that are commonly understood to have one meaning at Macalester may have a different meaning

in another cultural context. Be sure you are truly seeking to understand other people's bodily autonomy and boundaries.

Resources

- Check with your program or your host university to see what resources are available to you on site. You may find immediate local response to be more useful than resources that are far away.
- Macalester Title IX & Non-Discrimination Office: <https://www.macalester.edu/titleix/>
- Sexual Assault Prevention, Support and Resources: <https://www.macalester.edu/healthandwellness/sexual-violence-prevention-education/>
- Macalester Health and Wellness Center: Both individual counseling and support groups are available to students: <http://www.macalester.edu/healthandwellness/counseling/>
- learn more, pick up a copy of NAFSA's *Sexual Health Abroad: A Guide to Healthy Practices* (2016) from Mac's Office of Study Away.
- RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization. RAINN created and operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline (800.656.HOPE, online.rainn.org or rainn.org/es) in partnership with more than 1,000 local sexual assault service providers across the country and operates the DoD Safe Helpline for the Department of Defense. RAINN also carries out programs to prevent sexual violence, help survivors, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

Macalester Contacts and Email Addresses

- Study Away – +1 651-696-6300 (Open M-F, 8am-5pm CST)
studyaway@macalester.edu
- Title IX and Nondiscrimination -- +1 651-696- (Open M-F, 8am-5pm CST)
titleixcoordinator@macalester.edu
- Student Affairs Office – +1 651-696-6220 (Open M-F, 8am-5pm CST)
studentaffairs@macalester.edu
- Health and Wellness Services – +1 651-696-6275 (Open M-F, 8am-5pm CST)
health@macalester.edu
 - Press 2 (24 hour phone counseling)
 - Call Health and Wellness and then Press 2