



TERRADOTTA

Keeping Faculty Safe Abroad

Why (and How) to Institute a Faculty Pre-Travel Registration System

Sometimes it takes a crisis to recognize a problem. Prior to the 2011 tsunami in Japan, the University of Arizona had no standard faculty travel registration system. The crisis hit, and the campus response teams had no means of connecting with the faculty or students in the region.

“Our provost was sitting with our campus emergency response teams, and she was shocked to learn that we didn’t know who was where,” said Steve Holland, Assistant Vice President for Risk Management Services. “It was very eye opening.”

The decision was made then and there that such a situation would not repeat itself. Regardless of the obstacles to overcome, the University would institute mandatory faculty travel registration.

Fast forward to 2014. The school not only has a policy in place that mandates pre-registration of all University related travel, they have instituted a system that makes it easy for faculty and staff to comply. In doing so they have not only solved the issue of how to reach travelers in the event of an emergency, they have also simplified travel planning, streamlined the internal review process for travel to dangerous areas, and made it easier to enforce compliance with federal export control laws and insurance regulations.

Surprisingly, they are only one of a relatively small number of schools that mandates faculty and staff pre-travel registration on university related business when students are not involved.

This article will address some of the benefits of implementing a broad-scale student and faculty travel registration system and provide insight on how the University of Arizona and others have worked to overcome obstacles to adoption.



Duty of Care

While the need for faculty travel registration is admittedly greater in some schools than it is at others due to size and scope of international activity, there are many who feel that faculty should always be afforded a high “standard of care” and that in failing to provide it, universities are opening themselves to undue risk.

One university risk manager who would prefer to remain anonymous put it this way:

“For students, I know that as long as their travel is funded or organized by the college, I will know where they are and how to get in touch with them should the need arise. I can’t do that for faculty. When my archaeology professor wanders off to Turkey to dig in the dirt, I have no idea where she is. If she calls for help, I can help, but I cannot initiate it. Thinking with my Risk Manager hat, I would say, if we are doing it for the students, we should be doing it for the faculty.”

According to Holland, the reality is that the expected duty of care to students is greater than for faculty and staff because they are not seasoned travelers, and may not always make mature decisions. He does feel, however, that in order to maintain an adequate standard of care to all travelers, a university should be able to offer both students and faculty the following:

- Rapid access to competent medical care while abroad
- A means of managing emergency evacuation for both political and medical emergencies
- Reasonable lines of communication where it is technically feasible
- Advance preparation that provides travelers with everything they need for a successful experience before they get on the plane.

Increased Traveler Safety, Reduced Institutional Risk, Better Reporting

In addition to meeting duty of care obligations, the benefits of instituting a pre-travel registration process are increased traveler safety, reduced institutional risk, and better reporting.

When asked why the University of Minnesota instituted a faculty staff travel pre-registration policy, Stacy Tsantir, Director of International Health, Safety and Compliance, explained it like this: “The greatest ‘why’ is the health and safety of our travelers...Before we had this system in place, we used to say we may as well have stood in the mall and screamed ‘who is in Mexico’ for all the good it would do. We wasted a lot of time calling around trying to find out who was where instead of being able to react immediately.”

Another “why” is reduced institutional risk. This includes being able to demonstrate fulfillment of duty of care obligations, making sure insurance coverage is adequate, and ensuring compliance with national and international import and export laws.

While the third benefit—better reporting—may be somewhat overshadowed by the first two, it is nonetheless important. More information on who is traveling where means more data points on which to report on internationalization efforts. This data can be used for a myriad of purposes, from grant writing to recruiting, and more.

Specific operational benefits of a centralized pre-travel faculty registration program

- ▶ The ability to be proactive and targeted in getting information to travelers about new laws or situational issues they should be aware of in the country of record
- ▶ The power to flag travel to state department warning countries so that the necessary precautions can be taken
- ▶ The capacity to flag insurance requirements by situation and location to help ensure that travelers are properly covered
- ▶ The means to nip potential problems in the bud by informing faculty traveling for research purposes about export control regulations and the necessary licensure that must be obtained prior to bringing export controlled work to certain parts of the world
- ▶ The ability to set up peer-to-peer resource networks that enable seasoned international travelers to serve as mentors for others traveling to a particular area for the first time

Making It Happen

Understanding the benefits of requiring faculty to pre-register international travel and making it happen are two entirely different things, but with the backing of senior administration, the right software system, and incentives for faculty to participate, it isn't nearly as difficult as some might think.

Get the backing of senior administration—Because The University of Arizona has the backing of senior administration, faculty and staff are required to pre-register travel by institutional policy, and policy compliance is a condition of their institutional appointment. This makes it far easier to mandate compliance.

If senior administrators at your school question the benefits of requiring faculty and staff to pre-register travel, do your homework and make sure you can fully communicate the personal and institutional risks involved with failure to act. As mentioned above, the level of need for a broad-based registration system is not universal—it will depend on the size and scope of international activity at the school. Ask your insurers, ask your legal team, look at best practices in the field and then weigh the cost of covering your exposure with the budget and resources needed to implement a system.

Get a system in place—Before you can even begin to talk about getting faculty on board with the program, you need to think about how it will be implemented and managed. In days past, this might have been accomplished through paper registration forms and excel spreadsheets. Nowadays there are cloud-based software programs that can be accessed just about anywhere, anytime. Find one that integrates with other university systems, is easy to use, and takes the least amount of time possible on the part of the user. With the right system, registration should take less than a minute.

Find the right incentives—You have senior administration on board, and you have the system implemented and ready to use. Now how do you get your busy faculty to actually follow through and log their travel?



Dangle a few carrots—Try implementing best practices like those at the University of Minnesota:

- Promote the system as a timesaving conduit for important health, safety, and logistical updates and assistance from the University before, during, and after the international trip.
- Promote the system as a way for the University to receive group discounts on both high-quality international medical insurance and travel.
- Promote the system as a way to collect data points by which to report on internationalization efforts.
- Promote the system as a way to build a peer-to-peer support network among faculty members travelling to the same region.



Wave a few sticks—In addition to positive promotion, sometimes compliance can be nudged along, as is done at the University of Arizona through use of the following policy provisions:

- Require all faculty and staff traveling on university business to pre-register as a prerequisite for reimbursement.
- Make travel registration a University policy and a condition of their faculty appointment.

Representatives from both schools admit that the process is not flawless, nor do they have a 100% adoption rate. They are, however, much further along than most and when and if the next crisis arrives, they will be ready.



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