

Center for Global Education

Dear Parents:

Greetings from the Center for Global Education. I am pleased that your student will be a participant in our study abroad program in Mexico this coming semester. I want to take this opportunity to anticipate some questions you may have and to respond as best I can. You can find an electronic version of the manual that was sent to participants, containing detailed information about the semester, at <https://web.augsburg.edu/global/APA/Manuals/MXS15.pdf>. In particular please note the information about communication (telephone numbers, mailing addresses, etc.) in the General Information section of the manual.

The students will live for most of the term in a large house in Cuernavaca. Much of our programming is also done in this house. We have a competent, well-experienced staff in Cuernavaca who will provide excellent leadership during the program.

Two concerns that are frequently expressed when it is learned that the students will travel to Mexico are health and safety. Basic tips on personal safety and health are given in the program manual, and more detailed information is provided to students during orientation in Mexico and repeated throughout the semester. In addition to the Center for Global Education staff in Cuernavaca, with whom we monitor security issues, there are also consultants and numerous resource persons in the region with whom we keep in close contact. Through professional organizations we regularly receive and share comparative security information with others in the field of international education. Additionally, our medical and emergency services provider, **Educational and Institutional Insurance Administrators, Inc.**, sends us weekly and sometimes daily reports on world "hot spots" in real time as they arise. Finally, we register students with the U.S. State Department and regularly visit their web page to remain abreast of the most current travel warnings and public announcements throughout the world.

The U.S. Department of State posted an updated Travel Warning on January 9, 2014, to inform U.S. citizens about the security situation in Mexico. The travel warning begins with, "Millions of U.S. citizens safely visit Mexico each year for study, tourism, and business, including more than 150,000 who cross the border every day. The Mexican government makes a considerable effort to protect U.S. citizens and other visitors to major tourist destinations, and there is no evidence that Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) have targeted U.S. visitors and residents based on their nationality. Resort areas and tourist destinations in Mexico generally do not see the levels of drug-related violence and crime reported in the border region and in areas along major trafficking routes." See the full text of the Travel Warning at: <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings/mexico-travel-warning.html>.

The Travel Warning provides a state-by-state assessment of security conditions. The specific assessment for the State of Morelos and Cuernavaca is a recommendation to exercise caution because narcotics-related violence has occurred in area, but there is no recommendation that U.S. citizens defer non-essential travel to the area. No travel advisory is in effect for Mexico City and the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Puebla where CGE also does programming.

The Center's staff in Cuernavaca closely monitors all reported violence in Cuernavaca, the State of Morelos, and throughout Mexico. Program activity has been discontinued in communities that are considered unsafe or potentially unsafe, including those where previous violence has occurred. There has been no evidence of violence directed at international students, foreign tourists, or foreign residents in any area where CGE does programming.

Augsburg College has successfully run educational programs in Cuernavaca, Mexico continuously since 1979 and is planning to continue with scheduled programs throughout the coming year. Contingency plans are in place to immediately relocate planned program activity should it become necessary to avoid any location that could pose a safety or security risk.

The decision to continue with the Center's programming in Mexico has been made with careful consideration of risk. The safety and security of students and program participants is the highest priority of the Center's programs, and resident staff continually assess the safety and security situation and are prepared to make changes as needed in programming and facilities. All of the resident staff except one are Mexican citizens, and all have lived in Cuernavaca for many years and are very familiar with the city and its respective neighborhoods. In addition, the community engagement model of the program provides staff with contacts and relationships throughout the city that provide helpful information for assessing safety and security.

Cuernavaca is a large city and precautions have been taken to address the safety of students, as would be necessary in any large urban area. Street crime ranging from pick pocketing to armed robbery does occur in Cuernavaca, just as it does in many large cities in the U.S. and around the world. CGE staff advise and orient students and program participants to exercise common sense and specific precautions as they engage in program and personal activities. Guidelines (i.e. never go out alone, use only radio taxis, access ATMs only during business hours, etc.) are given to students and program participants regarding their personal responsibility in reducing risk. All program participants will be immediately notified of any increased risk to their safety and security. Participants are provided with cell phones for communication in the event of any group or individual emergency situations.

While students are responsible for planning independent and personal travel, they are urged and advised to read the latest U.S. State Department information to avoid travel to areas of high risk identified in the current Travel Warning. They are also required to inform CGE-Mexico staff of independent travel plans and contact information. The Center for Global Education registers all of our students with the U.S. State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) which provides the latest updates and travel information from the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

Center for Global Education staff will continue to monitor the situation in all areas of our programming and will not hesitate to cancel or reroute programs, if needed, to secure the safety of students and travel seminar participants.

As far as health is concerned, many students will have to endure a bout or two of diarrhea sometime during their stay. To optimize the health of the students while in Mexico, our staff will be instructing the group about safe eating habits and hygiene, as well as what to do during the family stay. In the case of a serious illness, there are good doctors and excellent hospitals in Mexico if a situation calls for professional health care.

The health and well-being of our current and future students and our staff and faculty is our top priority. Moving forward, we will continue to monitor conditions and we will not hesitate to make whatever programming changes are necessary should conditions change.

Some contacts/resources you may find helpful:

Center for Global Education in Minneapolis, Minnesota:

24-hour Emergency Cell Phone: 612/817-2830

Margaret Anderson, Coordinator for Academic Programs Abroad: anderso4@augsborg.edu

Phone: 612/330-1159 or 800/299-8889

Center for Global Education Faculty/Staff in Cuernavaca, Mexico

Ann Lutterman-Aguilar, Site Director: lutterma@augsborg.edu

Office Phone in Cuernavaca: 612/605-7230

Other program staff and e-mails are available in the "Faculty and Staff" section of the program manual.

Helpful Websites

- **Center for Global Education**
- U.S. Department of State:
 - **Mexico Blog**
 - **Mexico Country Information**
 - **Travel Information**
- **Mexico On-Line**
- **CNN Americas section**
- **MSNBC Americas section**
- **Advice for Parents at StudentsAbroad.com**

As you may realize, the experience your student is about to have is a very intense and challenging one. For many students, the study abroad experience will stimulate a great deal of reflection about personal values and life directions, and you may notice changes in your student upon return to the U.S. S/he will likely want to share all of the adventures with you and may, at times, find it difficult to communicate the intensity of the experience. An accepting and open environment will make it easier to share and integrate the experience.

Finally, you may be thinking that this would be a good year to take that trip to Mexico you've always been thinking about. If so, you are most welcome to visit. If space is available, visiting family members and legal guardians may stay for free for up to one week (afterwards, the rent is \$15/person/day) in one of the program houses. If space is unavailable in our program houses, there are nearby hotels that offer inexpensive, comfortable accommodations (see "Visits from Family and Friends" in the General information section of the manual). Feel free to contact our International Resident Assistant (cgemexicointern@gmail.com) if you are interested in visiting and would like information about accommodations.

Again, please contact me if you have any further questions about the program.

Sincerely,

Margaret M. Anderson
Coordinator, Academic Programs Abroad