

**Better Safe than Sorry:
Steps towards your safe and successful research in human geography**

Workshop Goals

To review and discuss the objectives of the "Student Safety Plan and Protocol" to be presented at your Spring Review meeting.

To provide advice on identifying potential safety issues for individual research.

1. Student Safety Plan and Protocol

Timing: Presented to student's thesis committee at Spring Review

Participants: Student, faculty supervisor, and thesis committee

General format: Prepared by supervisor and student prior to Spring Review meeting; revised, discussed, and ultimately approved by thesis committee at or following Spring Review meeting

Details: Each student, working with their faculty supervisor, will design and write a detailed safety protocol for the period they plan to conduct research in the field (see 'Safety Procedures' for example, below). We expect that each plan will be tailored to the individual needs of each student which may be unique to the environment and the activities of the research. Information provided in the plan should include, but is not restricted to:

- a. Emergency contact information (e.g. local emergency services phone numbers, search and rescue phone numbers)
- b. Schedule and system for regular check-in with supervisor, family, or friends
- c. Emergency evacuation plan
- d. Potential hazards
- e. Necessary skills to deal with named hazards
- f. Training the student has already received (including dates of completion/expiration, if relevant)
- g. Training the student requires (including proposed dates of completion)
- h. Safety equipment list

In addition, all students working in the field should be required to receive training and certification in basic first aid, identifying whether they have already received this training (d) or when they plan to complete it (e). Should the student require certification, we propose that the department subsidize part of the course fee and faculty supervisors provide the remainder. First aid courses are offered weekly at the University Fire Station-Hall 10 (2992 Westbrook Mall) for a fee of \$110.

Lastly, students should be required to complete a medical form (see example provided below), containing personal medical information such as allergies or previous injuries that may be important to emergency care providers. Two copies of this medical form should be kept on file with both a) the student's faculty supervisor and b) the department main office (in a secure and locked file cabinet), so that this information can be accessed in case medical care is required in an emergency.

2. Safety Plan Follow-Up

Timing: After Spring Review; prior to the start of field work

Participants: Student and faculty supervisor

General format: Review and revision (if necessary) of Safety Plan; preparation for field

Details: Once the Safety Plan has been approved by the committee, the student and their faculty supervisor should continue to meet and discuss the provisions and preparations outlined in the plan, to ensure that all requirements are met. For example, if a student requires training in a certain skill, such as firearms use or wilderness first aid, the supervisor should make sure the student locates, registers, and attends an appropriate training program. If special equipment is required, the student and supervisor must arrange to order and purchase the equipment with enough time to test its functionality before taking it into the field. In sum, it is the supervisor's responsibility to consult with the student and make sure all the preparations outlined in the Safety Plan have been completed prior to the start of the field season. Once field work begins, regular check-ins should be maintained between student and supervisor, or other contact named in the Safety Plan. After field work ends, the student and supervisor should again meet to discuss any unexpected safety problems, review the Safety Plan, and revise procedures and preparation for future field seasons, if necessary.

3. Advice for Preparing Safety Plans in Human Geography

1. Interviews and personal contact

Timing - optimal times versus inappropriate times

Location - optimal locations versus inappropriate locations

These will vary with individual projects, but you need to be clear one when and where interviews should not be conducted in order to maintain your professional integrity.

Be aware that perceptions of you have professional implications and the "wrong" impression can cause irreparable damage to you and your local collaborators and colleagues.

Be aware of your safety and that of your collaborators.

2. Ethics and expectations

Professional and personal boundaries

- to whom do you provide your email? office location? phone number?
- developing relationships and trust, while setting boundaries with colleagues and collaborators
- managing expectations
- awareness cultural differences, signs of mutual respect

Authority figures and perceptions of you and your work

- know local cultural and social norms and customs
- awareness of local perceptions of cultural and gender
- prepare to ensure you respect local social and cultural norms
- anticipate a range of responses to your requests and interactions; prepare for worst-case scenarios

3. Travelling to Research Sites Overseas

Canadian Embassy (or your nation's embassy)

- location, access by phone or email
- registering and updating as your plans change

Logistics

- visas, passports, permits, insurance - plan in advance and have low expectations of bureaucracies and timely responses
- money - cash, currencies, credit cards, access to additional funds
- Local contacts or "fixer" = individual or organization such as an NGO or University who assists with local logistics, security and paperwork

Health concerns

- medical insurance and documentation to take with you
- vaccinations - timing, types, options, follow-up, documentation

- symptoms/prevention/treatment of common ailments (cold/flu to water-borne diseases) - be prepared with your own medications and advice from your Canadian doctor
- do you have a first aid kit and are you trained in basic first aid

Political stability and advisories

- registering with embassy,
- Canadian government policies
 - how do you learn of and respond to new advisories as issued
 - repercussions if you do not to adhere to advisory warnings

Risk of kidnapping/political instability

- realistic risk assessment
- worst-case scenario: line of communications with supervisor and family, how to ask for support from the Canadian government

4. Communications During Research

Scheduled updates - by phone or email on a regular schedule

- depending on your research, this may be daily, weekly, monthly

Missed updates - what steps are taken if you do not check in?

- When should we start looking for you? 1-2 days overdue? 3-5 days overdue? >5 days overdue?
- How and where do we look for you? With whom have you provided your schedule and places you planned to conduct your research? (e.g., local contact, family or friend in Canada, or both)

5. Emergency Contacts

Who should be contacted? Under which circumstances?

How? Register names, phone numbers and emails of your emergency contacts with the appropriate person (local collaborator, your supervisor etc)

6. Managing Self-Expectations

Research timelines and delays

- be prepared for inevitable unanticipated difficulties and delays

Flexibility and feedback

- know that few research projects go exactly as proposed and you must be flexible (prepare plan A, B, C etc)
- prioritize work tasks so that the core research is accomplished and additional components are completed as time/opportunity allows
- schedule an opportunity to get feedback from your supervisor during the first third of your research time to ensure that you are on track and they understand/agree with the changes you have had to make to meet your research goals

Time off

- be self aware and take time off when it is needed to stay healthy and to avoid burn-out
- be aware of reverse culture shock when you return home