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**Global Education Office**

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We would like to respond to some common concerns you may have as you prepare your student to participate in the Hampshire Cuba program, and invite you to contact our Global Education Office or any Cuba Program faculty member for further information.

On September 29, 2017, the US State Department issued a “travel advisory” discouraging Americans from traveling to Cuba because of mysterious symptoms being reported by staff members of the US Embassy in Havana, such as ear complaints and hearing loss, dizziness, headache, fatigue, cognitive issues, and difficulty sleeping. You can read the full advisory here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/alertswarnings/cuba-travel-warning.html> . The locations of the alleged incidents—diplomatic residences and certain tourist hotels—are not places normally visited by U.S. students studying in Cuba. The advisory states that there is no evidence that the Cuban government is responsible for inducing these symptoms; the Cuban government has denied any knowledge or involvement, and has cooperated fully in investigating their origin. The travel advisory also does not bar legal travel by Americans to Cuba, including participation in educational programs such as ours. In view of the circumstances, we have determined that students in our study abroad program in Cuba are not at meaningful risk of any such harm and we will be operating the program in spring 2018 as we have done consistently over the past 19 years.

The Global Education Office, the academic department at Hampshire that manages and oversees the Hampshire in Havana Cuba Program, along with the Hampshire College Cuba Faculty Committee, the Dean of Faculty Office and the Five College Risk Management Office, are continually monitoring and evaluating the situation in Cuba. In the unlikely event that circumstances should change, we will certainly keep families apprised of the situation and make recommendations as to our next steps. It is also important to know that our medical evacuation and repatriation insurance provider, AIG Travel Guard, would also provide any emergency evacuation as necessary. For more information about AIG Travel Guard and its services please visit: [https://www.fivecolleges.edu/riskmgmt/intltravel/student\\_intl](https://www.fivecolleges.edu/riskmgmt/intltravel/student_intl)

While in Cuba, students are advised to maintain a low profile and to avoid hotels where U.S. citizens are known to congregate. All students enrolled in the Hampshire Cuba program will be given a comprehensive Cuba handbook and will participate both in a pre-departure orientation and an in-country orientation upon arrival to Cuba. During these sessions we review safety guidelines with students as well as our emergency protocol, providing students with essential emergency contact information for the Hampshire Faculty Director in Residence, the Cuba Program Coordinator and our academic partner, the Alejo Carpentier Foundation.

Our program is a fully authorized educational program licensed by the US government and operated in compliance with all U.S. and Cuban laws and regulations. We enjoy good relations with the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Relations, which grants our students and staff the visas needed to stay in Cuba, and the Ministry of Culture, the entity in charge of our academic partnership with the Alejo Carpentier Foundation. Never have any of our students encountered

any difficulty on re-entering the U.S. after their time in Cuba.

The Hampshire Cuba semester program began in 1998. Since its founding, we have never had a student have any problems with Cuban officialdom, nor have any of our students encountered any sort of hostility or mistreatment because of their being American. In fact, Cuban society is very welcoming to Americans in spite of our government's poor relations with its leaders. Cuba is also remarkably free of violent crime, though of course it is a very poor country and petty theft occurs as it does in most parts of the world. Cuban cities are on the whole much safer than American cities. Also, its public health and medical care standards (especially for foreigners) are higher than in most other Latin American countries.

Participation in the Cuba program is an academic exploration of a society different than our own. All of our students return from Cuba with a new appreciation of the complexity of making a judgment about that nation: the warmth, hospitality, and joy of life of its people contrast with its overly controlling and bureaucratically infuriating government. Most crucially, they meet and work with Cuban intellectuals and artists who challenge them to rethink their assumptions and open their horizons to different ways of thinking, acting, and being creative in the world. Students are free to make up their own minds about Cuba based on their own lived experience rather than seeing the country only through the filter of ideological hostilities.

We are very excited to be able to offer students this unique opportunity to study in Cuba. We will be in touch again closer to the departure date with copies of the handbook, emergency phone numbers and protocol. In the meantime, should you have further questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Katie Irwin, Director of the Global Education Office or Margaret Cerullo, spring 2018 Cuba Faculty Director in Residence.

Sincerely,



Katie Irwin ([kirwin@hampshire.edu](mailto:kirwin@hampshire.edu))  
Director of Global Education

and Margaret Cerullo ([mcerullo@hampshire.edu](mailto:mcerullo@hampshire.edu))  
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