

February 26, 2020

Lipscomb Faculty and Staff,

As many of you know, every semester we have students studying abroad in a number of locations, and this semester is no exception where we have students in Vienna, Florence and Costa Rica. These programs can be one of the most enriching and life-changing experiences a college student can have during their academic program at Lipscomb!. Whether our students are studying on our campus or in locations thousands of miles away from Nashville, our goal of keeping our students safe and secure remains a primary focus.

Most study abroad semesters happen with little to no fanfare or notice from those of us here at home. But this semester is a bit different and many of you have been asking about the welfare of our study abroad students given the headlines about the Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) and the impact it is having in Asia and in other locations around the world, including Italy and even here in the U.S. As a matter of fact, since last Friday, the Covid-19 virus has presented an increasing number of cases in northern Italy, near Milan and Venice. Although we never know when a health crisis such as this is going to develop or exactly how or where it will emerge, be assured that we have had plans in place for a situation like this for a number of years as part of our health and welfare contingency plans.

As is our normal process in times like this, we have been monitoring the Covid-19 situation for several weeks, and especially over the last week with the increased activity in northern Italy. During this time, our university team has consulted with and followed the guidance provided by our expert partners, including the U.S. Department of State, the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention along with local laws and orders in the impacted areas on how to treat and respond to this situation. Additionally, Lipscomb has partnered for many years with International SOS (ISOS), the world's leading international healthcare, medical assistance, and security services company. International SOS provides 24/7 advice and assistance through its global network with over 68,000 credentialed medical, legal, security and aviation providers operating in over 70 countries. Guidance from these resources helps inform our decisions along the way in situations such as this where the circumstances are fluid and may change quickly.

The Changing Situation in Florence

In the last 24-36 hours, the guidance we have received from these resources has been “stable” to “slightly elevated” regarding the current and future circumstances in Italy. While these measures do not show any immediate concerns to our Florence students, they do indicate the likely possibility of an expected elevation in the circumstances in Italy in the coming days or weeks. And, we know from recent experiences with the spread of the Covid-19 virus, that countries may swiftly and unexpectedly make decisions that can significantly affect one’s ability to travel.

Additionally, in the last 24 hours, a number of schools with programs in Florence have announced the cancellation of their programs and have sent their students home, including New York University, Stanford University, Elon University, Syracuse University, Florida International University, Harding University and Fairfield University, to name just a few. Most of these schools cited the basis of their decision is to avoid running the risk of having students and faculty remain abroad if further travel restrictions are quickly put in place in the future.

An additional logistical complication is that Florence is one of the most popular study abroad locations, hosting between 35,000-40,000 college students in any given year. In these types of unexpected health or safety situations, we must also consider the ability to successfully assist our students to relocate given the number of expected student departures in a short window and the ability of the transportation systems (train and air) to handle the increased volume at a critical time where most, if not all, of these students need to relocate from Florence.

So, because of the increased level of concern and guidance from the resources we have available and the desire to be proactive for the health and well-being of our Florence students, **we have decided that staying in Florence is not a viable option at this time.**

Relocation Options

Obviously, one relocation option is to return the Florence students to the U.S. and continue their academic programs via online formats. In a few similar situations in the past, we have had to do just this as returning to the U.S. was the only viable option available. And, this is an option available to the Florence students now. Unfortunately, this option would also likely be the end of their study abroad experience.

However, we do have a unique situation in Europe where we have another semester-long, established study abroad program in Vienna, Austria. This site presents another option where we could temporarily relocate the Florence students to Vienna.

Given all our options and considerations for the health and well-being of our students, **we have decided to temporarily relocate the Florence students to Vienna**. This option is only possible because, fortunately, **none of the Florence students have visited an area or region impacted by the Covid-19 virus**. Because our students' safety and well-being are of utmost importance, we would not make this decision if it put our Vienna students at risk by introducing another student population that could be impacted by the virus.

Why Vienna?

There are several reasons that made Vienna, Austria a viable option for us to consider. First, the health situation in Vienna is much less dynamic than in Italy. This may be because the Austrian government is very proactive with both preventative and detection measures that they have had in place for some days and weeks. Second, based on our years of having a study abroad site in Vienna, we have a high level of confidence in both the accessibility of and medical skills available in the Austrian hospitals and medical centers. Third, because we have a fully developed program in Vienna, students would have the personnel support and available housing facilities to meet their needs for a temporary period of time. Fourth, there are fewer study abroad programs in Vienna as compared to Florence so should a need arise to return to the U.S. at any time, there are many options of direct flights from Vienna to the U.S. And, finally, if the students remain in Europe, it allows them to continue with a global learning experience and makes it possible to more easily transition back to Florence should the circumstances there improve.

Professor **Leanne Smith**, faculty advisor in Florence, and **Emily Woodroof**, the Florence site director, will accompany the students to Vienna. Once they arrive in Vienna, we will have a full agenda to welcome them to their temporary host country, provide an orientation to the city and how to get around using the public transit system, team building activities to meet other students in the Vienna program and explain any academic adjustments, such as online work to continue the academic classes with their Italian professors. Professor Smith and Ms. Woodroof will continue to teach their courses (Cross-Cultural Experience and Italian I) face-to-face as usual.

We feel very comfortable and confident in our decision to offer our Florence students this temporary relocation to Vienna. We will continue to monitor the guidance from our expert resources and information we receive from both Italy and Austria and this will continue to guide

our future decisions. If you have questions, please contact **Dr. Rebecca Zanolini**, director of global learning, at rebecca.zanolini@lipscomb.edu or 615.440.8196.

Please be in prayer with all of us for all of our students, especially those studying abroad during this semester.

Blessings,

Randy