



## Student International Travel Policy: Temporary COVID-19 Addendum

February 21, 2022

ITRMC Recommendation to Provost Fischer

The US Department of State has listed nearly every country as Level 4, *Do Not Travel*, or Level 3, *Reconsider Travel* due to COVID-19. At present, the US Department of State and other government and non-governmental agencies have determined that COVID-19 continues to pose potential risks to travelers that may be mitigated through various means.

To this point, the Gilman program has only allowed funds to be awarded to students studying to countries with US Department of State travel advisories of level 1 or 2. Funds could not be awarded for countries with a level 3 or 4 regardless of the risks associated with the warnings. Indeed, if a country risk advisory was raised, students had to return their funds. On February 16, 2022, the US Department of State funded Benjamin A. Gilman Scholarship program made a significant shift in its award policy that allows Gilman Scholarships to be awarded for study abroad in countries where COVID-19 prompted USDOS advisories of Level 3 and 4. Moreover, these changes are retroactive. Students whose awards were rescinded due to the travel warnings, may now use funds awarded in March and October of 2021 to study abroad in a [long list of countries](#).

The USDOS changes recognize that the COVID-19 is dynamic and likely shifting from pandemic to endemic. To fulfill our commitments to WKU's strategic direction, student learning growth and demand, WKU must develop a more dynamic response to international travel that maintains a focus on safety and risk mitigation while enabling travel.

Proposition 1: The opportunity to live, learn, research and intern abroad benefits students in many ways with impacts throughout their lives. Choosing educational travel is a conscious decision that involves balancing and recognizing numerous risks and opportunities. WKU accepts choices and decisions made in concert with the qualities associated with being part of the WKU community, including the Student Code of Conduct. Ultimately, students are responsible for their decisions.

Proposition 2: The International Travel Risk Management Committee recommends temporarily permitting student travel to countries where USDOS and CDC list COVID-19 as the first risk indicator. Restrictions to high-risk countries remain in place where security, safety, environmental or other health risks are high. Should new variants or strains of COVID-19 emerge, the temporary permission may be removed, reinstating full restrictions on travel. Permission to travel does not mean that the university sees travel as without risk. Students who make the decision to travel take responsibility for their decisions understanding the risks and uncertainty involved in any form of travel.

Proposition 3: WKU allow all external and internal scholarships and financial aid to support students' international travel. University funds used by students for travel allow students to take responsibility for their decisions and choices when presented with risk and uncertainty.

*Climb with us.*

Global Learning & International Affairs | Western Kentucky University | 1906 College Heights Blvd. #11066 | Bowling Green, Kentucky 42101-1066

Phone: 270-745-4857 | fax: 270-745-6144 | email: [iem@wku.edu](mailto:iem@wku.edu) | web: [www.wku.edu/international](http://www.wku.edu/international)

*Equal Education and Employment Opportunities*



Proposition 4: While the university cannot anticipate or elucidate every possible risk associated with international travel, it can provide students with helpful information and resources to help students make the best choices for their individual circumstances and destinations. The university may require students to submit a written appeal to the Level 3 and Level 4 travel suspension, participate in information sessions and periodically check-in with Global Learning and International Affairs. During these sessions the university may require students to take certain measures, such as international health and emergency evacuation insurance, registering with the USDOS STEP program, AXA Travel Eye, etc. The university will also make strong recommendations to students, including vaccinations. Each country, region and locality will have their own policies and social norms for safe conduct while living as a guest in their community. Students are required to demonstrate knowledge of local regulations and norms for safe conduct where they will live. Each individual student makes her/his decision to follow university policies and recommendations. Students are also expected to inform themselves with additional reliable sources of information and recommendations as part of their travel and learning. Learning how to navigate new and different circumstances, risks and opportunities are critical aspects of global learning. The Appeal/Review process is one aspect of this continuous learning process.

Informational Metrics: USDOS and CDC travel advisories provide valuable metrics. WKU is moving beyond a single metric to include information on vaccination rates, transmission rates, hospitalization rates, status of health system capacity, effectiveness of care (WHO), etc.. WKU will also expect students to familiarize themselves with local regulations and norms. WKU will use and share metrics developed by other respected health and risk management organizations and professionals. These include but not limited to:

- CDC
- Johns Hopkins School of Public Health
- Drum-Cussac
- AXA
- CIEE
- WHO
- Other National Institutes of Health

By implementing these propositions and information related to health and well-being, we hope that WKU students will have richer, safer international educational experiences.

*Climb with us.*

Global Learning & International Affairs | Western Kentucky University | 1906 College Heights Blvd. #11066 | Bowling Green, Kentucky 42101-1066

Phone: 270-745-4857 | fax: 270-745-6144 | email: [iem@wku.edu](mailto:iem@wku.edu) | web: [www.wku.edu/international](http://www.wku.edu/international)

*Equal Education and Employment Opportunities*