Safety and Security places the highest priority on the safety and security of all students. SIT’s experience with risk assessment, emergency preparedness, and crisis management allows us to adapt quickly to dynamic challenges. Because socioeconomic, political, environmental, and medical conditions vary widely across the more than 40 countries in which SIT operates, health, safety, and security measures are specifically tailored to each location and to current circumstances.

Orientation activities provide the foundation for a successful semester
Students are thoroughly briefed on safety considerations during in-country orientation and are continuously updated throughout the semester if and when circumstances change. Moreover, your homestay families will help you navigate your new surroundings. They’ll provide firsthand exposure to local norms, model culturally appropriate behavior, and give you precautionary advice about the local environment. The experiential design of the academic program will also contribute to your ability to analyze your own behavior in relation to the host culture, thereby helping you make sound decisions about your safety and security.

Students are expected to adhere to all safety and security parameters as instructed by in-country staff, and to be well versed on all policies detailed in the Student Handbook. As is the case anywhere, there is much you can do on the program to ensure your own safety by simply taking responsibility for your behavior and being extra vigilant in new situations. Being careful about food and beverages, wearing appropriate clothing for the culture and climate, and maintaining your wits, sound judgment, and flexibility will go a long way toward maintaining physical and mental well-being.
Emergency Communication

SIT Study Abroad is available 24 hours a day to respond to and manage student emergencies. Students will be provided with local emergency contact information during in-country orientation. If you call outside of business hours, you will be greeted by an answering service and forwarded to an on-duty SIT Study Abroad staff member.

To reach SIT Study Abroad, please call (802) 258-3212 or (888) 272-7881 (toll free).

In the event of an emergency, SIT Study Abroad may inform your designated emergency contact person of what occurred. A student’s home institution may also be notified in order to facilitate the best possible support for the student and his/her family.

Cell Phone Policy

All students are required to have a working cell phone while on SIT Study Abroad programs. This policy is part of our commitment to student safety and will facilitate communication in case of an emergency. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that they are reachable by phone at all times. This means keeping the phone charged and stocked with airtime/minutes as well as notifying staff of, and replacing, lost or stolen phones. Please note that students who do not comply with this policy may be subject to disciplinary action.

Please see the Country Overview pre-departure document for program-specific recommendations regarding cell phones.

Please bear in mind that a basic cell phone with simple call and text messaging is the best option for all programs. Expensive or flashy phones (including iPhones) are not recommended as these may attract unwanted attention in some economically depressed areas.

US State Department

Please make sure you review the US State Department’s Consular Information Sheet for South Africa. This is available at: http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/south-africa.html.

Should there be developments that require program alterations, SIT Study Abroad personnel will communicate immediately with all participants regarding those proposed changes or program contingencies.

Before the program begins, SIT Study Abroad will register your participation in the program with the US State Department website designed for that purpose.

Your homestay family will treat you like a son or daughter.

However, if you are traveling independently before or after the program, we strongly recommend that you register your travel plans. Please go to https://travelregistration.state.gov and follow the steps to register with the relevant embassy.

Alcohol and Drug Policy

Alcohol and drug consumption carry serious safety and legal risks, and may lead to cross-cultural misunderstandings. If you choose to drink, consider there are behaviors which may be acceptable on college campuses in the United States (excessive drinking, staying out very late) which are unacceptable in South Africa for both safety and cultural reasons. You will be living with a family who is deeply concerned about your well-being, and you must respect this concern and their generosity in opening their home to you.

Drug use, other than for medical reasons, is strictly prohibited and is grounds for dismissal from the program. Be advised that legal penalties for drug users in many countries are severe and the authorities generally operate on a presumption of guilt. The program will be unable to assist students facing legal trouble resulting from drug use.

General Program Tips

Remember that while you are a student in a cultural education program in South Africa, you are also an
ambassador for your home country, home institution, and SIT Study Abroad. We ask all students to abide by all policies and guidelines in order to help maintain those important relationships as well as their own safety and wellbeing. Failure to abide by established guidelines may result in disciplinary measures. The following are safety tips for your time on the program:

- Follow the advice of locals (in particular your host family) – e.g. if people in the area do not go jogging and tell you not to, listen to them and don’t do it.

- Do not visibly display or flamboyantly use material possessions such as iPods, laptops, digital cameras, name-brand sunglasses, sneakers, etc. in communities where such items are economically out of reach for most of the population.

- Do not carry large amounts of cash in your pockets or daypacks. Bring a money belt that can be worn out of sight under your clothing.

- Dress conservatively; try not to draw attention to yourself by dress, speech, or behavior. The more that your body is exposed, the more unwanted attention you will attract.

- Stay in groups, particularly at night.

- Be very aware that the use of alcohol will impair your judgment and that this may cause you to misinterpret already unfamiliar cultural cues. It also makes you a more likely target for would-be criminals. Excessive consumption of alcohol is subject to disciplinary action.

- Dagga (marijuana) is very available; so are other drugs. These drugs are illegal and their use is subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from the program. Legal penalties for drug use in South Africa can include large fines and imprisonment. The program is unable to assist students in such circumstances.

- Homophobia is the norm. In general, gay men and lesbians are careful (for cultural and safety reasons) not to be “out” about their sexual orientation in public. Before departure, if you have questions or concerns about your sexual identity and study abroad, please contact your admissions counselor.

- Remember that you are an ambassador of your home country.

During the program, you can always talk to the program staff.

Health Insurance
All SIT Study Abroad students have access to accident and sickness insurance as part of their program fee. Some features of the accident/sickness plan include:

- Emergency reunion benefits for one immediate family member
- Medical evacuation in the event of serious emergency
- Security evacuation expenses
- Lost baggage and personal property
- Repatriation and accidental death and dismemberment

Students should note that routine physicals, dental work, and other customary medical care are not covered by this plan. This plan covers accidents and sickness only. Please see our website for a full Description of Coverage and scroll down to Student Health Insurance: http://studyabroad.sit.edu/pn/admitted-students/medical-review-process/.

With this insurance, you must pay for all medical expenses at the time of service and then file a claim to be reimbursed. This means that you must have funds available to you in case of emergency. It is strongly suggested that you bring a credit card, either to pay directly for medical expenses or to withdraw cash to cover medical costs in cases where credit cards are not accepted. In cases of severe medical emergencies, on-site staff will work with headquarters and the insurance company to arrange for payment. Under SIT’s insurance, expenses will be reimbursed according to the terms of coverage after the submission of the appropriate claim form.

When you pay for services rendered, make sure to request receipts that you can later submit with your insurance claim form. Most doctors will not accept credit cards so you will need to get a cash advance from the credit card to pay for the services. Some clinics and pharmacies in the bigger cities will accept credit cards.

Personal Property Insurance
Students should be aware of their environment and their belongings throughout the program, and take care to protect against theft whenever possible. Personal property and baggage insurance is included in the program fee for all study abroad program participants through SIT Study Abroad. For details on SIT’s
personal property and baggage insurance, please see the full Description of Coverage on this site: http://studyabroad.sit.edu/pn/admitted-students/medical-review-process/

Students whose personal property is damaged or stolen will need to complete a claim form and submit it for reimbursement. Students should note this insurance has a maximum reimbursement of $2,500 per person and reimbursement amounts take the depreciation of the item’s value into account. Aside from a personal computer, we do not encourage students to bring very expensive items to the program. If you plan to bring expensive items to the program, you may wish to consider purchasing additional insurance to cover them in the event of loss or theft. If you do experience theft or loss of items, please inform in-country program staff right away.

Please note: It’s a good idea to bring a thumb drive with you on the program. As a precaution, always be sure to back up information stored on laptops, memory drives, and digital music players. Past students have suggested making frequent backups of important documents, including assignments and ISP data. Store your backups in a separate physical location and/or online.

Health Guidelines and Requirements

Maintaining good health is critical to having a successful semester. To help you do that, we have provided Health Guidelines and Requirements for your program:


It is very important that you read this document as early as possible and examine it with your medical provider. The guidelines include required and recommended immunizations as specified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization, and World Learning; a suggested calendar for immunizations and other prophylaxes; and valuable information on how to avoid exposure to common carriers of disease. Please call your admissions counselor with any questions.

General Health Tips

Here are some important health-related tips based on past student experience:

- Bring a full semester’s supply of important medications with you. We realize that it may be difficult or expensive to fill a prescription for this period in advance. However, it is often impossible to send medications to program sites due to high import taxes, customs seizures, program travel, etc.

- Using physician’s letterhead stationery, have your doctor/physician write the names of your prescriptions and a description for each one. Your doctor should specify that this medication is only to be used by you and is not for sale. This note will be helpful in an emergency, and you should carry it with you while traveling, in case you are questioned by immigration authorities.

- Important medicines should be carried on the plane with you, not in checked luggage.

- If you are asthmatic, bring an ample supply of inhalers for the entire program, as these cannot be mailed to you from the United States.

- If you have any serious allergies, be sure to bring an epinephrine kit and an antihistamine.

- If you wear contact lenses, bring your own solutions. Bring a pair of glasses as a back-up; if you lose your contacts, you may have difficulty replacing them. In addition, some people find it difficult to wear contacts in a different environment.

- Please take care of all necessary dental work and allow for ample recovery time prior to your program.

South Africa is often described as having a dual health care system – a private system that you will find very close in quality to anything you can access in the U.S., and a basic but free public system that is under-resourced and over-subscribed. While you are in any South African city you will have access to some of the best medical care available. The doctors are well-trained
and the private hospitals are equipped to international standards. In Durban, the program also has a good network of crisis and counseling services.

Students should note that the communities with whom we interact have a high prevalence of HIV and tuberculosis. SIT Study Abroad expects students to practice universal precautions, keeping clear of body fluids and refraining from unprotected sex. It is recommended that students have a Mantoux test before departure to provide a baseline immune response test. Prospective students with compromised immune systems are strongly advised to discuss with their doctors the risks associated with contact with persons infected with tuberculosis.

Students will be in a low-risk malaria zone for approximately ten nights and in a medium-to-high risk area for approximately four nights. Speak with your health care provider about the appropriate prophylaxis for you. You will not be in a malaria risk area for at least several weeks after your arrival in South Africa.

Emotional Well-Being

Cultural adjustment, academic challenges, a full schedule of classes, travel, field-based activities, and the dynamics of your SIT group can present new challenges to maintaining a good attitude and healthy emotional state. It is important to consider coping strategies in advance. For some students, this may mean personal journaling, exercise, music, movies, leisure reading, or coffee at your favorite café. Thinking ahead and planning for the ups and downs of your time abroad will ensure that you have the tools that you need to take good care of yourself and maintain a positive outlook.

If you have used counseling services on a regular basis, SIT advises that you discuss this program with your mental health professional as early as possible prior to departure. In some cases, students have elected to maintain a phone or email relationship with a provider in the US, though the practicalities of time differences and program demands may make such an arrangement difficult to maintain on a regular basis.

In Durban, the program also has a good network of crisis and counseling services.

WHO Card

The International Certificate of Vaccination (also known as the WHO card) is a card used to record medical information such as immunizations and other medical history. We recommend that you bring your Immunization Record or WHO Card. A WHO Card may be obtained from a Travel Clinic or online at: http://www.who.int/ihr/IVC200_06_26.pdf. Please consult your physician to ensure that your WHO card accurately reflects your immunization record. Refer to the Health Guidelines and Requirements document for required and recommended immunizations for your program.

All students should travel with an up-to-date WHO card and/or Immunization record regardless of whether there are required immunizations for your program at this time. Countries, or localities within countries, may change immunization requirements at any time, so it is important that you have this document available. Without this proof of immunization history, you may be denied entry to certain countries/areas. We recommend keeping your WHO card and/or Immunization Record with your passport and other important documents, as well as making a photocopy that you keep separately.