

# Compassionate Withdrawal as part of Risk Management<sup>1</sup>

The decision to allow withdrawal from a course or an entire program without penalty -- "compassionate withdrawal" -- as a result of human or natural catastrophe presents many challenges to study abroad programs. While some sending institutions and third-party providers have developed a strategy with specific criteria, no amount of pre-set procedures will remove the need for case-by-case examination, given the uniqueness of each situation. Adding to the complexity are the number of variables: individual students or an entire student group; one course or the academic program; responding to risk or public safety or fear; possible conflicting policies among host, home and third-party institutions. The information below can help to foster a productive discussion between programs and US sending institutions and lead to an informed choice that is acceptable to all.

## A. DEFINITION

Withdrawal: from either a course or from the program as a whole.

Compassionate withdrawal: a mechanism allowing students to terminate their term of study without penalty: petition for a "W" in their courses, or allowing them to leave the course/program and be able to make up the work/exam and get a grade.

Temporary Leave of Absence: a mechanism allowing students to leave their program of study temporarily without penalty

Home institution: the institution sending the student abroad

Provider: the institution facilitating the study abroad experience (provider, local offices of home institution)

Partner institution: the institution hosting the study abroad student (local school, provider, local offices of home institution)

Academic officer: the authority(ies) responsible for making decisions about compassionate withdrawals and managing communication among institution(s), students, faculty

Remotely: not in the defined place of study abroad

## B. POINTS TO CONSIDER

### 1. Deciding to allow for Compassionate Withdrawal (CW)

Where does the threshold lie for allowing compassionate withdrawal?

- Timing: is it ever too early in the semester to request a CW?
- Situation: which events justify the CW (natural disaster, act of terrorism, local universities closing, highly disruptive strikes...)?
- Risk: as defined by local authorities, foreign authorities, and/or the local institutions themselves

Who is the decision-maker? (case-by-case, taking into consideration rules, policies and degree of flexibility of each institutional player - home, provider, partner)

- Are there alternatives to the compassionate withdraw? Such as a temporary Leave of Absence?

---

<sup>1</sup>Contacts :

Christopher Edwards (CEA Paris) – [cedwards@ceastudyabroad.com](mailto:cedwards@ceastudyabroad.com) - 06 33 15 92 78

Timothy Carlson (IFE Paris, Strasbourg) – [tim.carlson@ife-edu.eu](mailto:tim.carlson@ife-edu.eu) - 06 58 97 46 06

- Are students authorized to withdraw from some courses and request to complete work remotely in others?

## **2. Evaluating the request for CW**

Is risk management part of your CW procedures?

Is any supporting documentation required to justify the CW?

Is your institution ensuring equity by treating all requests with equal consideration (e.g. same petition process for all students)?

## **3. Completing work remotely**

Who determines whether or not remote completion is possible? Academic officer? Faculty? Home institution, host institution, provider?

What is the acceptable time threshold for allowing students to complete work remotely? Is this threshold consistent across terms (summer, semester...)?

How to ensure equal treatment for students requesting a CW compared to those who stay?

## **4. In the case of remote completion of work**

How to ensure positive attendance?

Are there implications for financial aid?

How is the work collected?

How are deadlines modified and/or enforced?

Who proctors examinations?

If remote completion is insisted upon by home institution, is the latter responsible for the necessary controls?

Who ensures deadlines are respected?

## **5. How is communication managed?**

Academic officer to student?

Faculty to student?

Does your program/school have the bandwidth to manage the interface with students, and potentially between partner institutions and students, in the event of a large number of student requests for compassionate withdrawals?

Through which medium are you communicating with students?

## **6. Partner institutions**

Partners will likely have varying policies and must be included.

Do you know what your partner school's policies are?

Can you be proactive in determining a framework that defines operational parameters for partner institutions and home institutions?