



# DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

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*The Faculty of Arts and Sciences*

## COMMITTEE ON OFF-CAMPUS ACTIVITIES

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Dear Student,

I write to alert you to the fact that participants in off-campus programs may encounter racist or sexist attitudes or behavior. Incidents have been rare--but even one is too many. The point of this letter is to remind you that Dartmouth cannot guarantee a safe or "ideal" environment--either physically or emotionally--on its off-campus programs, any more than it can do so here in Hanover. While an encounter with racism or sexism may not harm you physically, it can cause emotional stress.

Just as racism and sexism are problems in the United States and at Dartmouth College, so can they be issues when you travel abroad. Racism and sexist incidents can be particularly troubling abroad because you're not as familiar with the historical and cultural contexts which might help you interpret and respond to them. Students thus must take it upon themselves to become as informed as possible about the kinds of racism and/or sexist behavior they might encounter at a given site. For example, in some countries, a visit by a woman to a man's room may be understood as a willingness to have sex. Wearing shorts or beach attire in an urban setting may attract unwelcome stares or worse. Minority members might be stopped more often or made to show identity papers or given inferior service in shops or restaurants. Eye contact or smiles may be interpreted as more intimate than they are in the United States. You may experience different, possibly more blatant, expressions of racism or sexism that might be considered more taboo in the United States and encounter stereotypes that are not seen as unacceptable in the country you are visiting.

### **What you can do:**

Racism and sexism exist everywhere, but their expression differs from country to country. Nothing can justify sexual or racial harassment in any country, nor can Dartmouth College do anything to prevent it. But sensitivity to the cultural norms of the host country can be a powerful preventative.

As you prepare to study on an off-campus program, make an effort to learn about the dangers associated with that particular program's location. Be aware of the characteristic history, political issues, ethnic mix, or traditional assumptions about race, gender, or religion that contribute to its local culture. Gestures, actions, clothing, and mannerisms may have different meanings in different places. Mutual misinterpretation is a constant possibility.

Make an effort to dress and behave in a way appropriate to the site you are visiting.

Take care not to jump to conclusions. Some of the difficulty might be linguistic. For example, it is not necessary to be offended if, in France, you are described as a member of a "culte," because the word is simply used to refer to religion or to a Protestant religious service.

Remember that misunderstanding (and even assaults) may occur with acquaintances and even new friends, as well as with strangers, in your host community.

Be cautious. Walking home alone at night can be risky at some off-campus locations; some districts may even be risky to walk through during the day. Practice the same caution you would in any American city. Avoid traveling home alone at night; it is always best to find a ride with friends, or take a taxi if possible, the expense of which is small when your safety is at stake. Taking weekend trips alone can also be dangerous.

Be aware that many of the non-discriminatory policies which exist at Dartmouth--and that may be backed by the force of law in this country--may not be as widely accepted in some of the places where our off-campus programs are located. Laws obviously vary from country to country. Those who report incidents cannot be assured of a sympathetic ear when they talk to local authorities.

Never hesitate to contact the director of your program for help in dealing with attitudes you encounter, reporting incidents, or coping with your feelings about them.

Orientation meetings at Dartmouth as well as at the program site are meant to help you understand the local risks and cultural norms. Pay attention to this advice. Ask questions. And be sure to report any incidents of physical assault or sexual or racial harassment to your program director.

I wish you a safe and memorable term.

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