

UCEAP Health & Safety Course

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Executive Summary

UCEAP officially launched its new, state-of-art Health and Safety course on October 29, 2020. The culmination of a year-long development project with input from dozens of UC subject matter experts and healthcare professionals, this online, self-paced course prepares students for situations abroad that could impact their physical or mental health, safety, or well-being. The course will be available to all campuses for students preparing to travel on UCEAP or faculty or department-led programs.

Introduction

What's on the mind of a UC student who has been accepted into an international study abroad program? For most students, it is unlikely to be health or safety. Yet, preventable health and safety issues can significantly disrupt student experiences abroad. How can we engage, educate, and empower students to make proactive decisions about a set of topics that often don't seem relevant before departure—and do it remotely? With these questions in mind, the UCEAP IT and Health, Safety, and Emergency Response (HS&ER) teams embarked on reimagining a new student-facing UCEAP Health & Safety Course in the fall of 2019.

UCEAP serves all ten campuses in the UC system and offers over 150 UC credit-bearing programs in 40 countries worldwide. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, UCEAP sent over 5,000 students abroad each year. Effectively preparing students for the multitude of health and safety issues they may encounter while studying abroad, including physical and mental health, cultural norms, and personal safety, presents many unique challenges. Some topics, such as mental health and emotional wellness—which can take a toll on an individual's ability to cope and adjust to a significant change in cultural environments, norms, and potential shifts of academic rigor - apply to all students studying anywhere. Other topics are crucial for students studying in certain host countries.

An earlier version of an online health course for students called the UCEAP Online Travel Course (OTC) provided effective tracking delivery of health and safety content to UCEAP participants studying in higher health risk countries. Still, students frequently expressed frustration over some user experience (UX) and technical problems. The course was text-heavy, challenging to navigate, and lacked accessibility features. Students were required to complete the course in a single session. Student feedback from the OTC, amongst many other factors, was carefully considered in the choice of software, third-party technologies, and pedagogical strategies integrated into the new course.

Today's cohorts of UC study abroad students are accustomed to interacting with and learning from streaming media. The pervasiveness of devices, apps, and tutorials, the increasing attention on user experience and human-centered design, and the proliferation of interactive audio and visual media has set a high bar and a common language for what students expect from a digital experience. These considerations informed the development of the course: package the health and safety content in a similarly seamless experience—one that has unity of visuals, variety of activity options, and sound pedagogical strategies, all resting on a solid technological foundation.

Course Development

Phase 1

The UCEAP Health and Safety course development occurred in two phases. The first phase focused on identifying and crafting high-level health and safety content to benefit all UCEAP students studying in all program locations. This broadened delivery was a significant shift; for the first time, all UCEAP students would benefit from a comprehensive health and safety course, not just students headed to higher health risk host countries. An international stakeholder team was assembled and led by UCEAP Instructional Designer Carrie Kapp in partnership with the HS&ER team. It included input and participation from UCEAP Program Directors and study center faculty abroad, UCSB Student Health, and Campus Administrative Directors from UCLA and UCSC, plus ongoing feedback, contributions, and support from staff at UC study abroad offices.

UCEAP combined input from UC subject matter experts, data from internal incident reports, and industry best practices to identify the high-level health and safety topics. This expanded content addressed mental wellness matters abroad, managing prescription medications overseas, and knowing the host country's cultural norms and the relationships between standards and personal safety. UCEAP also incorporated input from subject matter experts such as international Faculty Directors, UCEAP alumni, and current UCEAP participants. Staff from the UCSB Resource Center for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, the Resource Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity, and the Student Health Drug and Alcohol Program participated in script reviews and feedback exchanges during the course development. These groups contributed to carefully considered inclusive imagery and travel-specific wording designed to create a welcoming and informative environment for all learners. Using agile methodology, the stakeholder team focused their attention on each topic through multiple exploration and iterative development rounds of outlining, scriptwriting, storyboarding, building, and testing.

The project goals for the high-level course, collectively agreed upon and documented in a Project Charter by the Phase 1 stakeholder team, included:

- Develop a four-module interactive online course to empower UCEAP study abroad students to make thoughtful, proactive health and safety decisions before and during travels.
- Clarify UCEAP's roles, responsibilities, and (online) resources that contribute to a healthy and safe study abroad experience.
- Design the course to allow each section to stand alone and work in tandem with other modules such as country-specific health and safety requirements and other student-centric predeparture content.

In designing the course, identified technologies served the following purposes:

- Design a secure online experience that UC students can participate in (SSO / Moodle LMS)
- Auto-capture completion data and user feedback (Articulate Storyline 360 / SCORM)
- Speak the language of the target learner demographic (Adobe Creative Cloud for branding/media)
- Collaborate and communicate synchronously and asynchronously with an international stakeholder team on the script, storyboarding, meeting recordings, and more (Microsoft 365 / Teams)

The new UCEAP Health and Safety course is a standalone interactive learning experience authored in Articulate Storyline 360 that speaks a common language, SCORM, with the open-source Moodle LMS.

The SCORM format tracks completion, ensuring students get health and safety information, and collects student survey feedback, allowing UCEAP to continuously improve the authored content. Within the course experience itself, technology facilitates effective learning engagement techniques, three of which we will focus on storytelling, interactivity, and gamification.

Storytelling

Essential topics begin with narrated study abroad stories by UCEAP alumni, fictionalized for privacy. The peer perspective elicits interest in issues that might not otherwise appear engaging: managing health conditions and prescriptions, culture shock, food safety, the connection between cultural norms and personal safety, and emergency preparedness. The stories were created as moving image montages using Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, Premiere, and Audition as supporting technology for the storyboarding, image and video coloring and editing, audio narration, sound effects, and music. Storytelling acts as a “hook” to capture and move the learner—stories can prompt action and change minds.

Learning through the perspective of another student makes it more interesting and impactful when going through this course. - Course feedback, UC student, 2021

I liked the stories from past study abroad students. It helped me gain more insight on what could happen while abroad. - Course feedback, UC student, 2021

Interactivity

Interactivity is interwoven into the course, generally, after an initial introduction clarifies a topic and context to studying abroad. Interactivity motivates learners to think, analyze, reflect, and learn effectively and do so at their own pace. By providing *context*, its application focuses on increasing learner motivation by adding meaning. Through a *challenge*, a learner’s interest and curiosity activate problem-solving skills. *Activities* help learners try different paths and face the consequences of their choices while also providing them with the opportunity to go back and correct their mistakes. And *feedback* works as a reinforcement of the concepts taught.

Most of the course interactivity consists of click-and-reveal functionality created within the Articulate Storyline 360 environment to assist students in exploring and assimilating concepts and action items. A supplement to the online experience is a packet of infographic-style printable/downloadable course worksheets for learners who benefit tangibly within a learning experience: taking notes, doodling, or fidgeting (a kinesthetic/writer within the [VARK model](#)). While not for everyone, the course worksheets are an optional interaction method that all students can choose to print and scribble on now or save in a folder for later; either option is also a lasting trigger for the actual content discussed in the course.

I liked that it was interactive, so it forced me to pay attention. - Course feedback, UC student, 2021

I liked the pdf that we could use to take notes and follow along because otherwise, I would forget the information. - Course feedback, UC student, 2021

Gamification

One of the first slides of the course is a study abroad Fact or Fiction card game, complete with sound effects, animation, and click-and-reveal functionality, encouraging fun and playful learning experiences. It is also a pre-assessment in disguise: how much do students already know, or think they know, about

study abroad health and safety? The Phase 1 stakeholder team collaborated on the top urban legends and misunderstood topics of studying abroad and framed them as factual statements. For example:

“If you break a local law in your host country, the US Embassy can get you out of jail.” Fact or Fiction?

Students read and assess the statement based on their current knowledge and make a choice.

Gamifying an online course encourages learners to engage in desired learning behavior by taking advantage of psychological predisposition. Games appeal to our competitive nature, making them an influential tool that gives students the chance to “earn” while learning. The reward of completing a task can boost dopamine levels and confidence and provide an incentive to continue the interaction.

When a student gets the answer right, descriptive, positive feedback appears with a correct answer as to why the topic is essential; this feedback also confirms that more details are coming up in the course. If a student misses a response, the game provides feedback, such as “that’s a widespread assumption!” then prompts a “try again,” so students eventually learn some common pitfalls. For a skeptical or busy student who might have approached the course thinking they already knew everything they needed to know, this experience provides a gentle nudge that there might be more than meets the eye to studying abroad. These tactics can boost intrinsic motivation, which aids in retaining concepts and information the course discusses.

I liked the fact or fiction game and its user interface. It provided short and concise answers to important topics to be covered. -UCEAP alumni, 2020

Gamifying an experience and acknowledging that I might have previous knowledge is a good move. - UCEAP alumni, 2020

[Excerpt slides that illustrate these engagement techniques are viable here.](#) These include the study abroad Fact or Fiction gamified pre-assessment, Ricardo’s Story, Smarter Choices for Street Food interaction, Transportation Safety animation, Julie’s Story, and UCEAP Travel Insurance interaction.

Phase 2

Phase 2 of the Health and Safety course focused on developing an additional seventeen unique, country-specific modules for higher-risk programs that UCEAP operates. Six UC Health Staff representing five UC campuses contributed expertise regarding health, vaccination, and endemic disease topics to ensure that the information provided to the students accurately reflected the advice of medical professionals. In collaboration with UC Health and other subject matter experts from the featured host countries, new course modules were developed for multiple locations that branch off the parent Health and Safety course. These included countries such as Costa Rica, Ghana, India, Russia, and the Solomon Islands. As the course build spanned throughout the pandemic, UC Health Staff assisted in creating a section dedicated to post-COVID 19 travel.

Feedback & Scalability

With international travel still restricted, smaller numbers of students have engaged with the new UCEAP Health & Safety Course, but with overwhelmingly positive feedback. Data collected since the summer of 2020 comes from alumni and nominated students from two rounds of beta testing, students electing to stay overseas, students who planned to travel but canceled due to ongoing restrictions, and students currently preparing to travel in future terms. Students are reporting heightened engagement and

interest in course topics that profoundly impact one's ability to adapt and excel within a new culture and academic environment: culture transition, emotional and mental health, managing conditions, and prescriptions abroad. UCEAP looks forward to continuing to track this data once travel fully resumes.

Course demonstrations provided to UC Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, Michael T. Brown, and campus Senior International Officers and Study Abroad Directors elicited interest in syndication. Conversations have begun to allow campuses to brand the course and modify copies to their specific needs. Adapting the lessons can save each campus the expense of developing similar materials and represents the possibility of providing all UC students with a consistent foundation for participating safely in study abroad, whether through UCEAP or a campus-based program.

With vaccination increasing worldwide and UC campuses hoping to resume in-person classes in fall 2021, there is optimism that UC students will begin participating in study abroad programs soon. The importance of preparing students for health and safety in this new environment is evident; the UCEAP Health & Safety Course shows the potential for leveraging systemwide knowledge to develop instructional resources that all can use.

Project Contributors

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- UCEAP IT Learning Management System administration: Scott Kasai and Jason Brown
- Guest Narrators: Neil Clark (UCEAP), Fernando Sandoval (UCEAP), Ben Kinman (UCEAP), Irving Alvisurez (UCEAP), Bryn Lemon (UCEAP), Shannon Krahn (UCEAP), Pamela Shaw (UCEAP), Devon Engel (UCEAP), Sierra Hastings
- Contractors: Shari Cruz and Val Serdy (ADA compliance, accessibility review)
- UCEAP alumni and Program Advisors who contributed actual study abroad stories for adaptation.
- UCEAP alumni Phase 1 Beta Testers & UC Student Beta Testers from various campuses