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# “HOPE FOR THE BEST, PLAN FOR THE WORST”

## A SYMPOSIUM ON OFF-CAMPUS RESEARCH

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### A Planning Tool for Students

The potential for injury, assault, harassment, and violence during off-campus research activities is an often-unacknowledged issue facing students and researchers of all disciplines. This document provides a planning tool for students, faculty, administrators, and counselors to determine how best to plan for the risks of off-campus researchers before a problem emerges.

Note: Some of the scenarios presented here may seem extreme, and highly unlikely. It is our sincere hope that this level of preparation is more than what is necessary and that you never need to use it. This symposium, however, is designed to begin the planning process; therefore, we encourage you to take what feels most useful and leave what does not.

### What You Will Need:

1. Student Planning Tool (This Document)
2. Off-Campus Research Plan (Location, Length, Etc.)
3. University-Run Resource List
4. Student-Faculty Conversation Guide

#### A Statement of Authorship

This document was adapted from a fieldwork planning guide authored by the MeToo Anthropology Collective ([meetooanthro.org](http://meetooanthro.org)). Sarah Messbauer (University of California, Davis) has authored minor changes to suit the diverse needs of UC Davis researchers, but **all credit goes to M2AC** for creating the foundations of this document.

#metooanthro’s work is a collective enterprise that many have contributed to, with primary authors leading the research and collation of content for each piece of work. The ‘A Long Journey Home: Supporting Students in the Field’ seminar packet is authored by Holly Walters (Brandeis University) and Amy Hanes (Brandeis University), and developed with the Rape Crisis Centre at Brandeis University.

The ‘A Long Journey Home: Faculty Guide’ is authored by Holly Walters and Kersten Bergstrom (Texas A&M University), with contributions and editorial input from Esther Anderson (University of South Queensland), Hannah Gould (University of Melbourne), Kathleen Openshaw (Western Sydney University), and Mythily Meher (University of Melbourne).

## Making Your Safety Plan

Let's begin with a basic outline for the overall plan and start thinking about some of the major questions. As we continue, we'll fill in each section in more detail.

### Start by Considering your Destination

Do you know fundamental details about your destination? Some questions to ask yourself include:

1. Where is it that you plan to go, and for what length of time?
2. What is the political situation currently, either on the national scale or locally at your destination?
3. How do the social and cultural norms of your destination compare to what you are currently familiar with?
4. What does the medical infrastructure of your destination look like? Is healthcare generally available, and of good quality?
5. What is the local legal system like? Are there established procedures for visitors to your destination to gain legal assistance, should they need it? Are there laws that differ substantially from those in your current location?
6. Is the communications infrastructure of your destination more advanced, or more limited? If your destination does not have internet or mobile phone services, what are the available options for communicating with others in the country or internationally?
7. If you have traveled to this destination in the past: what has changed since the last time you were there? How might those changes affect your answers to the previous questions in this section?

### Consider Your Identity & Identify Potential Risks

To adequately assess potential risks at your research destination, you need to do more than simply understand yourself and your own identity: you need to think about who you are *in the context of where you're going*. Understanding how your identity and background will be viewed by others—and what, if any, differences exist between how you see yourself and how others will see you—is an absolutely critical part of managing your risks while off campus.

To this end, some questions to ask yourself include:

1. Are you fluent in one or more of the local languages? Is English or another language you already speak commonly understood? If you answered no to both of these questions, how will you communicate with others? How are non-fluent individuals viewed by people at your destination?
2. How are identity markers like sex, gender, race, religion, or nationality understood on the ground and what issues might arise from this? Put another way: what are general norms and values surrounding sexuality, racial/ethnic, religious, and gender boundaries in your destination?

If, for example, you want to think about gender and sexuality, you might consider the following:

For women: Consider what situations you might encounter being female, working alone, and as an outsider in a foreign culture. What kinds of restrictions and expectations do women often face and how might those issues impact you or your work?

For LGBTQIA+: Consider how the queer community is understood and received at your destination. Is homosexuality illegal or a cause for threat? What potential dangers exist? How do you want to respond to those dangers?

For men: Sexual assault and harassment are not just a problem for women and the LGBTQIA+ community. Men can also be victims of assault and face severe stigma following an incident. Additionally, this is the space for men to think and talk about how their actions in the field might be interpreted and viewed by others around them (both colleagues and local peoples). In what ways might their actions be misconstrued or seen as threatening? How might their position as Westerners (or non-Westerners) become problematic in terms of gendered relationships at their destination? How do they want to respond to those issues?

Intersectional Questions: Consider how your ability/age/religious identity, visible or invisible, might intersect with and affect your safety while off campus. What additional issues might arise within the unique combination of circumstances you anticipate encountering?

Additional Questions: What are the social assumptions about sexuality and someone of your perceived social positioning (age, gender, relationship status, job, nationality, level of education, class, race, etc.)? What kinds of behaviors are considered acceptable? What are the consequences of violating those standards?

Are there different expectations in rural and urban contexts, and would it be useful to adapt accordingly?

Given your perceived social positioning, who are considered appropriate people to discuss these topics with? What are acceptable ways to pose these questions?

3. What are the laws surrounding identity-based violence in your off-campus research context? If there are no formal laws that deal with personal identity, are there informal laws or unofficial enforcement groups that would influence your ability to gain assistance?

## Plan Your Strategy

1. Before you depart, what are the most important “action items” you should accomplish to mitigate the risks of your research trip? Who are the key people you should connect with for assistance with planning or execution?
2. In the event of a problem, who can you contact in an emergency? What resources do you have available to you? If you need to leave, will you have available funds and transportation?
3. Following an event, what would you like to have happen or what resources would you like to access? (Note: This does not necessarily mean that this is the precise plan you will follow in the event of a situation, but promotes strategizing and awareness of possible resources).

**Note: Safety planning cannot *eliminate* danger.** Ideally, it minimizes danger by 1) priming you to notice threats, and by 2) reducing your response time. If you only have moments to extract yourself from a situation, and you already have strategies on hand, it can make all the difference.

## Important Considerations

**You are subject to the laws of your destination** while there so it is relatively imperative that you become generally familiar with those laws. Check to see if national laws regarding identity-based violence are available online. If not, bookstores in the capital (particularly those associated with university presses) or university libraries are likely to have copies of national laws. You can also contact local or regional NGOs working on legal issues, Embassies, or Embassy Library staff, as they also usually have information they can provide.

**Seek out other peers or faculty who have previously worked at/in your destination** (this may mean contacting someone outside of your home institution). Ask them for feedback and information about potential problems, and pay particular attention to information from people of different ages, different social positions, and different backgrounds.

**While off campus, consider how you might determine who to talk to and how deeply to delve into topics of sex, gender, race, religion, and more.** You may, for example, bring up a story from the news or a neighboring community, or casual gossip in your conversations with others. Gathering responses this way is useful because it distances the speaker from the actual topic; neither you nor they will necessarily have to divulge personal information or affiliation.

**Pay attention to offhand comments and unsolicited references to danger.** Ideas about what constitutes “advice” and “explanation,” when it is appropriate to offer it, and how the recipient is

expected to receive it are contextually specific. Local research partners and casual acquaintances can be communicating important information in ways that are not always obvious.

**Consider pervasive attitudes about marriage, family, and other social structures.** For example, many solo female researchers wear wedding rings even if they are unmarried in order to reduce harassment. Keep in mind that your perceived marital status may also impact your access to lodging (some local guest lodgings will not accept solo women or single women in a group of men) or religious spaces. Conversely, you may have access to spaces or rooms available only to women. Be aware of what those situations are and when they might be most useful.

*Note: Access to safe lodgings also occasionally means that you will need to pay more for lodging (or different types of lodgings, such as a single room) than other researchers. Do not be afraid to add these considerations to grant applications or stipend budgets.*

*Note: Learning about any terms (including slang) used at your field site to describe particular groups of people—say, LGBTQIA+ individuals, people of color, or persons with disabilities—and if there are different terms to distinguish those groups from others (i.e. different terms for same-sex partners versus same-sex friends) can give you insight into these situations.*

## Planning Specifics: Housing

1. Before committing to a housing situation can you explore the options in person? Are there hostels, research houses, or hotels that seem safe to stay in while you research housing in the area?
2. If your research goals don't involve living amongst informants (or if doing so is not safe), could you live nearby? What reputation does your preferred area have amongst people from the area? Amongst outsiders?
3. If crime statistics feel useful for decision-making, can you access them online or does your embassy have those statistics broken down by region, town, and/or neighborhood?
4. Is living in close proximity to state-based authorities (police stations, military posts, etc.) considered safe or risky in your research context?
5. If there is an elder council or meeting place near your site would living closer to it make you feel safer?
6. If living in a safer area means paying more for rent, how can you negotiate these costs?

*Possibilities: negotiate a lower rate with the landlord; build the costs into grant applications with an explanation in the budget justification section.*

7. If you had to move unexpectedly, what would be a viable second option? Where could you stay if you were between places?

### What Kind of Housing Do You Need?

1. What is considered a safe living situation by local standards? Do people of similar social positioning have roommates or share communal spaces with neighbors? Do they have guards that they employ overnight? Could you implement any of these strategies?
2. In many places dogs are feared and bars on the windows are thought to be deterrents for attackers. Are these options for you?
3. Where are all of the exits in your residence? What's the best exit strategy if someone breaks in?

*Possibilities: A room with a separate door that locks and a window for exit is ideal. Avoid being cornered in closets, small spaces, or rooms with potential weapons (i.e. kitchens with knives).*

4. Do you have access to a charged phone and reception at all times?

*Possibilities: Keep it charged at all times and near you while sleeping.*

5. Do you have trusted neighbors that would come to your aid if you called for help?

*Possibilities: Recruit a trusted neighbor and discuss signals (verbal and visual) that you can use to call for help. Ask the neighbor to check in or call the authorities if they hear strange noises from your place.*

### Planning Specifics: Bodily Safety

1. What makes you feel safe in a new geographic (and possibly linguistic) context?

*Possibilities: martial arts; self-defense classes; pepper spray (may or may not be a legally or personally viable option in your context).*

2. In some cases, researchers opt to dress in the clothing typical of the region or of their informants. Is this a viable option for you? Why or why not?

*Possibilities: will dressing in the clothing typical of your research participants be read by others in a particular way? Is Western clothing more acceptable or would this be cause for additional stigma?*

### Planning Specifics: Transportation/Travel

1. What are safety practices around public transportation?

*Possibilities: opt to hire a whole taxi (instead of sharing one) during peak crime periods, in dangerous neighborhoods, or late at night.*

2. If hiring a private taxi in your location is more dangerous, opt for public transportation.
3. If hiring a private taxi ask for the driver's name and badge number (if applicable) and make it obvious that you are sharing that information (on the phone, via text, etc.). Even if you are only acting as if you are sharing the information it can be useful.
4. Give noncommittal answers to taxi drivers if they ask, "Do you live here?" when you arrive at your destination. Other answers (i.e. saying you are visiting a friend) can be useful.
5. If you and an informant/friend have Internet access and smart phones with GPS capabilities, they can use it to track you until you arrive at your destination.

### If You're Being Followed

1. If you feel you are being followed and the situation is a potentially dangerous one:

*Possibilities: Take small steps to discourage someone following you, such as, a) change sides of the street; b) pretend to have a problem with your shoe, bend down and see if someone is following you; c) stop suddenly, turn to look at the person and greet them (use caution with this); d) pretend to receive a text or call in order to look around and see if you are being followed; e) pretend to know someone on the street and greet them loudly (explain the situation to them after); f) enter a store or office immediately (public buildings are preferable).*

2. If you are sure you are being followed and the situation is dangerous:

*Possibilities: a) get into a taxi without permission, ask to be let out at next stop, and explain what happened if you feel comfortable; b) enter a nearby home without permission; c) yell or doing other things to draw attention to yourself; d) pretend to take a phone call from someone intimidating (i.e. "Hello Officer X, I am on my way to the police station...").*

### Aliases & Codes

1. If you are asked for personal information and do not feel safe giving it out, could an alias be helpful?

*Possibilities: Some people give out a false name, country (or state) of origin, and job title when asked for identifying information by strangers they are unlikely to see again or feel uneasy around. If created ahead of time, and offered confidently and naturally, an alias can be useful.*

2. Could using codes to quickly communicate with trusted individuals be useful?

*Possibilities: If detained somewhere against your will (by an individual, by authorities, etc.) and you have the opportunity to use a phone, being able to use a verbal or text code can be a quick and efficient way to communicate with a friend in the area. One-word codes are often easy to remember and communicate by phone or text. The code should be a word that is believable if said, but not something you normally say. If texting the code, it may be useful to erase the text after sending it. The person receiving the code must know it, and how to respond to it, ahead of time.*

*Longer codes (i.e. two words dropped into a sentence) can be used to convey more detailed information (i.e. location, who is present, etc.).*

*If you work in an area where the local authorities detain you without cause or confiscate papers and/or phones, codes can be useful for communicating your location if you come upon a checkpoint (i.e. send a code about your location to a trusted person before being stopped).*

## Planning Specifics: Local Authorities & Resources

1. Are state authorities (police, military, etc.) a viable source of support or a reporting option for you, should you need them?
2. Are non-state (traditional) authorities a viable source of support for you?

*Possibilities: Informants' and laypersons' characterizations of these authorities can be a starting point for assessing their viability for you. Do they trust some of these authorities more than others?*

3. Is your home country's embassy a viable source of support for you?

The U.S. State Department has an online program (STEP) that allows expats to register their visits. Citizens receive updates on regional security issues and evacuations as they happen. Registering ensures that the embassy already has your information if you need to report a violent incident to them. (<https://step.state.gov/STEPMobile/default.html>)

Regardless of whether you officially register with your embassy, befriending embassy staff is one way to learn about security resources in the area. Sometimes they will share the Regional Security Officer's (RSO) phone number with you.

Embassies often have medical officers who often give out referrals to local health services.

*Note: If a violent incident is reported to an embassy staff (even if it is not a formal report) that staff member is encouraged and sometimes required to report that incident to the RSO. You may or may not be named in that report.*

4. Are local service-based organizations a viable source of support for you?

*Possibilities: The Hot Peach Pages (website) has a directory of resources around the world in a variety of languages (not all service organizations listed offer victims' services, and some are advocacy organizations or non-operational). Disclaimer: seeking services in a second language, after being injured or traumatized, may be especially difficult.*

## What to Have on You

### 1. "Go bag"

Most universities recommend having a "go bag" available to you wherever you are. This is a bag that includes: passport and/or I.D.; immunization records; approval letter for research; visa; health insurance information; vaccinations; change of clothes and shoes; two-week supply of necessary medications; cash; debit and/or credit cards; phone credit and charger; basic care items that are relevant to your context; important numbers written out. All of these items are then immediately accessible to you in case of natural disasters, political evacuations, or whenever you might need to leave the area immediately.

Note: these items can be kept in an actual bag all together, or in a place that you can quickly access if need be.

*FORGE has a list of items that transgendered students may want to consider adding to their bag (<http://forge-forward.org/event/ne-coalition-webinar-serving-transgender-survivors/>).*

### Also Include:

1. Color photocopies of important documents *with you* and a trusted person at home (including scanned copies).

*Having color photo copies can be useful at checkpoints for either giving to an officer or for keeping on your person if your passport is taken. If possible, get color copies notarized by in-country officials. These can be carried instead of a passport in some countries where you are required to move around with identification at all times.*

2. Important phone numbers (written down)

*If you work in an area without regular reception or a place where phones are sometimes confiscated at checkpoints, having important numbers (including in-country contacts) are useful.*

3. Up-to date identification documents and visas

*Having all papers up to date can reduce friction with officials and eliminate reasons for being detained. Being detained, if you are traveling alone, can escalate risk of assault.*

## Closing Comments

This can feel overwhelming. Plan in pieces.

The point of this planning exercise is not to dissuade you from your research. It's to make sure you know what the potential risks are, and are as comfortable as possible with those risks.

If you are forced to make a decision between your personal safety and getting the data you need for your research, please remember that the long-term effects of safety issues can be more impactful than the loss of data. Decide in advance what your limits are, communicate those limits with your advisors, and don't let the pressures of the moment sway your resolve.

You are the best judge of what feels dangerous and safe for you. Take whatever feels necessary and leave what does not.

## Reflecting on Your Needs & Determining Next Steps

*Use the prompting questions below to begin outlining your safety plan.*

First, establish the basic details.

1. *Determine the extent of your planning needs by defining the scope of your trip.*
  - Where do you plan to go?
  - What do you plan to do?
  - How long do you plan to stay?
2. *Establish who you'll be interacting with during your stay.*
  - Are you travelling alone or with someone else?
  - Do you have a host at your destination?
  - To what extent will you interact with other academics, the general public, etc.?
3. *Evaluate the ways your personal identity, experiences, and skills may influence your trip.*
  - Are there trainings that may help you build necessary skills?
  - What are the major differences between how you perceive yourself and how others at your destination might perceive you?
  - What does your current support network look like and what gaps in your network need to be filled (emergency contacts, friends, advisors, etc.)?

As you progress through this process, remember the following key points:

1. *You are the only one that can determine if a situation feels dangerous to you.*
  - What situations are you most concerned about?
  - How do you want to respond to those situations?
  - What resources are available to you?
2. *In a dangerous situation, whatever you do to stay safe is the right thing to do.*
  - Where can you go if you are in immediate danger?
  - Who can you contact if you are in immediate danger?
  - Once you are safe, where can you access funds and transportation?
  - What resources are available at your university? In your country?
  - Will you have internet access? Cellphone? Other forms of contact?
3. *You are never alone in this – even if you can't avoid a problem, there are resources available to assist you with the short- and long-term effects.*
  - What resources would be most helpful for navigating academic issues stemming from your research experience?
  - What resources would be most helpful for navigating personal issues?  
Professional ones?
  - What types of long-term support might you benefit from, and where can you access that support?

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# OFF-CAMPUS RESEARCH PLANNING

## RESOURCES AND SUPPORT FOR UC DAVIS STUDENTS

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### Before You Go

Risk Management

<https://safetyservices.ucdavis.edu/categories/risk-management-services>

Field Safety

<https://safetyservices.ucdavis.edu/article/field-research-safety>

### While You're There

Office of Student Support and Judicial Affairs

<https://ossja.ucdavis.edu/case-management-student-support>

Graduate Studies

<https://grad.ucdavis.edu/resources/graduate-student-resources>

UC Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP)

<https://shcs.ucdavis.edu/insurance-services>

### Once You're Back

Office of the Ombuds

<https://ombuds.ucdavis.edu/about-us>

Harassment & Discrimination Assistance and Prevention Program (HDAPP)

<https://hdapp.ucdavis.edu/>

Center for Advocacy Resources and Education (CARE)

<https://care.ucdavis.edu/>

Counseling Services

<https://grad.ucdavis.edu/current-students/mental-health-counseling-services>

WorkLife's Wellness Resources & Programs

<https://hr.ucdavis.edu/departments/worklife-wellness/wellness-resources>

### Additional Tips

- Many of the services above can be used at multiple stages throughout your off-campus research cycle. Don't hesitate to contact a resource at any point to get further information on how they might be able to help.
- The Centers in the Student Community Center offer additional information on support for various communities. Make an appointment with a Center GSR for more details.
- Some Colleges and Schools provide their own resources for off-campus research. Consult your College website for further information.
- Many scholarly associations also publish information related to off-campus research activities. Visit your association's website or talk to a scholar in your field to learn more.

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# OFF-CAMPUS RESEARCH PLANNING

## A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO TALKING WITH FACULTY<sup>1</sup>

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### What You Should Remember

Establishing a positive and productive relationship with your faculty adviser is a critical step in achieving graduate school success. You can support this relationship by planning important meetings (such as those related to off-campus research) ahead of time so that you have the time and space to discuss the topics that are important to you. Use the following checklist for self-reflection and to plan research meetings with your adviser in light of what you identify as your goals and expectations for off-campus research.

Remember, your adviser is very busy and has many things on their plate—other advisees to visit, courses to plan and prepare, research to conduct, meetings to attend, and so on. Despite this, however, **your advisor has a responsibility to provide you with the support you need to succeed in your work** — it is right and expected that they will help you refine and enhance your off-campus research plans as part of this responsibility.

### Prior to Your First Conversation

- Make an initial appointment to meet with your adviser. Emails are usually best, so email your adviser about two weeks ahead of time. Suggest some days/times that you are available, using your maximum availability.
- Develop, review, and/or revise your off-campus research safety plan. Reviewing this plan should become a regular part of your preparation for related meetings with your adviser.
- Come prepared with an agenda – use your responses to the off-campus research planning document as your guide. It will help your adviser if you send them the agenda in advance.
- In an email, write one to two sentences describing the main objectives of your meeting. Plan on keeping the meeting to about 30 minutes; if you don't get to everything, schedule another meeting.
- Provide materials ahead of time. If there is anything you would like your adviser to review before the meeting, send it to them well ahead of time.

### During Your First Conversation

There are many possible topics you could discuss during your first off-campus research meeting with your adviser. Again, consider which topics are important for a positive and productive advising relationship, and make an effort to keep your meeting to about 30 minutes.

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<sup>1</sup> Elements of this guide were adapted from a resource entitled, “Graduate Students: Working with Your Faculty Adviser” developed for the University of Washington College of Education.

- Discuss expectations about your off-campus research plan with your advisor, including what you plan to do and where you plan to do it.
- Share your safety planning document. Get their advice on gaps or errors that might exist.
- Discuss how your adviser might assist you in locating additional resources relevant to your research plans. For example, if your advisor has visited your off-campus research location before, they may be able to inform you about physical resources nearby (such as hospitals, police stations, or reputable housing) or connect you with people nearby who can assist in an emergency.
- Make your adviser aware of particular concerns about your identity, background, experiences, or skills that may influence how and when you complete your off-campus research. Make sure they understand what your concerns are, and ask for their advice on how to mitigate them.
- Ask your advisor to discuss what kind of response you can expect from them in the event of an emergency or urgent safety concern. If your advisor prefers not to be the first point of contact, ask for the name and contact information of a campus representative whom you can contact in their stead. Establish a procedure for sharing urgent information, including a “contact tree” of essential campus personnel.
- Ask your adviser what structure they prefer for additional reflection with you on the safety plan you’ve developed. In-person meetings? Phone conversations? Email?
- Review the areas of your plan you need to revise and/or enhance, and create a list of action items for addressing those issues. Double-check with your advisor that the list you’ve generated together is comprehensive, and set a deadline for sending them a revised plan.

## After Your First Conversation

- Address the action items you created during your first meeting. Create a revised draft of your safety plan, and share this with your adviser at your next meeting.
- If your off-campus research plans change, change your safety plans accordingly.
- Before your trip, share the final version of your safety plan with your advisor, your designated emergency contacts, and any other people (friends, family) you feel should know the details of your plan.

## Additional Tips and Helpful Information

- Use the subject line of your email to catch their attention; for example: “Advising appointment request — Diane Pleasant.”
- If your adviser doesn’t respond within 5-10 business days, try sending your email again.
- If you still don’t hear back and your questions are urgent, contact your graduate advisor or program coordinator to see if they can help locate your adviser or find someone who can help you temporarily.
- Show up for your meeting on time and prepared. This will demonstrate to your adviser that you value their time and that you take your safety planning seriously.
- Ask clarifying questions as needed during your meeting. It’s not helpful to you or your adviser if you leave your meeting feeling unsure about expectations or next steps.