

**March 10, 2020**

Dear Comunidad 29 Encuentro Dominicano students:

**Please read this entire message carefully and thoroughly. It contains information related to completion of your semester abroad.**

Some students and parents have contacted us with the request that we not ask you to return early from the Dominican Republic given that a higher travel warning has not been issued for that country. At the same time, other students and parents have contacted us with questions about why we have not yet called you back to the United States. After intense review of information from a broad variety of sources, we have concluded that ***in the same way you chose for yourself to study abroad, at this time you must choose for yourself whether you will remain in the Dominican Republic or return to the U.S. early.***

Creighton University's Global Engagement Office (GEO) closely monitors global reports on the Coronavirus (COVID-19 respiratory disease) outbreak. GEO routinely reviews reports from the World Health Organization, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, the U.S. Department of State, the United Nations Security Council, and public health departments of countries where students are studying among others. Cases have been reported in every country where students are studying abroad, although numbers vary greatly.

Currently, the U.S. Department of State has rated the alert level for the Dominican Republic as "**Level 2: Exercise Increased Caution**" and the Centers for Disease Control has rated the country as "**Level 1: Usual Precautions**." The links below provide details of such advice from these agencies:

- [U.S. Department of State Travel Advisories](#)
- [U.S. Centers for Disease Control](#)
- The [World Health Organization](#) also provides regular updates on the wave of COVID-19 infections.

Creighton University's [Policy: Travel: Domestic and International \(No. 2.1.33\)](#) specifies that programs to countries with higher level warning (i.e. **Level 3 or 4 "Reconsider Travel" or "Do Not Travel"**) must be cut short and travelers in those locations must be directed to return to the U.S. as soon as possible. The main purpose of this policy is to support your safety and well-being, which may become more difficult to do as the local healthcare system becomes stressed. We will certainly request you return should the alert level be raised in that country.

So far, we have recalled students from China, South Korea and Italy in accordance with this policy. A mid-term trip to Japan was canceled while one to Peru is proceeding as planned. A decision about summer travel courses will be made on a case by case basis no later than 6 weeks before departure.

Experts from all the organizations listed above and others have indicated that although they are not able to forecast how much more serious the situation will get, how many restrictions may eventually be put in place (if any), or how quickly you would be able to leave in an emergency, daily life in the Dominican Republic is proceeding as usual with education campaigns to reduce local transmission of the virus.

Likewise, the ILAC Center and PUCMM leaders have indicated they are following the global and local situations very closely and implementing recommended precautions, but ultimately ***proceeding with classes and programs as usual.***

We imagine there are many “what if” scenarios you will want answered as you make your decision. However, due to the volume of students we need to assist, we will not be able to respond to every possibility and some answers would need to postpone ***until after you return,*** if you choose to do so.

Please consider the following points as you make your decision:

- The Encuentro Dominicano program and PUCMM plan to continue the academic term as planned and currently are not planning to broadly offer distance options to students who choose to depart early. Therefore, if you leave, although we would work on a case by case basis to determine how to help you finish the semester, ***you may not be able to complete all of your current courses.***
- Creighton University will assist any Encuentro student who chooses to return and who is unable to complete all of their current courses virtually. However, we ***cannot guarantee*** that there will be many courses into which you can enroll. Realistically, you should ***expect to take some courses during Spring 2020 Term 2 AND during Summer 2020.***
- An academic completion plan for early returnees will ***not be able to be devised before you return.*** Each student’s case is unique, and the Encuentro Dominicano personnel will need time to evaluate what is possible. Please understand that creating such plans is an ***exception to usual study abroad procedures.*** The tentative timeline for the university to be able to process each of your unique situations is outlined in the table below:

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
Travel arrangements to return to your home / permanent address	Confer with the Encuentro Dominicano Academic Director to see if an arrangement can be made to provide a distance format for you to end the semester	Sort out whether there is any financial compensation and what form that can take per University policies

- ***Your financial aid status may be affected if you return early.*** Again, each student’s situation is unique. In most cases students will need to remain registered and complete courses during the Spring 2020 term in order to maintain their financial aid status. Please review the information you received during your financial aid advising session before you committed to your study abroad placement.
- Depending on your unique academic and financial aid circumstances, ***if it is determined that you are entitled to any financial compensation, it will come in the form of a tuition waiver for up to a total of 18 semester hours.*** This may be achieved through a combination of Spring 2020 Term 2 and Summer 2020 courses, or, in some cases, Fall 2020 courses (if your financial aid status is not jeopardized if you have to withdraw from Spring 2020).

- Any other questions regarding compensation will be discussed on a case-by-case basis adhering to the University's policy.

If you choose to depart early from your study abroad site, please follow the important steps outlined on the attached "To Do's Before Departing the DR Early" document.

Regardless of whether you remain in the Dominican Republic or return home, please continue to observe recommended precautions for travelers while abroad and upon your return. Many countries including the U.S. have implemented health screening procedures at airports. We encourage all students traveling to follow the health and safety guidelines promoted by the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control](#):

- Frequently clean hands by using alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water. When coughing and sneezing cover mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue – throw tissue away immediately and wash hands.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who has fever and cough.
- If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing seek medical care early and share previous travel history with your health care provider.
- When visiting live markets in areas currently experiencing cases of novel coronavirus, avoid direct unprotected contact with live animals and surfaces in contact with animals.
- The consumption of raw or undercooked animal products should be avoided. Raw meat, milk or animal organs should be handled with care, to avoid cross-contamination with uncooked foods, as per good food safety practices.

We can certainly imagine you will be disappointed if you are not able to complete the Encuentro Dominicano program as you had hoped. We are grateful that you have the option to return to the US, and our prayers go out in concern and solidarity for the people across the globe who are sick with the Coronavirus.

The Global Engagement Office stands ready to provide all the assistance we can. Please don't hesitate to contact us with any questions.

Travel safe.

Dr. Padilla

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**René Padilla, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA**

Vice Provost for Global Engagement

[Global Engagement Office](#)

Creighton University | 2500 California Plaza | Omaha, NE 68178  
402.280.4745 (w) | 402.280.2211 (f) | [RenePadilla@creighton.edu](mailto:RenePadilla@creighton.edu)