An open letter to students (and parents) participating in a 2015 Calvin Off-Campus Interim Class:

Greetings from the Off-Campus Programs office! We are excited about that you have committed to participating in one of over 25 different off-campus interim classes in January or May 2015. We hope and pray that this opportunity will be a deep and rich experience for each of you to grow in so many ways (academically, personally, emotionally, and spiritually). We also hope that your studies off-campus will give you a bigger perspective of what is going on in the world and your place in our global community.

In addition to my excitement for the many adventures that lie ahead for you and your classmates, I also worry about the safety of all Calvin faculty, staff, and students as you all navigate an increasing complex and broken world. Given many recent world events that could impact the safety of our various interims I thought it might be helpful for the off-campus programs office to outline many of the protocols that are in place to monitor world events and respond in appropriate ways to reduce the risks we may encounter while studying off-campus. While we know that we cannot guarantee everyone’s safety or eliminate all risks, we can reduce risks and create great opportunities for you to grow.

Beyond describing the many protocols that Calvin has put into place for your upcoming interim experience, we also want invite each student to partner with us to assure that each program is as safe as it can be. As a result this open letter lists a number of measures that Calvin has already taken related to safety and also provides a list of things that you can do to partner with us related to health and safety while you are away. For parents, we hope this letter demonstrates the attention and care we devote to the importance of safety. In addition, a second letter listed on our website offers additional suggestions or reminders of things you can do to help your son or daughter have a great experience during his or her upcoming off-campus interim.

Calvin philosophy and protocols related to risk management:

- Awareness of global issues. Calvin continues to monitor world events, responding in a timely and appropriate way as specific concerns are identified.
- Experienced Faculty. Calvin faculty have experience in the place where they are teaching and work with local, trusted partners whenever possible.
- Travel Insurance. Calvin purchases supplemental travel insurance for all students studying internationally during interim. The policy can be found in the student and parent resource page of the off-campus programs website.
- Health briefing and vaccinations. All students studying internationally are required to complete an online health briefing and receive all necessary vaccinations.
- Transparency. Calvin attempts to share all information we have related to each location where we are conducting classes, in addition Calvin uses a variety of paperwork to prepare for our off-campus interims. These forms include waivers, emergency contact info, and medical forms.
- Orientations/Training. Calvin does provide on-going training for all off-campus interim instructors. As a part of this training we encourage each instructor to develop site-specific orientation for each location where they will be teaching.
- Risk management protocols. Calvin has developed a large number of protocols related to specific situations that students may encounter.
- STEP Registration. We encourage all students to be enrolled in the Smart Travelers Enrollment Program, this process is facilitated by each individual instructor for their specific group.
- Resources. Calvin provide students with resources related to safety while traveling abroad as well as working to create safer spaces as it related to alcohol consumption and sexual harassment/assault. Specific attention is helping students develop situational awareness in their surroundings.
- Community. Each individual Calvin instructors works with the overall group of students to build a community that promotes care and accountability within the group.

In addition to the work of the college related to health and safety for students, the college also asks students to partner with us to minimize risks as they travel and study off-campus. Specifically we ask students to:

- Situational Awareness. We encourage students to develop their own situational awareness related to their surroundings.
- Community. Commit to look out for one another and to hold each other accountable for appropriate behavior throughout the experience.
- Make good decisions. We encourage students to make good decisions especially about alcohol, dress, and avoiding bad situations.
- Communication. Students are encouraged to communicate openly and regularly with their professor and each other.
Although no one can guarantee the safety of participants or eliminate all risks from a study-abroad experience, Calvin College is committed to doing its utmost to provide secure environments in which students can live and learn. Our goal is to minimize risks and keep students and parents aware of special situations as they make decisions about studying off-campus. If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the off-campus programs office.

Humbly,

Don De Graaf, Ph.D. -- Director of Off-Campus Programs
Calvin College