BCGS Academic Year 2021-22 / Spring 2022
COVID-19 Pandemic – Program Protocol
(as of June 1, 2022)

The safety and well-being of BCGS students, faculty, and staff is our top priority, so we are working with authorities on-site to take all precaution as necessary and follow all guidelines and regulations set out by Columbia University as our administrative home institution, the Freie Universität Berlin (FU) as our host institution, the State of Berlin, and the Federal Government of Germany. In order to ensure that the BCGS programs can be carried out safely and effectively for all parties involved, please find below information and links to resources about how COVID-19 might impact the upcoming study abroad experience so that you can remain informed as the situation evolves. Please note that these planning protocols as well as participation policies may be modified at any time prior to departure or while in-country.

1. Resources and Regulations
   - Columbia University
     - Center for Undergraduate Global Engagement (UGE)
       Spring 2022 Resources for Study Abroad, Travel Policy, and Recommendations: https://global.undergrad.columbia.edu/article/spring-2022-resources-study-abroad
   - Freie Universität Berlin
   - State of Berlin
     - Measures: https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/measures/
     - Directives: https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/measures/directive/
   - Federal Government of Germany
     - Overview: https://www.zusammengegencorona.de/en/
     - Robert Koch Institute: https://www.rki.de/EN/Home/homepage_node.html;jsessionid=BF8823ED266C8ADEE9E3A9043EFO4.internet121

2. Travel, Arrival, and Orientation
   - Students are responsible for purchasing their own flights. They should not purchase flights until they
receive further guidance from their home school study abroad program adviser and the BCGS. All flights should involve flexible cancellation conditions, in light of international travel uncertainties associated with the pandemic. Furthermore, we recommend taking out travel cancellation insurance in view of current circumstances.

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, restrictions for entry into Germany from many countries apply. Persons entering must complete a digital entry registration. They also have to provide a negative test result or proof of immunity. Please check this website for continuously updated details: https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/coronavirus/2317268
  This website will inform you on:
  - Entry restrictions
  - Digital entry registration
  - Mandatory testing or proof of immunity from COVID-19
  - Quarantine regulations
  - How to conduct yourself when in Germany?
  - Where to find more information

- Entry and Exit Requirements as stated by the U.S. Embassy in Germany (https://de.usembassy.gov/covid-19-information/)
  - Travelers from non-European Union countries can enter Germany if they are fully vaccinated. Please verify that you qualify as fully vaccinated before attempting to enter Germany, as the definition of fully vaccinated in Germany is different from in the U.S.
    - Those who are not fully vaccinated will need to demonstrate an important need to travel.
    - Read more about German entry restrictions on the German Foreign Ministry’s website.
  - Digital Registration on Entry: Persons entering Germany who have spent time in an RKI-designated high-risk or virus-variant area in the 10 days prior to entry are required to submit a digital registration on entry.
  - All travelers ages 12 and older must submit proof of vaccination in order to enter Germany by air, land, or sea. Travelers who have been in a virus-variant area in the last 10 days must present a negative PCR test, regardless of vaccination or recovery status. A rapid antigen test is not accepted in this case. Please visit the website of the German Mission in the United States for more details.
  - Proof of vaccination or of recovery from Covid-19 can replace a negative test certificate and exempt you from quarantine on entry. Persons who, at any time within the last 10 days prior to entry, spent time in an area which is classified as a high-risk area or area of variants of concern at the time of their entry must, in addition, observe special obligations to register, furnish proof and self-isolate. https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/coronavirus/faq-covid-19-impfung.html

- Crossing the border and entering Germany is subject to changing official regulations. Participants are responsible to be familiar with these, for example, any testing and quarantine protocols. Please check the following sites on travel regulations:
  - https://www.einreiseanmeldung.de/#/
In case of a mandatory quarantine upon arrival or at any point during the semester, the affected participant(s) is/are expected to communicate clearly and frequently with program staff, so that effective logistical support can be rendered. Financial cost (extra rent, food, etc.) associated with any quarantine period is to be carried solely by the participant, not by the program.

If the on-site Orientation Days cannot be (fully) carried out due to quarantine complications, an online orientation will be substituted. This would also be applicable to the start of the pre-semester BCGS course “German Discourse and Culture.” See also under number 3.

3. Student Accommodation

Students should not enter any legally binding lease contracts and should not pay any deposits before their home schools and the BCGS give final study abroad approvals!

Given the unpredictability of the pandemic, BCGS recommends to opt for housing in student apartments where potential quarantines are easier to implement.

Students residing in student apartments, i.e. Neon Wood, The Student Hotel, or The Fizz will be subject to the pandemic- and hygiene-related policies and regulations in force at these locations, as communicated before and/or upon arrival. Please see the following websites:

- https://www.thestudenthotel.com/de/coronavirus/
- https://help.the-fizz.com/l/en/category/w5v60j16h7-corona-information

Students residing at dorms will also be subject to the pandemic- and hygiene-related policies and regulations in force at these locations, as communicated before and/or upon arrival:

- The Studentendorf Schlachtensee (Student Village, leases at least six months):
- The Studierendenwerk Berlin (Dorm Halbauer Weg, leases at least six months, or Dorm Goerzallee, leases for at least 12 months)

If a participant needs to be placed in self-isolation/quarantine upon arrival or after the semester gets underway, appropriate arrangements will be made in accordance with the local health authorities (Gesundheitsämter) and the specific location where the student is living. Furthermore, the program will assist where possible. Of course, if a student were to be seriously sick, they need to be hospitalized.
4. **Daily Life in Berlin and Public Transportation**

- Pandemic-related policies and regulations in Berlin currently in effect (may) include: social distancing rules, wearing masks in public places (shops, public transportation, museums, etc.), personal hygiene directives, registration of personal data at restaurants, places of worship, etc. in order to facilitate contact-tracing, and so forth. Here are useful links for up-to-date information:
  - Official Berlin Website: [https://www.berlin.de/en/](https://www.berlin.de/en/)
  - Corona Testing Centers: [https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/testing-facilities/](https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/testing-facilities/)
  - Vaccination: [https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/vaccination/](https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/vaccination/)
  - Public Transportation: [https://www.bvg.de/](https://www.bvg.de/), [https://go.bvg.de/corona](https://go.bvg.de/corona)

- Please note that the pandemic may cause restrictions with respect to events and activities involving larger groups of people, such as sports games, concerts, club life, etc. Access to various cultural activities and events is curtailed, restricted, regulated via online tickets only, etc. The program expects all staff and participants to act responsibly and in accordance with clearly announced regulations and policies with respect to the pandemic, both on and off campus.

5. **Preparedness and General Rules On and Off Campus**

- **Booster Vaccination Mandate** ([https://global.undergrad.columbia.edu/article/spring-2022-resources-study-abroad](https://global.undergrad.columbia.edu/article/spring-2022-resources-study-abroad))

  "The current vaccination mandate has been expanded to require booster doses for all study abroad students who meet the criteria for eligibility. In general, you are eligible for a booster six months after the last dose of your initial Pfizer or Moderna series (or WHO-authorized vaccine) or two months after the initial J & J vaccination. If you haven’t already done so, please obtain a booster dose prior to your departure for your semester abroad. Whether or not you can obtain a booster while you are abroad will be dependent on local policies and guidelines. A valid digital COVID vaccination certificate may be required to enter public spaces while you are overseas. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact your UGE program adviser.”
This decision was made to ensure the health of students, staff and faculty on the program. Furthermore, the proof of vaccination will allow students to move around more freely. Students should consult with their home school advisers and/or the BCGS adviser for further information.

- BCGS strongly recommends to
  - install “Corona-Warn-App” on smart phone [https://www.coronawarn.app/de/](https://www.coronawarn.app/de/)

- You are encouraged to go above and beyond in some cases and observe voluntary precautions, like getting tested, using the Corona-Warn-App, and following the 3G rule (vaccinated, recovered, or tested).

- FU requires all individuals to wear an FFP2 (KN95/N95) mask in enclosed spaces on campus. The requirement for FFP2 masks will not apply in examinations or for those holding a presentation if the person remains at their assigned place and social distancing is observed.

- The following health and safety measures are strongly recommended on campus:
  - maintain a safe distance of at least 1.5 m (~5 feet) to each other in enclosed spaces whenever possible
  - follow general personal hygiene guidelines
    - wash frequently hands with plenty of soap and water for at least 20 seconds
    - use hand sanitizers (dispensers are accessible in all university facilities and bathrooms)
    - cough and sneeze inside your elbow or handkerchief
  - air out rooms regularly (classrooms 3/hour, offices 1/hour) to minimize airborne transmission via aerosols
  - wipe BCGS workplaces with sanitizers before as well as after use (sanitizers and disposable towels are available in each classroom and office)
  - stay at home or leave campus immediately, if COVID-19 symptoms or exposure, e.g. raised or high temperature, persistent cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, loss of sense of taste and/or smell
    - contact local practitioner, if symptoms are severe; health professionals may arrange for coronavirus test
    - contact Berlin Corona Hotline (030-90282828) for information if desired
    - return to campus only after negative test result or implemented quarantine
    - inform BCGS of any confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infection to prevent further infections
    - students also inform Columbia Health via email at covidtesttrace@columbia.edu of any confirmed COVID-19 infection

- General cleaning is carried out by FU contracted specialized companies in full accordance with the applicable hygiene standards, bathrooms are cleaned daily. Frequently touched surfaces in BCGS classrooms, for example door knobs and tables, are cleaned and disinfected before each session by faculty and students.

- Signage, posters, and floor/ground markings in entrances, hallways, and bathrooms at the FU remind students, faculty, and staff to adhere to the Corona preparedness and response guidelines.

6. Academic Policies

- BCGS Academic Regulations remain in force throughout the program and semester, please see [https://global.undergrad.columbia.edu/program/bcgs](https://global.undergrad.columbia.edu/program/bcgs).
Participants will have to bring their own laptops/PCs and arrange for internet access (available at all student accommodation mentioned under number 3) to be able to participate virtually and to continue and complete their academic work if need be. The program is under no obligation to provide either a laptop or PC or to arrange internet access.

In case a student is not able to attend class due to COVID-19 diagnosis or exposure, BCGS faculty will be prepared to provide alternative (online) assignments as needed. This may not be the case with each local university instructor. The student would have to negotiate alternative (online) assignments directly with the respective instructor. Most FU faculty have been cooperative in the past, especially in circumstances that are out of the student’s control. BCGS would assist to follow up with university instructors as needed.

During a general lockdown, FU and other Berlin universities will go remote and all courses will move online and use learning management platforms. However, these courses will not be as flexible as BCGS courses.

If pandemic-related developments, such as a renewed lockdown, impact the program in its entirety, arrangements will be made for all students to complete the semester via online instruction. The program will make every effort to enable participants to remain in Berlin and complete the semester successfully on-site, most likely via online instruction. If the program goes virtual, this will not affect student visas. If the situation necessitates students’ departure from Berlin in order to return home, BCGS will render logistical and organizational assistance.

7. Field-trips in and around Berlin and Independent Travel

During the first six weeks of the program, a field trip in and around Berlin is organized on a weekly basis. These trips are subject to the pandemic rules and conditions addressed under numbers 1, 4, and 5. Travel will take place by bus and/or train, subject to all pandemic-related measures that the companies running these busses or trains have put in place. The program will endeavor to carry out these excursions as planned but due to the unpredictable nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, they may be cancelled.

During the semester, the program organizes a couple of cultural activities in and around Berlin instead of the regular multi-day excursion. These trips are subject to the rules and conditions addressed under numbers 1, 4, and 5. Travel will take place by bus and/or train, subject to all pandemic-related measures that the companies running these busses or trains have put in place. The program will endeavor to carry out these excursions as planned but due to the unpredictable nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, they may be cancelled.

Side Trips / Independent Travel [https://globaltravel.columbia.edu/content/planning-columbia-related-international-travel; https://www.cc-seas.columbia.edu/travelpolicy/faqs]

BCGS students “must take an active role in addressing administrative, health and safety concerns inherent to international travel. If you are planning a trip abroad, recognize that certain regions require special considerations due to political, cultural, legal or health-related reasons. Your careful review and consideration of the current state of your travel destination(s) is critical to your trip’s success.” Given the ongoing pandemic, BCGS does not advise students to travel internationally while in Germany.
If travel remains permitted by local, national, and international authorities, BCGS will not restrict students to travel but will require them to follow local, national, and international regulations. Furthermore, students must discuss their personal travel with the Resident Director (RD) with information about the trip such as itinerary and contact information prior to booking. This is necessary in case there is an emergency and the student needs to be contacted. The RD will also direct the student to ISOS and other resources to learn more about the local situation. The student would be required to update their travel in Columbia’s ISOS MyTrips at least two weeks in advance of their planned travel, including itinerary, lodging, and contact information. Side trips / independent travel should be limited to days during which there are no program activities planned. Missing class or class activities because of travel plans is not permitted.

8. Insurance and Local Healthcare System

- Students are obliged to retain medical insurance coverage back home during the month of March / September and for potential travel outside of Germany during the entire time in Berlin. Beginning of April 1 / October 1, the official start of the German spring semester (Sommersemester) / fall semester (Wintersemester), each participant is enrolled in the German student health insurance (AOK) which provides comprehensive health insurance coverage, including COVID-19 treatment. For further info on AOK in German please see: https://www.aok.de/pk/nordost/inhalt/fuer-studierende-der-aok-studenten-service/. Academic year students are covered from October 2022 through July 2023 (at the latest through September 2023), fall semester students from October 2022 through February 2023 (at the latest until March 2023), and spring semester students from April through July 2023 (at the latest through September 2023). Please note that the local healthcare system is well developed and accessible to everybody who has health insurance coverage or pays directly. There are currently 45 hospitals in Berlin able to treat COVID-19 patients, https://en.berliner-krankenhausverzeichnis.de/app/search.

- BCGS students normally register through Columbia’s University Travel Review Committee system and are covered by Columbia’s International SOS (ISOS) as the 24/7 emergency assistance provider. Their worldwide helpdesks can assist with urgent medical issues, security and logistical questions, medical advice, or other concerns and situations that may arise. ISOS can be contacted by phone, online, or using the ISOS app (available in your mobile phone's app store). Students should subscribe to their travel security alerts by setting up email alerts on their website: ISOS is not a health insurance, however, they also provide mental health support, up to five sessions, please see https://globaltravel.columbia.edu/content/what-international-sos-isos.

- Each school may have their own emergency services coverage that covers their students. Students should check with their home school for details.

- Students should check with their home school regarding health insurance coverage requirements for study abroad students.

- The program enrolls all participants in a personal liability insurance policy https://www.protrip-world-liability.com/ beginning September 1, 2022 through February 28, 2023 (fall only students) or through July 31, 2023 (academic year students), and beginning March 1, 2023 through July 31, 2023 (spring only students).”
9. BCGS Communications Protocol for Positive COVID-19 Cases

If a student tests positive:

- They must inform the BCGS Resident Director.
- The Resident Director informs Columbia University’s Center for Undergraduate Global Engagement (UGE).
- UGE informs student’s home school so they are aware of interruptions to the student’s participation in the program and to support student wellness during the isolation period.
- If the positive result came from a rapid antigen test
  - stay at home and contact Berlin Corona Hotline (030-90282828) for information
  - if symptoms are severe, contact local practitioner; health professionals may arrange for PCR coronavirus test
  - the student is not allowed to conduct activity in person on campus and should quarantine themselves in accordance with state regulations
  - return to campus only after negative test result or implemented quarantine
- The student informs Columbia Health via email at covidtesttrace@columbia.edu of any confirmed COVID-19 infection.
BCGS Preparedness on SARS-CoV-2

To fulfill our mission to continue our program safely and on-site, the BCGS keeps monitoring the pandemic situation. While there is reasonable hope for a calm summer, we have to keep our eyes on the coming fall and continue to follow pandemic regulations and recommendations. BCGS currently adheres to the SARS-CoV-2 Guidelines for Studying and Teaching During the Upcoming 2022 Summer Semester (as of April 1, 2022) published by the Freie Universität Berlin [https://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/coronavirus/sommersemester-2022/index.html]. BCGS staff updates students, staff, and faculty and is available for individual support. Further details can be found in the BCGS COVID-19 Pandemic – Program Protocol.

All individuals are required to wear an FFP2 (KN95/N95) mask in enclosed spaces on campus. The requirement for FFP2 masks will not apply in examinations or for those holding a presentation if the person remains at their assigned place and social distancing is observed.

Please continue to be vigilant about health and safety measures:

- **maintain a safe distance of at least 1.5 m (~5 feet)** to each other in enclosed spaces whenever possible
- **follow general personal hygiene guidelines**
  - wash frequently hands with plenty of soap and water for at least 20 seconds
  - use hand sanitizers (dispensers are accessible in all university facilities and bathrooms)
  - cough and sneeze inside your elbow or handkerchief
- **air out rooms regularly** (classrooms 3/hour, offices 1/hour) to minimize airborne transmission via aerosols
- **wipe BCGS workplaces with sanitizers** before as well as after use (sanitizers and disposable towels are available in each classroom and office)
- **stay at home or leave campus immediately**, if COVID-19 symptoms or exposure, e.g. raised or high temperature, persistent cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, loss of sense of taste and/or smell
  - contact local practitioner, if symptoms are severe; health professionals may arrange for coronavirus test
  - contact Berlin Corona Hotline (030-90282828) for information if desired
  - return to campus only after negative test result or implemented quarantine
  - inform BCGS of any confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infection to prevent further infections
  - students also inform Columbia Health via email at covidtesttrace@columbia.edu of any confirmed COVID-19 infection

General cleaning is carried out by FU contracted specialized companies in full accordance with the applicable hygiene standards, bathrooms are cleaned daily.

Signage, posters, and floor/ground markings in entrances, hallways, and bathrooms at the FU remind students, faculty, and staff to adhere to the Corona preparedness and response guidelines.

**BCGS requires a full COVID-19 vaccination status** (see BCGS COVID-19 Pandemic – Program Protocol) and **strongly recommends** to install the “Corona-Warn-App” on your smart phone.

You are encouraged to go above and beyond in some cases and observe voluntary precautions, like getting tested, using the Corona-Warn-App, or following the 3G rule (vaccinated, recovered, or tested).