

BCGS Academic Year 2021-22 / Fall Semester 2021 / FTP 2021 Option 4

COVID-19 Pandemic – Program Protocol

(as of September 8, 2021)

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 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 are still being finalized and may be modified at any time prior to departure or while in-country.

1. Local and Federal Resources and Regulations

- **Freie Universität Berlin**

- Overview: <https://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/coronavirus/index.html>
- Basic Hygiene Plan: <https://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/coronavirus/rahmenhygieneplan/index.html>
- Mandatory COVID-19 Testing for Students before Attending Courses or Taking Exams in Person at FU: <https://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/coronavirus/faq/studium/testpflicht/index.html>
- Reporting Infection: <https://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/coronavirus/meldeverfahren/index.html>
- Dealing with Infection: <https://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/coronavirus/medien/dealing-with-respiratory-diseases-at-universities.pdf>

- **State of Berlin**

- Measures: <https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/measures/>
- Directives: <https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/measures/directive/>

- **Federal Government of Germany**

- Overviews:
<https://www.zusammengengencorona.de/en/>
<https://www.covid19healthsystem.org/countries/germany/livinghit.aspx?Section=5.1%20Governance&Type=Section>
- FAQ:
<https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/faqs/EN/topics/civil-protection/coronavirus/coronavirus-fags.html>
- Robert Koch-Institute:
https://www.rki.de/EN/Home/homepage_node.html;jsessionid=BFB823B58D266C8ADEE9E3A9043E9F04.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.
- Persons wishing to enter the Federal Republic of Germany who have at any time within the last 10 days prior to entry stayed in an area which is classified as a risk area (for example the United States) at the time of their planned entry are required, prior to entry, to notify the competent authority via the travel portal of the following information (digital registration on entry) [ordinance document](#):
 - Their personal information as required under section 2 no. 16 of the Protection against Infection Act
 - Their expected date of entry
 - The places where they will be staying for up to 10 days prior to and following entry
 - The means of transport used to enter the country and, where available, their seat number
 - Whether they are in possession of proof of vaccination
 - Whether they are in possession of proof of testing or proof of recovery
 - Whether they are showing typical indications of an infection with the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus
- **Proof of vaccination or of recovery from Covid-19 can replace a negative test certificate and exempt you from quarantine on entry.** This does not apply if you have spent time in an area of virus variants of concern prior to entry.
- 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/#/>
 - <https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/en/en.html>
 - <https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/coronavirus/current-information-for-travellers.html>
 - https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/fileadmin/Dateien/3_Downloads/C/Coronavirus/Verordnungen/BAntz_AT_12.05.2021_V1_EN_angepasst.pdf
 - <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/einreiseundaufenthalt/coronavirus>
 - <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/faqs/EN/topics/civil-protection/coronavirus/travel-restrictions-border-control/travel-restriction-border-control-list.html#f15033926>
 - https://www.rki.de/DE/Content/InfAZ/N/Neuartiges_Coronavirus/Transport/Archiv_Risikogebiete/EN-Tab.html
 - https://www.rki.de/DE/Content/InfAZ/N/Neuartiges_Coronavirus/Transport/Archiv_Risikogebiete/Risikogebiete_aktuell_en.pdf?_blob=publicationFile
 - https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/travel-during-coronavirus-pandemic_en
 - <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html/>
 - <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/covid-4/coronavirus-germany>
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/international-travel-during-covid19.html>

- 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.
- Travellers currently entering Germany from areas which are not high-incidence and not of variants of concern are **exempted from testing and quarantine requirements, if recovered or fully vaccinated** with a vaccine approved by the European Union and whose final required vaccination was **at least 14 days prior**. See also under number 4.
- 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!**
- Due to the unpredictable nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, there will be no guest stay opportunity at this time. Students are strongly encouraged by the BCGS to apply to live in the pre-arranged apartments, noted below.
- Students residing at 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://neonwood.com/community-covid-19faq/>
 - <https://www.thestudenthotel.com/de/coronavirus/>
 - <https://help.the-fizz.com/l/en/article/xkyqvrqep8-what-is-the-fizz-doing-about-covid-19>
 - <https://help.the-fizz.com/l/en/category/w5v60j16h7-corona-information>
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, BCGS students are not encouraged to apply for dormitory living. However, if students are still interested in applying for single-occupancy rooms with shared bathrooms and shared kitchen facilities at dorms, please see details below. Students residing at dorms will 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):
 - Application via: <https://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/unterbringung/optionen-programmstudenten/studentendorf/index.html>
 - <https://www.studentendorf.berlin/news/measure-against-corona-virus-covid-19-2/>
 - http://www.fubis.org/3_unterbr/wohnheim/dorf/Hygienekonzept-Studentendorf-Schlachtensee-eG.pdf
 - The Studierendenwerk Berlin (Dorm Halbauer Weg, leases at least six months, or Dorm Goerzallee, leases for at least 12 months)
 - Application via: <https://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/unterbringung/optionen-programmstudenten/Studierendenwerk/index.html>

- <https://www.stw.berlin/en/housing/themen/quarantine-residences.html>
- http://www.fubis.org/3_unterbr/wohnheim/werk/Coronaregeln-Werk.pdf

- 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.
 - **Academic continuity:** The program will ensure that all students in quarantine situations shall be able to continue and complete their academic work for the BCGS “German Discourse and Culture” course. As to the courses taken within the German university system, the student would have to negotiate alternative online assignments directly with each local university course instructor. The BCGS, however, would assist to follow up with university instructors as needed.
 - **Financial responsibilities:** If a participant is required to quarantine, this will normally be carried out at their chosen place of accommodation. In case that is not possible, the local health authorities will assist in setting up **alternative quarantine arrangements** but neither the health authorities nor the program will carry any financial responsibility. Students in quarantine are responsible for their own **food expenses**. BCGS will provide a list of grocery stores, restaurants, and pharmacies with delivery services. Furthermore, the program will cooperate with the Student Accommodation providers on any logistical arrangements in regard to **deliveries of food and medical supplies**.

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/>
 - Measures: <https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/measures/>
 - Directives: <https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/measures/directive/>
 - Corona Testing Centers: <https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/testing-facilities/>
 - Vaccination: <https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/vaccination/>
 - Public Transportation:
 - <https://www.bvg.de/welcome>
 - <https://go.bvg.de/corona>
- Please note that the pandemic causes 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.
- **Exceptions from testing requirement and proof of a negative test for an infection with the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2**

- **Vaccinated persons** who have been vaccinated with a vaccine approved by the European Union and whose final required vaccination was **at least 14 days prior**,
- **Persons** who can show **proof of a positive PCR test result for an infection** with the coronavirus SARS-CoV-19 taken **at least six months ago** and who have received **at least one vaccination against COVID-19** with a vaccine approved by the European Union, and
- **Persons** who can show **proof of a positive PCR test result for an infection** with the coronavirus SARS-CoV-19 taken **at least 28 days ago but no more than six months ago**.

5. Preparedness and General Rules On and Off Campus

- BCGS notes that admitted students are currently required by their home school to be vaccinated in order to study abroad in fall 2021. Any vaccination exemptions should be discussed with their home school study abroad officer.
- BCGS strongly recommends to
 - **obtain a COVID-19 vaccination** prior to students' arrival in Germany because proof of vaccination will allow students to move around more freely and maybe required in certain circumstances
 - **take advantage of currently free rapid SARS-CoV-2 antigen tests** at several Berlin screening centers https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/testing-facilities/#headline_1_5
 - **install "Corona-Warn-App"** on smart phone <https://www.coronawarn.app/de/>
- FU requires students to
 - **provide proof of a recent negative coronavirus test for in-person attendance** <https://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/coronavirus/fag/studium/>
They should get tested at one of Berlin's certified testing centers (<https://test-to-go.berlin>). There is also a certified testing center on Freie Universität's campus, where they can get tested once per day for free (<https://www.covid-testzentrum.de/berlin-fu>).
 - Exceptions:**
Students who have had COVID-19 and recovered or who are fully vaccinated according to current legal provisions do not need to provide negative test results. <https://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/coronavirus/news-start/news/2021-05-27.html>
- Students, faculty, and staff are required to
 - **maintain a safe distance of at least 1.5 m (~5 feet)** to each other in enclosed spaces whenever possible
 - **use QR codes** to check in/out at your seats in classrooms
 - **wear a medical face mask** when around others in enclosed spaces: less than 1.5 m heavy duty surgical masks (FFP2, KN95, or N95) and more than 1.5 m regular surgical mask
 - **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 x per hour, offices 1 x per hour) to minimize airborne transmission via aerosols

- **wipe their 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 or public health office** by phone (Berlin Corona Hotline 030-90282828), **if COVID-19 symptoms or exposure**, health professionals arrange for coronavirus test, return to campus only after negative test result or implemented quarantine
 - **inform BCGS and FU of any confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infection** to prevent further infections on campus
- 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.



Image Credit: Robert Koch-Institute, Website, April 2021

6. Academic Policies

- BCGS Academic Regulations remain in force throughout the program and semester, please see <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 or to teach hybrid. 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. BCGS cannot guarantee that the local university courses will follow a hybrid system as will the BCGS courses after a possible re-opening and shifting back to in-person teaching.
- 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.
- **Independent Travel:** Students will not be permitted to travel internationally. If travel within Germany remains permitted by local and national authorities, BCGS will not restrict students to travel nationally but will require them to follow local and national 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. 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 September and for potential travel outside of Germany during the entire time in Berlin. Beginning of October 1, the official start of the German 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 2021 through July 2022 (at the latest through September 2022) fall semester students from October 2021 through February 2022 (at the latest until March 2022). 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 has also their own emergency services coverage that covers their students.
- The program enrolls all participants in a personal liability insurance policy <https://www.protrip-world-liability.com/> beginning September 1, 2021 through February 28, 2022 (fall only students) or through July 31, 2022 (academic year students).