Additional notes and instructions for student research taking place outside of the United States

As you may know, colleges and universities, as well as other institutions where research is carried out, have established committees, often called Institutional Review Boards or IRBs, whose responsibilities are to provide ethical oversight for research projects carried out by members of the institution, to protect the rights and safety of persons participating in the research project, and, at the same time, to safeguard the academic freedom of researchers. As part of your preparation for your time abroad, you should begin to outline with your advisor the research project you plan to conduct while abroad. While your research project will likely not be finalized until you are on site, if you anticipate that your work will involve human participants—as interviewees, for example, or as members of a community you will be studying—you should inform yourself about the necessary steps to secure IRB approval for your work. In particular, you should:

1. Make an appointment with the IRB chair (buchanan@beloit.edu) the semester before you plan on studying abroad
2. Let your academic advisor know that you expect to submit a request for approval by the college of research involving human subjects
3. If possible, prepare an initial application to the IRB for your advisor and the IRB chair to review in advance of your travelling to the program

In addition to the ethical concerns that pertain to research conducted in the United States, you should also consider the following:

1. Projects should meet local research guidelines and standards set by local or national review boards in the host country
2. Projects should not be offensive to local sensibilities and cultural norms. It is suggested that you err on the side of caution here. While many Americans are very open about certain aspects of their private lives, this may not be true for citizens of other countries. At a minimum you risk collecting meaningless data because subjects may not wish to tell a student from the United States about these aspects of their lives. At worst you may embarrass your participants, generate a hostile response, or even attract the attention of local authorities
3. All materials collected should be curated properly and, if required by national or local research standards, deposited at an appropriate facility in the host country

Once you are on site, the program director or other local advisor will work with you to refine your project and help you to prepare a proposal that meets research guidelines in both the host country and in the U.S. This proposal, together with a letter of support from the program director or local advisor that confirms that your research meets national guidelines and ethical standards within the host country, should then be submitted along with any other required materials to the Beloit College IRB. Although it may not be possible to obtain IRB approval before you begin your research (e.g., you may not have internet access where your research is taking place), it is important that you do eventually submit these materials to the IRB. Please note, however, that if your local advisor is unfamiliar with approving research proposals, it is suggested that you obtain approval from the IRB before you begin data collection. You should
also note that failure to obtain IRB approval for your research means that you may not present your research findings at a public forum such as International Symposium.

If you have any questions about these procedures, please contact the IRB chair as soon as possible. Above all, good planning on your part will help ensure that this aspect of your study abroad experience will be one of the most rewarding.