

## **Florida State University - Panama Safety Guide July 2008**

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this guide is to provide you with up to date, relevant information about safety and security at the FSU-Panama Campus. This guide is updated annually and is produced in accordance with the Federal Jeanne Clery Act of 1990.

Your safety and security in Panama is always uppermost in our minds as we strive to provide all students with the best possible international education. Studying abroad is all about experiencing new cultures and learning new perspectives, by living outside of what is familiar. Study abroad also has some extra dangers, therefore, often because the laws and customs of the host country are unfamiliar. Our goal is to enable you, as FSU students in Panama, to experience all the benefits of study abroad and equip you to handle the challenges as safely as possible.

The current world climate makes the goals of studying abroad and becoming better-educated world citizens, seem all the more relevant and immediate. We have always provided students and faculty with instructions on what to do if there is a crisis situation, such as the events of September 11th 2001. We closely follow the advice of the State Department, US Embassy and Panama Police in formulating our security procedures. Panama's many attractions and opportunities for amazing educational experiences still make it one of the best places in the world to study abroad.

The goals of this safety guide are to provide useful knowledge and information about safety and security in Panama. After reading this guide you should have knowledge of FSU-Panama's policies and procedures regarding safety and security. You should also have knowledge of how to make good decisions about your own safety in Panama, what to do if you do become a victim of crime, and what to do in the event of an emergency.

## **Important meetings and documents**

In addition to the *Safety Guide*, the following meetings and documents also pertain to student safety in Panama and form an integral part of our safety procedures:

- **Student Orientation**

There is a mandatory orientation the first week after your arrival in Panama. It is vital that all students attend this orientation, which will cover essential information for your stay in Panama, including many of the points raised here, in more detail.



- **Meeting with Housing Coordinator on Safety and Security Concerns**

There is a mandatory security meeting with the Housing Coordinator which is part of the orientation process during the first week of class. This meeting provides important information about terrorism, crime prevention and personal safety.

- **Student Handbook**

You will receive a briefing of the contents of the Student Handbook during orientation week when you arrive in Panama. You are urged to view the FSU-Panama Student Handbook (Section I: Rights and Responsibilities, and Section II: Housing Handbook) at <http://panama.fsu.edu>. (students/current students/documents and forms).

This document details most of the rules and regulations that students should be aware of while at the FSU Panama. It also contains useful information about the local area and services available to students, including important safety advice.

## **Safety on Campus**

Our campus, including our thirteen housing units, is located in La Boca, which is considered a very desirable and relatively safe neighborhood. However, we strongly recommend that you take the following precautions, regardless if you reside on or off campus. These simple tips will help to ensure your safety:

1. Lock all outside doors and deadlock windows when you are not at home. Most of our doors are metal doors, and those that are not are sturdy wooden doors. All our main entrance doors are equipped with peep holes.
2. If you live in university housing, make sure the outside light is on at night.
3. If you have a telephone-answering machine, don't record a message saying: "I am not at home at the moment," as this reveals to the caller that you are either a single occupant or that no one is at home at the moment. It is better to say: "No one is available to take your call at the moment."
4. If you receive an obscene or threatening telephone call or note, tell a member of the Student Affairs Office or campus security.
5. If you live in a shared house, don't assume that another roommate will make it secure when you go out. Make sure you leave the house secure at all times.
6. If you are going away overnight, let a roommate you trust or the Student Affairs Office know where you are going, when you should be back, and leave a telephone number where you can be reached in the event of an emergency.
7. Do not leave spare keys outside or in the garage. Keep house and car keys separate and out of sight in the house. Do not leave your keys near doors or windows. Leave keys in a safe place where you can find them easily in case you need to leave in a hurry. Never duplicate keys or provide a copy to someone who is not authorized to be in the housing unit alone.



8. If you are leaving the house for a period of time, it is suggested that you purchase a timer for your lamp and radios to make it look as if someone is in.
9. If you return to your housing unit and see signs of a break-in (e.g., smashed windows or open doors), do not go in. Go to a friend or neighbor's house and contact the university security office. Do not touch anything when you do go back in for you could destroy valuable evidence.

## **Reporting a Crime**

If you are a victim of crime, you should call the police by dialing 104. Please report the incident to the Housing Coordinator as soon as possible so that we can assist you. You will be required to complete a police and incident reports. Occasionally, we may notify all students of an incident, via memos or email, in order to warn people to be vigilant. We will not do this unless we feel that a definite threat exists.

## **Safety Off Campus**

Generally speaking, it is safe to walk on the streets in Panama. However, you should avoid walking alone at night and use your common sense wherever you are. You should avoid exploring areas of Panama you are not acquainted with, unless you are accompanied by a trusted friend or colleague who is acquainted with the area. If you are returning home late at night, walk in a group or call a taxi service. The university provides a listing of important numbers during orientation, among which are recommended taxi services. Avoid putting yourself at risk by taking shortcuts like walking through dark alleyways or parks.

Do not carry large amounts of cash with you when you are out. Always carry enough change and/or a cell phone or telephone card to make a phone call. Be alert and brief when using a mobile phone. When using a public telephone, stand face outwards, so that you can see what is going on around you. If you feel you are being followed, cross the street (more than once if necessary). If you are still not comfortable, move as quickly as possible to a public area, such as a restaurant or bar, and ask for help. It is not necessarily the best idea to use the first telephone you see if it is in an isolated spot.

Avoid confrontations - it's better and safer to walk away if you are being provoked or hassled. Be aware of others around you at ATM machines and try not to use them at night or in poorly lit areas. If you must use an ATM machine, go with a friend and leave as soon as you have your money. Always memorize your PIN (personal identification number) to access your money from an ATM machine. Never write down your PIN or give it to anyone else. Have your keys ready well before you reach the door of your car or house. Carry your bag close to you with the clasp facing inwards and wear the strap across your body.



Panama is a relatively safe city with a low violent crime rate compared to many US cities of an equivalent size. Petty theft such as pick pocketing and bag snatching is common. When in public, always remain alert to the risk potential of becoming a victim, especially if alone. Avoid flashing money, jewelry, cameras and other electronic equipment. Enjoy yourself, but try to keep a low profile. As in any large city, you need to be streetwise and be alert to dangerous places or situations.

### **How to avoid becoming a victim of crime:**

- Be conscious of your wallet when it is in your back pocket.
- Make sure you fasten your purse and wear it across your body if it has a strap, so that it is not easily accessible.
- Do not leave your belongings on the floor in a pub, restaurant, shop, or movie theatre. Strap your belongings around your ankle or under a chair leg.
- Be aware of people trying to distract your attention.
- Do not carry your passport with you, unless it is absolutely necessary. Carry a photocopy of the passport and picture at all times.
- Make copies of all your important documents and credit card numbers, including the numbers to call to cancel your cards if you need to have them replaced. Keep these copies in a safe place.
- Be conscious of your belongings in busy places such as tourist spots, bus stops, and shopping malls.
- Be very careful when carrying valuables in your backpack in busy areas.
- Think about what you need to take with you. Do you really need all your credit cards and all your cash?
- Remember that alcohol consumption impairs your judgment.
- Do not accept drinks from a stranger or leave your drink unattended in public places, as 'spiking' drinks with drugs or alcohol is on the rise.
- Set aside some money separate from your wallet, so you can always get home.
- Do not walk alone at night - take a licensed cab.
- Never accept a ride from someone offering you a taxi.
- Avoid dark streets and alleyways—use busy, well-lit streets, even if you have to take the long way home.
- Use your common sense—avoid strangers and questionable circumstances, even if it means turning around or crossing the street.
- If you feel uncomfortable or think someone is suspicious - make momentary eye contact, so they know you could identify them to the police.
- Walk tall and confident, and make sure you know where you are going. You should know where you are going before you go out



### **If you are attacked or have your belongings stolen:**

- Give up your belongings to avoid being hurt.
- Scream and shout to attract attention.
- Consider purchasing a personal sonic alarm - the noise can startle and throw an attacker off-guard temporarily.
- Report it to the police by calling 104.
- Report it to a member of staff (call FSU-Panama security, or a Graduate Counselor).
- Cancel your credit cards if stolen.
- We can arrange counseling, if you need it

### **Common sense precautions:**

- Use the "Buddy System"—always tell your roommates where you are going (even if it is just to the supermarket) and when you expect to be back.
- Register your cell phone number with the administration office, so we can contact you in an emergency (we will not use it for any other purpose).
- Always carry your FSU card with you.
- Always carry some form of ID with you.
- Never leave your belongings unattended in a public place, including on-campus buildings, and especially on public transportation.

### **Alcohol & Drugs**

Florida State University-Panama has established standards of conduct concerning the possession, sale, serving, and consumption of alcoholic beverages and drugs on the Florida State University-Panama Campus. These policies and rules reflect a concern for the health and safety of the campus community and apply to University faculty, staff, students, guests, and visitors. The possession and consumption of alcohol is only permitted in the housing units, by students, their guests and visitors who have reached the age of eighteen—the legal drinking age in the Republic of Panama. **Possession and or consumption by students, guests or visitors under the age of eighteen is prohibited.** The possession and consumption of alcoholic beverages is also prohibited at all University related activities on campus.

Failure to comply with the above policies will result in disciplinary action taken by the university, including expulsion from the program. Violations of the University Code of Conduct are handled through the Academic Vice-Rector and the Office of Student Affairs. Violations of the Panamanian drinking age regulations are subject to the laws of Panama and will be handled by the Panamanian police. (Note: for additional information please consult the FSU-Panama Student Handbook)



If you are drinking, whether on- or off-campus, never leave your drink unattended or in the care of strangers under any circumstances, in order to prevent strangers from meddling with the contents of your drink.

Advice and information for people with alcohol problems or anyone concerned about alcohol misuse can be found at <http://3rdmilclassrooms.com/Website/Home.htm>.

## **Sexual Assault**

The following precautions may help you avoid becoming a victim of a crime of a sexual nature:

- Remember that alcohol consumption impairs your judgment.
- Refrain from being alone (e.g., in a car, home or isolated place) with someone you do not know well, especially if you are not sober.
- If you do separate from your friends while you are out for the evening, let them know where you will be and give them a contact number. If possible, make sure you contact someone to let him or her know your whereabouts.
- Never leave your drink unattended, or accept a drink from someone you do not know well. As in the US, there have been incidents in Panama where drinks have been spiked, which makes you appear very drunk, renders you unconscious and causes memory loss.
- Remember that cultural norms and expectations are different. Your assumptions based on the situation (e.g., conversation, body language, manner of dress) may be very different from another person's assumptions.
- If you are a victim of rape, sexual assault or harassment, you should inform a member of staff, such as a Graduate Counselor, or call the IP Coordinator immediately. All cases will be treated with absolute confidentiality.
- Do not clean yourself or the crime scene, if possible, as it may affect the ability to prosecute the attacker.
- We can help to arrange counseling and after care.
- The university will take any allegations of rape, sexual assault or harassment very seriously. Student's accused of crimes of a sexual nature will be subject to university judicial procedures.
- In addition to university sanctions they may be subject to criminal prosecution under Panamanian laws.

Educational programs and information promoting awareness of rape, acquaintance rape, and other forcible and non-forcible sex offenses can be found on the following website:

<http://www.medicinenet.com/rape/article.htm>

*Panama does not maintain registries of sexual offenders or their crimes.*



## **Cultural Sensitivity**

There are many subtle cultural differences in the way people behave in other countries, including Panama, which you should be sensitive to, in order to protect yourself and avoid offending local people.

Wherever you go, you should read the news and be informed about your destination so you do not find yourself in difficulties. In general, it is best not to stand out too much. It is advisable not to discuss politically sensitive issues in public, and not to get involved in any local politics or protests.

Learning a few key phrases of the language is also essential—hello, goodbye, yes, no, please, thank you, I'm sorry, can you help me?, do you speak English?—will get you a long way and make your trip more enjoyable too.

## **In the event of a criminal action or other emergency**

In the event of a criminal action or other emergency, FSU-Panama students should follow the following:

1. Immediately call the FSU-Panama on-duty security guards at 6675-0630 (cell phone number) and report all the facts surrounding the criminal action or other emergency.
2. Call the University Housing Coordinator at cell phone 6676-4296 or telephone 314-0478.
3. Call the residence Graduate Counselors at cell phones 6672-1075 or 6679-7959 or telephone 317-9379.

The FSU-Panama educational campus and thirteen residences are located in La Boca, Ancon borough, Panama City. The security for all of the facilities is contracted with Star Security, a privately contracted Panamanian security company, which posts two agents on duty 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

In addition, there is an FSU-Panama "Incident Report Form" which must be filled out. This report is used by students and the university administration to document all incidents occurring on FSU-Panama campus property.

## **Emergency Numbers**

University Security:	6675-0630
Administration:	314-0367
Rector:	ext. 228
Academic Vice-Rector:	ext. 238



Administrative Vice-Rector ext. 227

Housing Coordinator: 6676-4296

Graduate Counselor: 6679-7959

Graduate Counselor: 6672-1075

## Crime Statistics

Crimes Reported to Security—Campus and local Police at FSU Panama

Offenses

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2001-2008
Murder	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Manslaughter	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Forcible Sex Offenses	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Non- Forcible Sex Offenses	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Robbery	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Burglary	0	2	1	2	2	5	2	0	14
Larceny	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	3	21
Aggravated Assault	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Arson	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

