

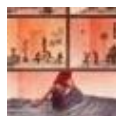
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# Amid Gaza war, UMass Amherst cancels fall programs in Israel

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT AUGUST 09, 2014



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UMass Amherst has canceled all study abroad programs in Israel for the coming fall semester amid continuing fighting in the Gaza Strip, campus officials announced.

The university said this week that its International Risk Management Committee made the decision based on advice and information from the State Department, insurance and risk management consultants, and other sources.

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The fall cancellation will affect two undergraduates, one who was planning to start a program at Tel Aviv University next week and another who was scheduled to start a program at Bar-Ilan University in October.

The students will be reimbursed fully for any “nonrecoverable” expenses, including airfare, deposits, and program application and visa fees. Administrators have also offered to help the students secure housing and course enrollments or to find alternative study abroad options for the semester.

“It was a difficult decision,” said Jack Ahern, the college’s vice provost for international programs. “But we take our responsibility to ensure students’ safety strongly.”

The State Department has recommended that US citizens defer “nonessential travel” to the region because of hostilities in the Gaza Strip between Israeli’s military and Gaza militants. Since fighting flared July 8, nearly 2,000 Palestinians, including many civilians, have been killed, while several dozen Israelis, mostly soldiers, have died.

A three-day truce ended Friday, and the air strikes between the two sides resumed.

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Jack Ahern, UMass Amherst’s vice provost for international programs

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Last month, UMass Amherst evacuated six students and one faculty member from the Israeli city of Acre, where they were nearing the end of an archaeological dig program, Ahern said.

“We became anxious about the hostilities and the danger they were in,” he said, adding that no one in the program was harmed.

The move will not affect the “substantial number” of UMass Amherst faculty and graduate students who travel to Israel or undergraduates who plan to go on personal travel, Ahern said.

He said the university typically sends five to 20 undergraduates to Israel each semester. No decisions have been made about programs scheduled for the spring semester.

“I’m hopeful that political conditions will allow” programs to continue, Ahern said.

UMass consulted with other colleges before deciding to cancel fall programming. Most other colleges the university spoke to are continuing their initiatives in Israel, according to Ahern.

Some other colleges have suspended study abroad programs there, including the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, the University of Iowa, and George Mason University, according to Ahern, media reports, and college websites.

Ahern said the last time he could recall UMass Amherst suspending study abroad programs was 2011, when the school evacuated students from Egypt and Syria during the “Arab Spring” uprisings and from Japan because of a tsunami and earthquake.


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