January 13, 2016

Office of Global Education

Dear Westmont in Istanbul Program Parents and Students,

As you may have heard in the media in recent days, Istanbul was the victim of terrorist activity on the morning of January 12th. We are deeply saddened by this event and remain in prayer for those affected. We are also concerned with the ongoing safety of our faculty and students. Westmont College has been offering global learning programs for more than 40 years and student safety remains our highest priority. We know that safety is highly important to you as a parent and/or student, as well.

In response to this event, Westmont would like to assure you that the administration has carefully assessed the current travel itinerary and conditions for the Westmont in Istanbul program. In recent years, Westmont has established the Global Travel Advisory Group (GTAG) to evaluate potential and actual risks associated with off-campus programs travel. Members of the GTAG actively monitor travel alerts and warnings from a variety of sources and meet, whenever necessary, to discuss alternatives for program itineraries. The GTAG relies on several data points for their decision-making process. The US State Department travel advisories and warnings are considered, alongside information gathered from external risk consultants and on-the-ground regional partners.

Following the recent attack in Istanbul on January 12, the GTAG has reviewed the current Westmont in Istanbul travel plans. After extensive discussion, we have decided to adjust the Westmont in Istanbul Program itinerary to areas within Turkey that are perceived to be safer. For the first two weeks (January 16-Feb 1), the program will be relocated to the town of Izmir. Izmir is a city on Turkey's Aegean coast, a metropolitan city in the western extremity of Anatolia and the third most populous city in Turkey.

Following these two weeks, students will move to Ortakoy, a residential area some distance from downtown Istanbul, Turkey (Feb 1-March 24). This location will allow students to live in apartments close to their classrooms. Students would be away from city center and would not need to move around the densely populated areas of the city. Student visits to tourist sites will be restricted.

As of today, the risk of isolated terrorist incidents in Turkey remains very real, as it does in many overseas locations. However, we believe that the January 12 incident is not part of a pattern warranting the cancellation of the Westmont in Istanbul program. We will continue to monitor the situation. The program leaders have identified alternative sites in the region and a contingency travel plan should the conditions require it. Although Westmont College cannot guarantee travel safety, you can feel confident that informed constituents are regularly monitoring and considering the current conditions of regions of student travel.

Notwithstanding what we’ve done to minimize harm, some risks remain. Off-Campus Programs are voluntary and students are not required to participate in order to graduate. The college carefully assesses the level of risk from an institutional perspective, and we would expect that students and their families go through a similar assessment. Please contact the Office of Global Education at Westmont if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you for supporting your student's interest in global learning and engagement and for your continued support of the Westmont College community.

Sincerely,

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