



Academic Field Trips and Risk

Academic field trips are an opportunity for students to add essential, real-life experiences to their classroom activities. This form of active learning is not without risk, though, and it is always more preferable to ask questions about risk before an incident occurs.

This article intends to assist Western faculty in making sure that certain risk-related items are considered as they plan and conduct their academic field trip activities. The risk landscape is provided by an online information sheet titled [Risk Management Considerations for Western Field Trips](#), but certain aspects of risk benefiting from closer examination are discussed below:

Getting students there

Deciding how to get students to your destination usually involves striking a reasonable balance between risk management and its partners – cost, convenience and control.

- *Letting students arrange their own transportation* - This arrangement begins with faculty merely telling students when and where to meet, leaving transportation at the discretion of the students. Students decide for themselves whether to drive, carpool, bicycle, bus or walk. This arrangement creates the least amount of risk and expense, but may lack the necessary controls or convenience that you seek for the activity. It might be appropriate for the following scenarios:
 - You wish to meet students for a publicly scheduled event, such as a film or play.
 - You are going hiking and you simply wish to make it possible for students to join you and your family.
 - Your class is meeting at an off campus location, rather than its usual classroom.
- *Using “University vehicles”* - A University vehicle can be a departmental van, Enterprise rental vehicle and even a personal car when used to accomplish an academic program or activity (“official university business”) like a field trip. With this arrangement, the 1) faculty are authorizing and directing the drivers and use of the vehicles and 2) mileage for the use of personal cars is reimbursable, although it may not be sought.

This arrangement increases risk and cost, but also convenience and control. Risk is mitigated by state and University mandated risk management controls. For example, you exercise a management role with the drivers and their use of the vehicles, and all drivers must complete the [Basic Driver Safety Program](#) and, if applicable, [Large Passenger Van Training](#). This arrangement might be appropriate for the following scenarios:



- You wish to take your students to a conference and arrange for their transportation, room and board.
 - You wish to spend the day with your students at a commercial facility in Seattle that requires everyone's arrival at a specific time for security checks before entering.
 - You ask your students to use their personal cars to transport equipment and carpool fellow students to an off campus research site.
- *Using a chartered van, mini-coach and bus operated by a professional driver:* The [University's charter bus operators](#) are awarded a contract based upon safety and pricing. These operators comply with federal and state motor coach safety regulations, and carry a satisfactory safety rating from the Department of Transportation. This scenario is expensive, but increases control and convenience and reduces a substantial amount of risk.

Obtaining Hold Harmless Forms

There are no set rules for obtaining signed hold harmless forms. The general practice is to ask participants of a voluntary field trip to sign a hold harmless form, but not participants of a required field trip as part of an academic course. For the latter group, however, exceptions should be considered for participants exposed to a high risk for injury and/or for participants participating voluntary basis (e.g. [university volunteer](#)). University employees who are participating as part of their employment duties should not be asked to sign a hold harmless form. Forms should be specific for a particular activity and can be obtained by contacting paul.mueller@wwu.edu.

Travel Authorization

- There is a University policy called [Authorizing and Reimbursing Travel for Official University Business](#) which outlines approval requirements.
- [Concur \(replaces TEM\)](#) – The University's online travel authorization and reimbursement processing system.

If you have any questions, contact [Travel Services](#) x3341.

If you have any further questions or comments about risk management as you plan and conduct your academic field trips, please contact Paul Mueller, Risk Management, at paul.mueller@wwu.edu or x3065.