

Science Off-Campus Field Activities

I. Introduction

Field activities are a vital part of the science curriculum at Austin Community College (ACC) and are required for many courses. In these activities, commonly called field trips or field exercises, ACC students participate in discovery-based learning and the application of classroom knowledge to the real world. These experiences enhance student learning and can significantly expand the employment opportunities for ACC students. In the interest of safety, and in compliance with Section 51.949 of the Texas Education Code, ACC must regulate student travel associated with academic off-campus activities that are led by faculty and staff. This state law requires that one of the faculty or staff members overseeing a field activity must be identified as the Responsible College Official (RCO). The RCO is the primary person responsible for compliance with the provisions of this document. A flow chart (Attachment 1) and checklist (Attachment 2) summarize many of the requirements described below.

II. Trip Preparation

1. Planning – An off-campus field activity presents hazards that many students are not familiar with. In planning such an activity, a RCO must assess the precautions that are necessary to protect the health and safety of all participants. To accomplish this, the RCO shall:

1.1. Identify the appropriate mode(s) of transportation [e.g. ACC-owned, leased or rented car or van, ACC-chartered bus, privately owned vehicle (POV)]. If a vehicle owned, leased or rented by ACC is not available, the College may allow the use of POVs provided that the driver(s) have a valid driver license, have proof of insurance, and assume liability for the use of their vehicle. If POVs are used, students must make their own arrangements to share vehicles. Any requirement for students to arrange their own transportation for field activities must be included in the course syllabus.

1.2. Perform a hazard assessment of the field activity using one or more copies of the *Hazard Assessment - Aquatic Field Activity* and *Hazard Assessment – Terrestrial Field Activity* forms (Attachment 3). The task force Science Safety Officer (SSO), the Math/Science safety Web site, and consultation with other faculty who have conducted similar field activities are useful resources for the hazard assessment. This assessment determines the safety policies, procedures, and personal protective equipment (PPE) that are required for the activity. The assessment must be completed far enough in advance of the activity to order and receive the appropriate PPE, or to include requirements for students to provide their own PPE in the course syllabus. Completed *Hazard Assessment* forms must be submitted with the *Science Activity Plan* (Attachment 4) for the activity.

1.3. Arrange for the appropriate PPE and clothing.

1.4. Establish safety policies and procedures for the conduct of the activity. This shall include, but not be limited to, the evaluation of circumstances such as terrain, road and water conditions, length of trip, and anticipated weather conditions. The RCO must determine if it is prudent to

require all participants to utilize available group transportation rather than POVs, and whether convoy travel is safe and prudent. Driving between midnight and 6:00 AM is strongly discouraged except in cases of an emergency. Policies and procedures that are specific to the field activity shall be described in section B of the *Science Field Activity Policies and Emergency Information* form (Attachment 5).

1.5. Ensure that all ACC employees who will drive ACC-owned, leased, rented vehicles, or approved alternate vehicles are on the ACC Risk Management Office (RMO) Approved Drivers List prior to the trip. An Approved Driver must:

- a. Be at least 18 years of age.
- b. Be a current ACC employee.
- c. Have a current driver license that is valid in the State of Texas.

d. Have taken a Defensive Driving Course in the past 3 (three) years or be enrolled in the next scheduled ACC-sponsored Defensive Driving Course prior to the trip. Requests to the RMO to become an Approved Driver will take at least two days to process.

1.6. Contact the RMO prior to vehicle travel in Mexico to arrange for appropriate insurance coverage and to determine if rental of a Mexican vehicle is required.

1.7. Obtain any required collecting permits or permissions to enter restricted areas.

1.8. Ensure that they have a current list of emergency telephone numbers for the area to be visited. This shall include the current telephone and pager number of the RMO.

1.9. On the day prior to and day of the field activity listen to radio, television or to the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration weather/marine forecast for information on temperature, precipitation, severe weather, and if appropriate, lake/marine wind and wave conditions, water temperature, river stages, dam releases, and lake levels. Forecast conditions shall be used to determine the necessity of safety briefings on weather or water hazards such as lightning, flash floods, tornadoes and other severe storms, temperature conditions, and water currents.

1.10. Establish procedures to notify participants if a field activity has been cancelled.

2. Notifications and Approvals

2.1. A *Science Field Activity Plan* (Attachment 4) must be completed for all off-campus field activities and must be submitted, along with *Hazard Assessment* forms (Attachment 3) and a blank *Science Field Activity Policies and Emergency Information* form (Attachment 5), to the Task Force Chair at least three working days prior to the activity. An approved copy of the *Science Field Activity Plan* must be on file in the Office of the Dean of Mathematics and Sciences prior to all field activities and on file in the RMO prior to all activities that travel outside of Travis and Williamson Counties.

2.2. All field activities that require expenditure of ACC funds must have advance approval of the appropriate Task Force Chair. For these activities, the RCO must submit an *ACC Request for Travel* form to their Task Force Chair at least 15 working days in advance of the field activity.

2.3. For field activities involving the use of POVs outside of Travis and Williamson Counties, the RCO must provide the RMO with information on all participants who intend to drive POVs. ACC employees who drive POVs must be on the RMO Approved Drivers list. POV drivers who are not ACC employees must be 18 years or older and must sign a *Science Field Activity Volunteer Driver Waiver & Release of Liability Form* (Attachment 6) prior to participating in the field activity. For each vehicle, the RCO must obtain the name(s) of the vehicle's owner(s), and for each driver, photocopies of their driver license, and proof of liability insurance. This information should be provided to the RMO prior to the trip.

3. Travel Waiver and Safety Forms

3.1. Participants in off-campus field activities who are not ACC employees must complete and sign a standard *Science Field Activity Waiver and Release of Liability Form* (Attachment 7) prior to the activity. Participants under the age of 18 must have a parent or guardian sign the waiver form. These forms shall be collected by the RCO and forwarded to their Task Force Chair.

3.2. If a course has multiple field activities, students may sign a blanket *Science Field Activity Waiver and Release of Liability Form* for the entire course.

3.3. All trip participants must complete and sign a *Science Field Policies and Emergency Information Form* (Attachment 5) prior to each off-campus field activity. This form shall describe policies and safety precautions for the activity, list any medical conditions of the participant that might present a problem during the activity, and contain the name and telephone number of an emergency contact for the participant. The RCO shall have emergency information forms for all participants in their possession during the field activity and provide each participant with their own copy of the form.

4. Obtaining Transportation

4.1. Only ACC employees are permitted to rent, lease or drive rented/leased vehicles for College business. Vehicle(s) rented for off-campus field activities must be rented in the name of ACC according to procedures established by the Dean of Mathematics and Sciences and the ACC Purchasing Department.

4.2. If POVs are used for an off-campus academic activity, drivers are liable for the operation of their POV. ACC is not liable for damages to POVs. Drivers of POVs must comply with the requirements of Paragraph 2.3 above.

4.3. RCOs shall not make specific assignments/arrangements for student travel in POVs. Participants shall make their own choices/decisions to ride in POVs if this option is allowed for the off-campus field activity.

5. Equipment and Supplies

5.1. Prior to a field activity, the RCO must coordinate with their Science Laboratory Assistant to purchase, test and assemble appropriate equipment and supplies.

5.2. The RCO must ensure that they will have the appropriate quantity of PPE for all trip participants. This may include safety goggles, earplugs (or other forms of noise protection), hardhats, protective gloves, protective masks, and Class II personal flotation devices.

5.3. If appropriate, the RCO should ensure that they have a functional megaphone, water life-saving equipment (e.g. signaling devices, emergency radios, ropes, and life preservers), FM radios for group communications, mobile phone(s) for emergency communication, traffic control/warning devices (e.g. cones, flags, signs, reflective triangles), and an adequate water cooler or jug.

5.4. All off-campus field activities must have at least one appropriately stocked first aid kit.

6. Orientation of Participants

6.1. The RCO must brief participants on appropriate clothing and footwear for the activity. This should include appropriate hat, shoe or boot types, length of pants and shirtsleeves, and types of jackets, gloves, rain gear and safety vests. All field activity participants must wear sturdy, closed toe and closed heel shoes or boots for activities that leave hard or landscaped surfaces, beaches, or well-maintained trails and roads.

6.2. For off-campus field activities, the RCO must provide participants with a checklist of equipment and supplies that they need to bring for the activity (e.g. Attachment 8). This may include, but not be limited to, sunglasses, insect repellent, sunscreen, and a water bottle.

6.3. Drivers should be encouraged to obtain at least six hours of uninterrupted sleep the night before they drive in a field activity.

III. Conduct of the Activity

1. Texas Department of Public Safety regulations, traffic laws, rental company rules, and ACC rules must be observed in transit to/from and during all off-campus field activities.

2. The RCO shall ensure that:

2.1. The passenger and load capacity of ACC owned/leased/rented vehicles is not exceeded.

2.2. All vehicle(s) participating in convoys have printed directions to the intended destination(s). For convoys, the RCO must instruct the driver(s) on the trip route, procedures if separated from the lead vehicle, and general communications.

2.3. Drivers of ACC vehicles or ACC leased/rented vehicles must perform vehicle safety checks (e.g. lights, brakes, turn signals, emergency flashers, safety belts, fuel level, tire inflation, windshield wiper fluid level, and oil/transmission fluid level) prior to departure.

2.4. They have a passenger list for each vehicle participating in the field activity.

2.5. Trip participants are briefed on general safety hazards prior to departure for the field activity and on specific hazards at each stop. Participants must also be briefed on the location of first aid kit(s) and, if applicable, fire extinguisher(s) and water safety devices. All activity participants must receive this briefing.

3. Each participant in an off-campus field activity must:

3.1. Wear a seat belt whenever their vehicle is in operation.

3.2. Report any unsafe conditions to the RCO as soon as possible. If this involves fatigue or sleepiness of the driver of their vehicle, then they must alert other passengers and immediately request that the driver take a break. Any resistance to such a request must be reported to the RMO.

3.3. Provide and administer any medications that they take orally or by injection for chronic medical conditions.

4. Drivers should take a 10-15 minute rest break approximately every two hours of continuous driving or rotate with another authorized driver. Relief drivers are encouraged to rest during “off-times”. Front-seat passengers are encouraged not to sleep during long drives.

5. Any accidents involving vehicles used for off-campus field activities must be reported immediately to local law enforcement authorities, the RCO, the RMO, and, if applicable, the rental company.

6. Any accidents or incidents during a field activity that require the attention of a medical professional shall be reported to the RCO and to the RMO as soon as possible. Accidents/incidents resulting in a death or hospitalization shall be reported immediately to the RMO. Students injured during science field activities outside of Travis and Williamson Counties are covered by Student Accident Travel Insurance provided by ACC.

IV. Actions Following a Field Activity

1. Following a science field activity, the RCO must submit an updated copy of the *Science Field Activity Plan* to their Task Force Chair or designated individual within a week following the activity. The Task Force Chair shall forward information from the updated *Science Field Plan* to the RMO as required.

2. For science field activities that required an expenditure of College funds, the RCO must submit an *ACC Out-of-District Travel Reimbursement Expense Voucher* with original receipts to their Task Force Chair within a week following the activity.

3. The RCO must report any damage of PPE or use of expendable safety supplies to the Science Laboratory Assistant who is responsible for their maintenance. This report must be made no later than the first class day following the field activity.