STAYING IN TOUCH
Communicating with your friends & family while abroad

In order to reduce the anxiety level of your friends and family back home and to keep yourself from getting homesick, it's important to stay in touch. Be sure to take an address list containing your friends' and family's phone numbers, fax numbers, and e-mail addresses. If possible, give your contact information to as many people as you can before you leave. Make sure that your family knows how often you plan to contact them. If they know that it is difficult for you to phone or e-mail, or that you will be traveling on certain days, then they will be less likely to panic when they have not heard from you in a while.

PHONE CALLS

Phone calls can be VERY expensive, so make sure you research your options before you leave the U.S. (In general, calling directly from a hotel phone, without a calling card, is the most expensive way to phone home. It can end up costing more for one phone call than for your hotel room itself!)

Ask your Program Director what past participants have found to be the most convenient way to phone from the country(-ies) where you are going. Exchange students can ask the coordinator at their host institution, or ask GT students who have already participated in your program. Some countries might have cheap pre-paid phone cards; others may rent cell phones once you are there, etc.

Don't forget to consider the time difference when calling the U.S., and tell the people calling you to remember too.

Calling Cards

An easy way to call home from overseas is to use a calling card from a U.S. carrier (e.g. AT&T, Sprint or MCI). When using one of these services, you will not usually need foreign coins and will not have to talk to an international operator. Special access codes in each country connect you directly to the AT&T, MCI, or Sprint network for potentially lower rates than going through the local telephone company. Be sure to ask your long-distance carrier for a list of the special access codes needed to get the network while you are abroad. Also, make sure you understand what the rates and surcharges are before you go. Ask the carrier(s) if they have special international calling plans. In some cases you may be able to get cheap rates on calls to one particular number (for instance, your parents' number in the U.S.).

Tell your friends and family to check their phone rates as well if they will be calling you so that they can sign up for the international calling plan that makes the most sense for their calling needs. Many phone cards are available to call from the U.S. to other countries at websites like www.callingcards.com
Skype

You should also check out [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com) to find out about making free calls over the internet to anyone else who also has Skype. It can also be used to make calls to landline telephones and cell phones at very discounted rates. Make sure to investigate this option before you leave!

Cell Phones

Most U.S. cellular phones do not work overseas, unless you have international service, but you can check with your cellular phone company to be sure. In some cases, you can rent a cell phone to use while you are overseas.

There are organizations that provide such services:

- *Planet Fone* offers rental cell phones at [www.planetfone.com](http://www.planetfone.com) that can be used in the U.S. and while you are abroad.

- *Cell Hire* is a new company that also offers rental services. Visit [www.cellhire.com](http://www.cellhire.com)

Check with your Program Director and/or with past participants to find out if they used cell phones when they were on your program. Be sure to investigate all of the costs so that you don’t get an expensive surprise when you get the bills!

E-MAIL

Ask your Program Director or past participants about e-mail access on your particular program. GT webmail is now very accessible through the Zimbra system. You should be able to check your GT account regularly while abroad. If you intend to use an alternate e-mail while abroad, then be sure to forward your GT e-mail account to your personal account since you are responsible for checking your GT e-mail at all times. Once you have forwarded your GT account, test it before leaving the country! Many students in the past thought that they had forwarded their GT accounts, but did not check to make sure it worked.