Increased risk of COVID-19 threatens study abroad programs

Hannah Schaffer, News Editor|March 6, 2020

“(COVID-19) must be a top priority for every country,” said current Director General of the World Health Organization Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus during a mission briefing on Wednesday, March 4. “Our message to all countries is: this is not a one-way street. We can push this virus back.”

The spread of COVID-19 was officially declared a public health emergency on Thursday, Jan. 30. Since the official declaration was made, the disease has continued to spread.

A total of 92,943 cases of COVID-19 have been reported and 3,160 people have died, according to the WHO.

The WHO is calling for countries to educate their populations, expand surveillance, find, isolate and care for every case, trace every contact and take an all-of-government and all-of-society approach to ending the epidemic.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause illnesses as mild as the common cold to an ailment as severe as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, according to the WHO.

Around 100 cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed within the United States and have resulted in 10 deaths, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

Although there have been no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Crawford County or Pennsylvania, Allegheny has convened its incident response team to address any potential future outbreaks.

Vice President of Student Life and Dean of Students April Thompson addressed the risk of COVID-19 in a campus-wide email on Tuesday, March 3. In her email, Thompson specifically addressed the concerns surrounding travel during the upcoming spring break.

“We strongly advise students, faculty and staff who may be traveling during the break to pay careful attention to travel advisories,” Thompson said in the email. “(Allegheny) recommends caution when considering overseas travel.”

The Spring Break 2020 Experiential Learning Seminar to Paris, Barcelona and Oslo led by Director of International Education Lucinda Morgan and Professor of Economics Stephen Onyeiwu was cancelled due to the “unpredictable nature of the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak,” according to an email sent to Allegheny students who were planning to attend the EL.

Onyeiwu and Morgan also felt that “the anxiety and uncertainty surrounding the coronavirus outbreak would be unconducive to student learning and exploration.”

Additionally, Thompson revealed that the college will be monitoring conditions and communication with students planning to go abroad during the fall of 2020.

Thompson also recommended that the campus community protect from any virus by washing their hands, avoid touching their eyes, nose or mouth, avoiding close contact with anyone who is sick, staying home when you are sick, coughing and sneezing into a tissue or your elbow and disinfecting frequently touched objects, such as cellphones.

“(COVID-19) is not SARS, it is not MERS and it is not influenza,” Ghebreyesus said. “The nature of this virus means we have an opportunity to break the chains of transmission and contain its spread.”