

# How Baylor University Uses Real-time Information to Keep Students and Faculty Safe

Every semester, hundreds of Baylor University students, faculty members and staff fly out of the relative safety of Waco, Texas, to far-flung corners of the globe to travel on behalf of the school— study abroad programs in Europe and Asia, mission trips to Latin America, and research conferences worldwide.

Keeping people safe while they travel on behalf of the school is the responsibility of the Baylor University Department of Public Safety. The person in charge of keeping these groups safe is Jared Bickenbach, Director of Global Safety and Security.

Bickenbach does this by assessing the risk environment of a region, country or specific city, and sharing that information with travelers before their trips. While groups are on the road, he relies on Dataminr to provide him with real-time alerts on breaking news, to keep travelers safe.

In this case study, we'll examine how Baylor University built its travel safety program, and share best practices to ensure travel safety at your academic institution or organization.

## Travel Planning

Baylor University students, faculty and staff who travel on behalf of the school are required to share their itineraries in the school's travel management system, listing out the cities and countries they expect to visit on their trip.

Bickenbach reviews and approves every itinerary personally. Certain itineraries are approved quickly, such as travel within the U.S., Canada or Western Europe—places that the [U.S. Department of State](#) deems "Level 1: Exercise Normal Precautions," Bickenbach says.

For locations that the State Department deems "Level 2" or "Level 3," Bickenbach will take a closer look at the probable

risks surrounding the trip, by reading updated travel advisory information, detailed risk reports from analysts at WorldAware, and the real-time news alerts coming from Dataminr.

He then uses that information to build a risk profile for the itinerary, which he shares with the group before they leave. In certain cases, he will determine the risks are too high, and will recommend canceling the itinerary.

## Real-time Travel Safety

With hundreds of students, faculty and staff on the road at any given time, Bickenbach ensures their safety by remaining in constant communications with travelers, notifying them of emerging security risks. In rare cases, the trip's risk profile changes quickly, and Bickenbach recommends groups cut their trips short and return to the U.S.

Such was the case at the start of 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic was beginning to spread across Asia and Europe. Using real-time information from Dataminr coupled with advisory recommendations from analysts, Bickenbach asked a number of students, faculty and staff to immediately return to the U.S.

Baylor University made the call in advance of wide-sweeping travel restrictions and ahead of other universities, who found themselves scrambling to arrange repatriation flights for their students, faculty and staff.

"The number one benefit for us is quality of information," Bickenbach said. "Getting information in a remote area of the world is pretty difficult ... and if you're a small security team, having the alerts push directly to you is such a time-saving measure."

# Best Practices for Travel Safety



## Adopt a centralized travel registration and budget management system

Organizing all current and future itineraries in one place allows an organization's travel safety team to understand who is traveling where and coordinate a rapid response in case of emergency.

Every itinerary needs to be approved beforehand, which gives Bickenbach the opportunity to meet with students, faculty and staff to brief them on travel risks they may encounter and open up lines of communication once they're on the road.



## Use software to build an accurate picture of probable risks before the trip starts

Bickenbach uses several tools to build a more complete picture of probable risks facing travelers. Dataminr gives Bickenbach a granular look at breaking news in real time, showing him a range of events as they happen.

He will make the call to cancel travel itineraries if the risks are too high or the situation on the ground is likely to change in the near future.



## Monitor emerging risks while travelers are on the road

Dataminr uses artificial intelligence to process publicly available information from over 200,000 data sources to deliver alerts on breaking news in real time. The source data can be in multiple formats—text, sound, image, and video—and originate from virtually anywhere in the world, spanning more than 100 languages.

Dataminr often delivers initial signals of emerging events faster than traditional news sources, giving organizations crucial time to plan their response during an emergency. A Dataminr alert pertaining to an event outside of the U.S., in any country where Baylor's students and staff are known to be temporarily studying and working, provides Bickenbach and his colleagues a head start on helping them stay safe.

"If I see an alert like that, I know I'll need to get information really fast," Bickenbach says. "I can use [Dataminr] to quickly capture what's happening... and can tell if any of those areas where we have students has been impacted."

Dataminr is also useful in remote areas of the world where journalists from large news organizations do not typically operate and where local journalists are slow to report on breaking news.

Learn more about Dataminr at [dataminr.com](https://dataminr.com)

## About Baylor University

### Founded

Feb. 1, 1845

### Location

Waco, Texas, USA

### Institution

Private Baptist  
Christian University

### Campus

1,000-acre urban  
college campus

### Students

18,000