

STUDENTS GUIDE

**FOR THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE JOINT
STUDY PROGRAMMES BETWEEN THE EU AND
AUSTRALIA, CANADA, JAPAN, NEW ZEALAND,
SOUTH KOREA AND THE USA**

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ERASMUS+, THE NEW EU PROGRAMME.....	4
CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE EU AND THE INDUSTRIALISED COUNTRIES.....	6
Objectives of the projects	6
Types of mobility and co-operation projects	7
Who takes part in the projects?.....	8
How do the higher education institutions participate in the projects?.....	8
Agreements between the EU and its partner countries	8
Scholarship.....	9
Additional funding	9
APPLICATION PROCESS	10
How to apply	10
General requirements	11
Reference letters	12
Writing a motivation letter.....	12
First degree diploma.....	12
VISAS AND RESIDENCE PERMITS	13
HOUSING	15
Student house (dormitory).....	16
Shared student flat or independent apartment	17
AFTER ARRIVAL	18
Registering with local authorities	18
Insurance	19
Bank account.....	19
Enrolment/ Matriculation.....	20
Academic writing.....	21
Language learning	22
OCEANS NETWORK.....	22
FINISHING YOUR EXCHANGE.....	24
Leaving the country of study	24
Returning home.....	24
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION	26
Cultural dimensions.....	26
Culture shock.....	29
GLOSSARY.....	32

What is this Guide?

This Student Guide is envisaged to assist you throughout the whole period of your involvement in one of the many mobility projects between the EU on one side and six industrialised countries cooperating on a bilateral basis with the EU in the field of higher education on the other side: Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and the USA. This Guide aims to provide information from the very beginning when you want to find out more about the programme, to the moment when you get ready to return home after having successfully finished your studies abroad.

Students and alumni of these projects are united in the OCEANS Network (“**O**rganisation for **C**o-operation, **E**xchange, **A**nd **N**etworking among **S**tudents”) – an association of like-minded people with diverse academic background who have participated or who currently take part in one of the many mobility projects.

This Student Guide is designed to be relevant for all students and therefore does not include concrete details about each and every project that has been set up between the different programmes. Certainly, this Guide cannot answer all questions - however, it is a handy information tool for the duration of your study abroad experience, since it contains practical tips and additional materials which will help you to make the most of your exchange.

Who wrote this Guide?

The Guide is written by the service provider of the OCEANS Network with the help of the active members of the OCEANS Network based on information from the European Commission, personal experience of the students, as well as interviews with project coordinators and results obtained during the online surveys.

Best wishes,

ICUnet.AG

Service Provider for OCEANS Network

service@oceans-network.eu

ERASMUS+, THE NEW EU PROGRAMME

Since January 2014, the European Commission has started the new programme (2014-2020) for Education, Training, Youth, and Sport, called Erasmus+. Erasmus+ brings together seven existing EU programmes.

Following the restructuring of the higher education programmes, the European Commission proposed one single integrated student and alumni association, gathering all the students and alumni that took/are taking part in Erasmus+ or in previously existing programmes now falling under its scope. The OCEANS Network, together with **Erasmus Mundus Association (EMA)**, **Erasmus Student Network (ESN)** and **GarageErasmus**, was asked to take part in the creation of this new bigger network, namely the **Erasmus+ Student and Alumni Association (ESAA)**.

The ESAA will have two strands:

- **Credit mobility** (students and alumni of OCEANS Network - the ICI-programmes, ESN and GarageErasmus)
- **Degree mobility** (Erasmus Mundus and EMA)

For more information on Erasmus+, please check here:

http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/index_en.htm

OCEANS' statement to the renewals by the transition board (Oct '14)

The transition process into the ESAA represents a challenge but also an opportunity for our organisation to expand internationally by joining forces to promote the common brand, Erasmus+. It does not mean that our organisation will disappear, rather that it can turn into something bigger!

To ensure a smooth process of transformation, the Transition Board and Liaison Group were created. Based on the workshop output, the Transition Board and the Liaison Group will hold meetings with representatives of the European Commission and other student and alumni networks involved to present the ideas and strategies developed. Furthermore, the Board and the Liaison Groups are working on a concept paper, which will be presented to the Commission. Its main features are:

Erasmus+ Worldwide

OCEANS Networks wants to build on the experience and expertise accumulated during the years to promote European Commission programmes, and it wants to promote ESAA as a strong brand for exchange students and other alumni organisations. This chapter could be called **Erasmus+ Worldwide**, and it would allow OCEANS to keep its own sense of community while being part of ESAA.

Future: Mission Statement

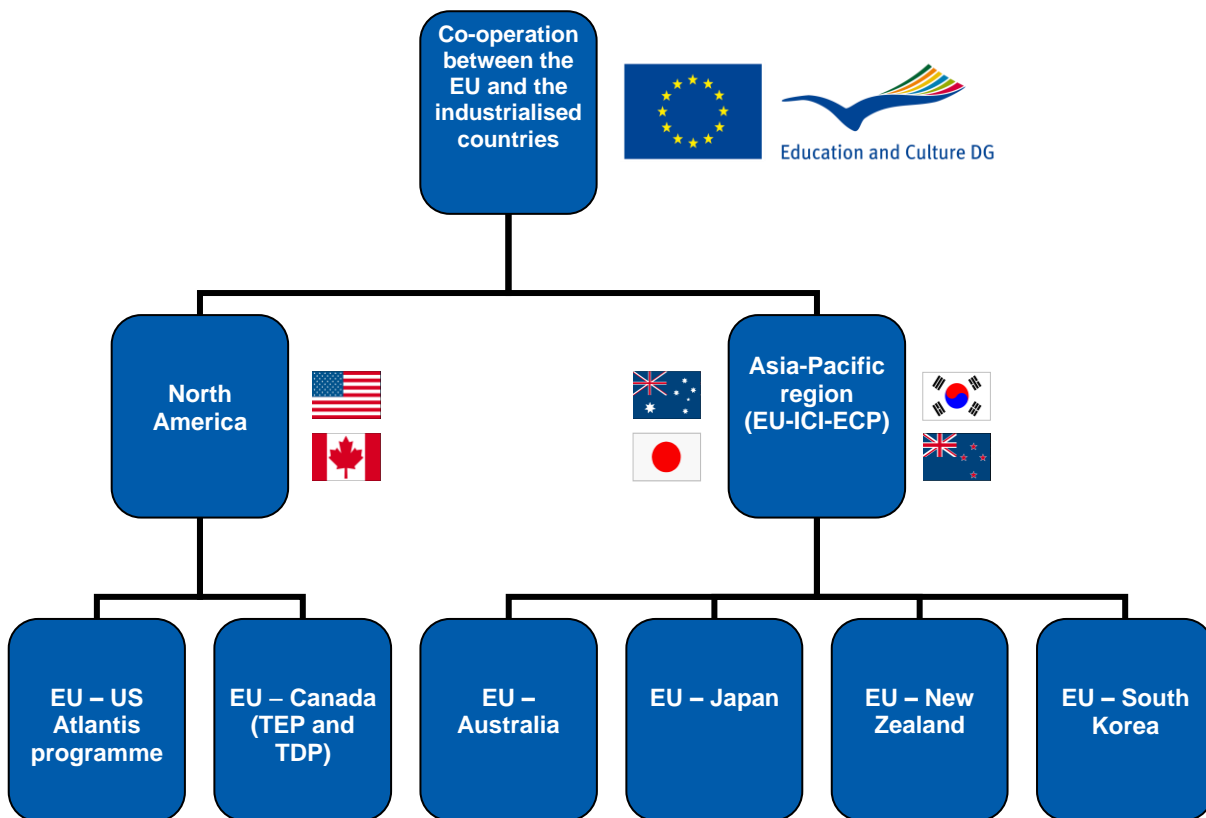
Within ESAA, OCEANS Network aims at providing support for future students, current students, and alumni of exchange programmes with extra-European countries. Support will be offered on a continuous basis, from the beginning of the exchange to providing skills during and after the exchange thereby increasing employability of the student in the job market.

Get involved! Join our Facebook group „**OCEANS Going Global**“!

CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE EU AND THE INDUSTRIALISED COUNTRIES

The first agreements on co-operation in the field of higher education and vocational education and training between the European Commission and the governments of the US and Canada were made in 1995. Later on, co-operation with other industrialised countries such as Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea have been officially established under the Industrialised Countries Instrument (ICI).

The bilateral programmes provide financial support for joint study programmes, student mobility and policy-oriented measures (as well as other actions such as an ongoing Policy Dialogue) jointly funded by both partners.



Each bilateral programme funds different projects.

All students who participate(d) in one of these projects are eligible to join OCEANS

Network for students and alumni.

Objectives of the projects

Although the nature of the mobility projects varies, they all, no matter at which level, have some common objectives:

- Development of better relations and mutual understanding between Europe and partner countries' citizens
- Improvement of intercultural competence and fostering language learning
- Striving for more competitive and compatible institutions
- Improved access to higher education
- Facilitation of the acquisition of skills needed for the global knowledge-based economy

Mobility...

All student-related projects require mobility, which means that if you are selected, you study at least in two different universities **in two different continents** according to the project's regulations and arrangements.

Types of mobility and co-operation projects

Joint/Double degree projects

Consortia of higher education institutions receive support to establish integrated joint study programmes. Students spend a substantial period of study in the partner country and receive either a joint or a double degree.

Joint mobility projects

Set up and run by a group of higher education and/or vocational training institutions from the EU and a partner country, those projects focus on short-term mobility of students (exchanges; often one semester) with recognition of study abroad periods, joint curriculum development, and exchange of trainees, teaching staff or administrators.

Policy - oriented measures

Activities include studies, seminars, working groups and benchmarking exercises. Relevant issues include recognition of qualifications and accreditation.

Who takes part in the projects?

Only students enrolled in the institutions participating in one of the projects can apply to do a period of study in North America and Asia-Pacific respectively or in one of the EU Member States. All students and alumni of these projects are eligible to the OCEANS Network (www.oceans-network.eu).

How do the higher education institutions participate in the projects?

The EU and the relevant partner country open a call for proposals which is published on their website.¹ Higher education and/or vocational education and training institutions (HEIs & VET) in the 28 EU member countries, as well as in the six industrialised countries may form a consortium to apply for the project. Institutions have to fulfil the following criteria: development of innovative international curricula; student services, language and cultural preparation; organisational frameworks for student mobility and faculty members' mobility; evaluation; sustainability and dissemination. After being selected, they may start to invite students to apply for the exchange.

Agreements between the EU and its partner countries

Every project guarantees full recognition of the activities in the exchange. The institutions must agree to allocate an adequate number of credit points for the course so that students do not experience an increase in their time of study. There should be preparation in language and culture on practical subjects, but also on the terminology of the studies.

Tuition fees

Most students report that they did not have to pay any tuition fees at their host university. As a part of the agreement these were covered in most cases. As agreements among the projects vary please contact your course coordinator about additional fee requirements.

¹ The calls are announced yearly, but not for all countries. Concerning the calls for the EU side, see http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/extcoop/index_en.php for more information.

Scholarship

The scholarships differ from project to project although the European Commission has established flat rates. The amount depends on the funding the projects receive from the budget agreed upon by the European Union and its partner. In some cases you might need some extra funding. However, compared to other mobility programmes, the scholarships are quite competitive.

Additional funding

If you do not have time to work while you are studying or your parents cannot support you, try to obtain some extra funding. First you should contact your home university and ask for financial support during your exchange. Here are some other ideas for where you may be able to gain additional funding:

For students from all over the world:

- UNESCO: <http://www.unesco.org/education/studyingabroad/networking/studyabroad.shtml>
- Study abroad: www.studyabroad.com
- Study in Europe: www.studyineurope.eu
- [Scholarship Portal: www.scholarshipportal.eu](http://www.scholarshipportal.eu)

USA

- Education USA: www.educationUSA.state.gov
- Institute of International Education: www.iie.org
- International Student: www.internationalstudent.com

CANADA

- Study in Canada: www.studyincanada.com/english/index.asp

EUROPE

- Contact the official institution for exchange of each country

AUSTRALIA

- Study in Australia: www.studyinaustralia.gov.au/sia/splash.htm
- Australian Government: www.goingtouni.gov.au

JAPAN

- Study in Japan: www.studyjapan.go.jp/en/

NEW ZEALAND

- Study in New Zealand: www.studyingnewzealand.com
- New Zealand Educated: www.newzealandeducated.com/de/en/institutions_courses/scholarships/incoming/international_doctoral_research_scholarships

APPLICATION PROCESS

There is so far no single database which provides information on all the projects available. It is an ongoing process – every year new projects are being accepted and others stop their activities. But normally the university or rather the international office and the course coordinators provide information about the possibilities of an exchange. The [European Commission](#) provides PDF documents that give an overview of the current projects.

The PDF documents can be found here:

- **EU-US:** [Cooperation in Higher Education and Vocational Training - Selected projects](#)
- **EU-Canada:** [Cooperation Agreement in Higher Education, Training and Youth - Selected projects](#)
- **EU-Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea:** [Cooperation in education and training](#)

You can also find the Google maps on the public OCEANS website: <http://www.oceans-network.eu/en/exchanges/index.htm>

How to apply

Every project has its own application procedure. The students need to be registered at the institution running the respective project in order to be eligible to apply. Please consult with the international office of your university.



General requirements

In most cases the required documents for an application are:

- student application form
- motivation letter (maybe in the language of the host country as a proof of your language skills)
- CV
- reference letters
- IELTS/TOEFL certificate (if the courses are taught in English)
- Overview of grades/copy of previous diploma

Often you may be required to provide samples of academic texts or proof of previous engagement in the field. Some students report that a brief interview was part of the selection process.

Some project coordinators require that the application consist of two or more copies of all documents – please check and keep this in mind when you order translations of diplomas. Many projects also have an online initial registration procedure.

Be very attentive when you read through the application requirements on the chosen consortium's website. Very often incomplete applications are simply put aside; hence, you lose your chance even to be considered as an applicant if you are not attentive enough. In some cases project coordinators may contact you with request for documents that you failed to include, but an incomplete application certainly already somewhat spoils your image. **READ ALL THE APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS, FAQs SECTIONS AND GUIDELINES CAREFULLY BEFOREHAND.**

There is no single deadline – application deadlines vary from project to project. Pay attention to whether by deadline they mean the date by which they should already have received all your documents, or the date by which you should have sent the documents by mail (i.e. according to the postal stamp). If your application is late, it will not be considered (one day after the deadline is regarded as being late).

In other words...

For any type of information about the duration of the project, scholarships, application rules and deadlines, final degree, etc. you should contact the coordinator of the respective projects.



Reference letters

- Depending on the requirements of the project, you could be asked to provide reference letters from your academic supervisor or professor, employer, head of the organisation where you are or were involved as a volunteer, leader of the academic or professional association you are a member of, etc.
- Please note that sometimes reference letters must be send separately by the referees themselves, while in other cases you can include them in your application along with the other documents.

Writing a motivation letter

- Try to write a “personal” target-oriented motivation letter, where you explain what makes you in particular worth being selected and clearly explain why you are applying for this particular project.
- Be sure to mention any work or volunteer experience that you may have, as well as any publications of your previous research. If you can indicate your scientific interests and the direction of your future Master thesis, it is also viewed as a plus.
- State clearly what your expectations are and what you would like to do upon finishing the project with the knowledge that you acquire during the project.

First degree diploma

If you need to submit a copy of your first degree diploma:

- If your 1st degree diploma is not in English, the certified copy and the diploma supplement with courses, hours and grades must be officially translated and certified by a notary or with an apostil.
- Note how many certified copies the project coordinator requires.
- Keep in mind that all participating universities have access to databases containing detailed information about the majority of universities and grading

Application approved...

There is no standard confirmation letter you get after you have been selected for a project. Some students receive an official confirmation letter while others are informed personally by their course coordinator.

systems from all over the world. The certified copy of diploma that you submit will therefore be checked and verified.

VISAS AND RESIDENCE PERMITS

A lot of students who start their exchange need to have a visa, particularly if you plan to stay for more than six months in the host country. Visa requirements and applications process vary greatly by country, even within the EU. Please make sure you take care of this issue in advance. In some countries you will have to pay money to obtain a visa.



Generally these documents might be required to obtain a visa:

- 🌐 Birth certificate
- 🌐 Health insurance
- 🌐 Declaration of income/financial situation
- 🌐 Proof of inscription of study programme
- 🌐 Passport
- 🌐 Flight tickets

Despite the enlargement of the EU, the [Schengen area](#) and general harmonisation of regulations regarding movement within the EU, it is important to understand that most visa issues are under the competence of the member states.

For Canada...

EU citizens can stay in Canada for up to 6 months as a tourist. So you only have to apply for a visa if you plan to stay longer.

Please contact your host country's embassy or consulate in advance to make sure you are able to prepare all the specifics on time. Your project coordinator should be able to give you more information.

Please consult the following websites run by the governments to clarify how to obtain a visa:

Australia: <http://www.immi.gov.au/students/>

Canada: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/information/applications/student.asp>

Europe: http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/borders/borders_visa_en.htm

Japan: <http://www.studyjapan.go.jp/en/toj/toj04e.html>

South Korea:

http://www.studyinkorea.go.kr/en/main.do;jsessionid=zCKO01RQgSPh+cbV10KFKg_node_10

US: <https://www.usimmigrationsupport.org/f1-student-visa.html>

It may be better if your passport is valid for the next couple of years before you start the exchange to avoid problems with applying for a new passport during your studies, and to ensure you have sufficient pages in your passport for the visa(s). Some countries require that the passport is valid for at least one year in order to issue a visa.

Once a student is admitted to a project, he/she should start the procedures to obtain the necessary visa in his/her home country at the embassy/consulate of the respective country. **Before** you apply for a visa, clarify with your coordinator or university international office desk, which visa type would be the best for you.

Based on the previous experience of students who have participated in one of the many projects, visa issues demand much time and attention. Sometimes it might take up to six months. For a more effective result, please start with the visa paperwork as soon as possible; pay special attention to detail when you prepare the

For the USA:

The standard visa is a **J-1 student visa** through the US embassy.

For South Korea:

You need the following documents for your visa application:

- Passport
- 2 Photos
- Letter of acceptance from the host university
- Confirmation of sufficient finances
- Health insurance
- Flight tickets

For Europe:

In most European countries a stay exceeding three months requires a **residence permit** (often besides obtaining a visa, non-EU students enrolled in a project also have to apply separately for a residence permit in every country they study in, unless their nationality exempt them from having to do so.

Non EU-students who are holders of a residence permit for a Schengen state may freely enter into and stay in any other Schengen state for a period of up to three months.

United Kingdom and Ireland have autonomous visa procedures different from the majority of European countries.

documents for visas and residence permits applications, for example to the format of photos or the amount of passport pages to be copied. Double-check all your forms and the data that you fill in. Always have copies of originals (it is a good idea to have them in a digital form too) for your own administration, as well as when submitting applications, as sometimes consulates do not return any documents (make sure you make several copies of the project admission proof, official scholarship, insurance policy statement and insurance card, etc.). You should keep your project coordinator informed if you face any visa problems.

If you would like to have your spouse or a child accompany you during your studies, be sure to inform your coordinator as in this case extra documents are usually required. In general universities cannot provide invitations for the family members of students, but you will certainly receive assistance and be referred to relevant sources of information.

Tip: As previous experience shows, sometimes a birth certificate is required for applying for the residence permit or for receiving the diploma upon finishing the project. Hence, it is worth taking it with you when you leave your home country, just in case.

In other words...

Apply for visa AS SOON AS POSSIBLE...!! You will be given all assistance and supporting documents, but you should make an effort to get it organised in time. Rules at embassies might change often, so be sure you get the most updated information on the required documents.

HOUSING

Whatever housing option you prefer, you will receive all the information from your project coordinator. Housing options, of course, depend on the destination city and university. Generally it is advisable to use the university networks. Sometimes the university itself offers accommodation for exchange students. Your project coordinator will inform you about this.

In other words...

You will be provided information on how to find accommodation and given contacts of university housing office, but remember that it is your responsibility to find suitable lodging for yourself.

Student house (dormitory)



The majority of European universities do offer accommodation in dorms. It might be the easiest option, since you do not need to perform any search yourself, but simply get in touch with the housing office at your university. Contact details will be provided to you by the project coordinator or university international office staff. Note that in some cases, there is an administrative fee that the housing

office might charge for their services.

In some countries university student houses are the cheapest accommodation option, while in others they are as expensive as non-student lodging.

Sometimes, dorms are intended for all students, sometimes there are dormitories specifically for international students. The reason for this separation is in most cases purely administrative, since foreign students “come and go”, and thus it is easier to have one or several dormitories where room tenants change so often. There is usually a student manager who is responsible for assistance to students, household issues and any organisational matters.

In Europe...

a lot of universities do not have a campus – university buildings, institutes and student houses could be spread out around town.

In South Korea...

accommodation on campuses is very common. Rooms are shared with other students, often from Asia. Keep in mind the cultural differences before moving in – be sure to check OCEANS Country Info South Korea. You can also rent a flat close to the university which is not too expensive.

The level of comfort in dormitories can vary from separate rooms with own kitchen corner and bathroom to shared rooms with facilities on the floor and kitchen to be shared. Sometimes there are also so-called “blocks” in dormitories, where several rooms are located in one block and kitchen and facilities are then shared within this block. As a rule, rooms offered in dormitories, especially in those for international students, are furnished.

The main advantage of living in a student house is, of course, socialisation: you can always eat dinner together with roommates or neighbours, meet people from different countries, throw parties, ask for help and simply make friends.

Having many students under one roof can certainly also be a disadvantage when there are just too many noisy parties held while you need to write your first paper; or when your idea of a clean kitchen seems to differ substantially from the perception of your neighbours.

Often there is a deposit that you need to pay before you move in, which would be returned after you move out (unless you leave your room in a very poor condition).

Shared student flat or independent apartment

If you do not want to live in university student houses and would rather find a room yourself, here is where you can look:

- Local newspapers
- Internet (there are always specific websites where ads are placed or forums where people post information about available rooms). Note that sometimes there might be a small fee for using the online room-search services.

Usually those websites are also in local languages, rather than in English.

- Message boards inside university buildings



Housing on the private market leaves you two options: shared student flat or independent apartment. By choosing the latter, you would certainly have more privacy and comfort, but generally this option is rather expensive.

Sharing a flat with other students is very common in a lot of European countries – there can be small shared flats or huge apartments with more than ten people of both genders living together. As a rule, an apartment belongs to a landlord, who rents out rooms to students, and he/she is the one with who you will sign a contract with and who you would contact in case of any problems. A deposit is also usually envisaged.

While living together with other, often local, students indeed helps to get to know the culture of the host country and make close friends, it is often the case that landlords prefer not to rent rooms to students for a period less than a year. Moreover, in a lot of cases, rooms on the private market come unfurnished, though not necessarily. Sometime is it possible to find a short-term let apartment, when, for example, a local student goes abroad for an internship, and rents out his/her room for a short period of

time. You might also consider that option yourself if you know you will return to your host university for the third semester.

If you would like to have more privacy, there is always an option of living by yourself in a private apartment, but it can be quite costly, and in most cases do not expect it to be a large flat.

Tips:

- 🌐 When you check prices for shared flats or single apartments, pay attention whether utilities costs (water, gas, heating, telephone, Internet, etc.) are included in the stated price or if you would need to pay for them extra.
- 🌐 Note, that in some countries the rent is charged weekly (in the UK, for instance), while in others the price is per month.
- 🌐 In some cities it is not hard to find housing, but it might be somewhat problematic in others. Therefore, make up your mind about which housing option you would like to use and start looking for a place to live well before the semester begins. Once classes have started, there are not many rooms left.
- 🌐 Make sure you carefully read the rent contract conditions, dormitory rules (pay attention if it mentions special arrangements for changing rooms, moving out earlier than planned, etc.) and payment requirements.
- 🌐 It is often the case that students from abroad do not have a chance to actually visit the flat or student house room before they arrive. Do not hesitate to ask the contact person for pictures, check the house location of the map to estimate how close it is to university, and ask about public transport possibilities.

AFTER ARRIVAL

Registering with local authorities

In many countries there is no need to register at the local authorities but please make sure to check this before you go to the country.



In some cases the university clarifies all these details and you do not have to do anything. But please ask your course coordinator to make sure.

In Europe, both EU and non-EU citizens should register with local authorities when they come to a new country to study. This is done for the population census as well as security purposes. The course coordinator or international office staff will assist and inform you how it is done. In most cases you should present a rent agreement, your ID (passport) and letter of acceptance to the university. When you leave the country at the end of the semester you should de-register with the same local authorities.

In South Korea...

You should register with the local authorities. Sometimes this is arranged with the help of university and you do not need to be worried about it. Ask a local to help you in order to avoid language problems.

Insurance

All students should make sure they have travel insurance. It is your personal responsibility to take care of your medical insurance for the entire period of studies abroad. Sometimes universities have



Sometimes universities have special arrangements with national insurance companies, in which case you may get a discount. Be sure to ask your project coordinator.

Make sure...

... your insurance covers you everywhere in the world, whether you go to a conference in Seoul, or on a short weekend break to Mallorca or if you just go back home for a couple of weeks.

Bank account

Opening a bank account in your host country is highly recommended, since your credit card might not be accepted everywhere, plus, withdrawing money from a foreign bank account might result in paying additional fees. In general, to open a bank account you will need to present the following: passport, proof of financial situation and current address. It helps to bring a native speaker as support.

Good to know...

Banks sometimes have offers for university students, so compare the offers before you sign up for opening an account. Some banks even provide you with some 50\$-100\$ cash reward if you open an account with them. International students are usually given a simple debit card with no overdraft option.

N.B. Opening a bank account might take some time. Take this into consideration when you plan your finances, especially in the first weeks following your arrival.

Enrolment/ Matriculation

Most universities require foreign students to be officially enrolled (registered) before they start their classes. The enrolment process is a means of recording student data and providing important information to students. During the enrolment process students also declare that they will abide by the regulations of the university concerned. This procedure is often completed with university's student administration office at the beginning of the semester, or shortly before. Your coordinators will inform you of the formalities. In some universities you might need a high school transcript in order to be enrolled.

Upon your enrolment you will receive a student card which, in some universities, is not only your student ID, but also a cafeteria and a library card. After you finish your studies, there is usually a university de-registration procedure, which the coordinators will inform you about.

STUDY

The projects offer high quality courses, in most cases, designed specifically for the selected participants. Therefore, please be ready for intensive study, challenging tasks and a large amount of independent academic research.



In order to make your studies successful always follow the deadlines for any type of study projects (papers, presentations, essays, reports, etc.) closely. Failing to comply with deadlines, results in a lower grade.

Most universities exercise an attendance policy; hence, you can only miss a certain number of classes. With a lot of classes, attendance is compulsory and therefore failing to comply with the attendance policy can result in a lower grade. Your professors or coordinators will explain the attendance policy in the beginning of each class. If, due to illness or other special circumstances, you are unable to attend a class, please notify your professor. If you are likely to be absent for an extended period of time, you should notify the coordinator.

Often you will also receive a syllabus – a study plan for every class with the professor’s office hours and contact information, lecture plan, final assessment procedure, bibliography and recommended reading, etc.

Cheating is not tolerated at any point of study process and examinations. Cheating can result in expulsion from the project.

A lot of universities also use electronic learning systems, which are online intranet portals where professors can put course information, weekly timetable, reading lists, etc., and students can download documents for classes (assignment descriptions, examples of presentations, questions for examinations, etc.). Sometimes these online portals can also be used to organise group work, submit completed assignments and monitor your grades.

All participating universities have a short introduction project before starting the classes, as part of which you will be shown around the university and the structure of the courses will be explained. This introduction is usually very useful because it provides answers to a lot of questions and you gain a clearer understanding of what is expected from you.

Academic writing

Note that reference styles vary according to discipline or even geographic location, so be sure to find out which style is accepted at your project. You will be able to obtain this information from your professors, academic advisers or course coordinators.

It is extremely important to follow the rules of reference closely when you write any type of academic work in order to avoid plagiarism. All universities treat plagiarism as a major failure to comply with university rules. Punishment can be very severe and can even result in expulsion from the project.

When you work on your papers, Bachelor or Master Thesis, please make sure to read the guidelines for writing and documentation of research thoroughly. There is no common academic writing standard for the different projects, but there is certainly one for every course. Be attentive and ask your academic supervisor.

Some universities also organise a defence (oral presentation) of your final master thesis, while others require several



printed copies for the archives. The course coordinators are responsible for providing you with a detailed description of what is expected from you, deadlines, and how you should conduct your research.

Language learning

Let your coordinator know if you would like to attend a language course at your university, as sometimes there are special offers for project participants. We very much encourage you to take the opportunity to study a language whilst in the respective country.

You might also consider other options to improve your language skills. International clubs at universities often offer “tandems” where you are paired up with a native speaker of the desired language who, in turn, wants to improve his/her skills in your mother tongue. This can be an exciting and useful experience at no extra cost.

Tip: do not be afraid to use your newly acquired language skills, even though you might not feel confident yet – as a rule, local people appreciate your attempts to speak their language and will be willing to help you.

OCEANS NETWORK

When you are accepted for one of the projects and have received confirmation, you are welcome to become a member of the “Organisation for Co-operation

Exchange And Networking among Students” in short the **OCEANS Network**. It is open to all students and alumni of any nationality. Simply register with [OCEANS Network](#). OCEANS Network is run by the students and alumni themselves with the help of a service provider company. The Network is funded by the European Commission.

As a member you can participate in the community by engaging in forum discussions, join different groups, learn about planned events, find fellow students and graduates and interact with them. The website is constantly updated and new features are added. Members of OCEANS are regularly given opportunities to take part in a variety of competitions, networking projects, attend international events promoting international education. Often travel scholarships are given for those who are motivated to further



develop the Network. Members of the OCEANS Network do not only benefit from the community, but are also welcome to help shape it. There is a regular call for proposals for small scale events where you can present your idea of a workshop, seminar, meeting or any type of activity that you would like to engage in with other members and receive some financial support from the Network. OCEANS is an excellent networking instrument, make a use of it!

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Realise IT4 Kick off event in Berlin 4-6 September 2014

The REALISE IT 4 Launch Conference hosted five talented teams of entrepreneurs on September 4-6 in Berlin, Germany. The five teams-- Socially Delicious, Call Waiter, Smart CV, Apply Yourself, and Expericity (fir City Lab)-- were launched through an intensive weekend of training, talks, and socialization. The event was hosted at BetaHaus, a space crafted for innovation and collaboration. The venue provided the perfect backdrop for the teams to develop their ideas into projects. The...

more



Welcome to OCEANS Network

OCEANS Network – is a network for students and alumni of specific [bi-lateral exchange programmes](#) between the European Union on the one side and the industrialised countries ([Australia](#), [Canada](#), [Japan](#), [New Zealand](#), [South Korea](#) and the [USA](#)) on the other side. The student exchanges aim at promoting better relations between the people, improving the intercultural understanding and knowledge transfer.

OCEANS Network is run by the students and alumni themselves with the help of a service provider and it is funded by the [European Commission](#).

Members can [join workshops](#), [conferences](#) and [higher education fairs](#) all over the world, travel and accommodation scholarships included!



Follow OCEANS Network



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on **LinkedIn**: <http://www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=3717609>










on **Facebook**: <http://www.facebook.com/OCEANSnetwork>

For more information about upcoming events, check [Activities](#) to Join and Announcements on the website's main page (<http://www.oceans-network.eu/>)

FINISHING YOUR EXCHANGE

Leaving the country of study

Do not forget to:

-  Inform your host university about your departure
-  Collect rent deposit (if applicable)
-  De-register with local authorities
-  Return library books
-  Close bank account if necessary
-  Cancel mobile phone, internet contracts
-  Collect certificates confirming your attendance

In South Korea...

Make sure you thank, and bring some small presents for your coordinator and the International Relations Board – this is very important in Korean culture!

Returning home



This section is aimed at those students who will be soon going home after completing a project.


Most people do not realise that

returning home after a long stay in another country might be as challenging as dealing with the culture shock while being abroad. When preparing to go abroad you expect a lot of things, people, culture, food etc. to be different, but when you return home you expect everything to be very familiar, and thus students are not usually prepared to experience a “re-entry” or “reverse” culture shock. Certainly re-integration back to ones own culture differs from person to person, but being aware of common re-entry challenges, and hence setting the right expectations, could help you to diminish the reverse culture shock.

Back home...

You might have to write a report and hold a small presentation on what you have learned during your time abroad to inform and recruit future participants.

Possible aspects of reverse culture shock:

-  Unrealistic expectations and idealisation of returning home



- Feeling of “being left out” and lagging behind on what has been happening home
- Misunderstandings with friends and family who might not show enough interest to the stories you tell about your adventures
- Inability to use your newly acquired skills and knowledge immediately
- Lack of interest in activities that you were involved in before you went on the project
- Unpreparedness to find your friends and family changed and for them to see “the new you”

Recommendations how to diminish reverse culture shock

- Think about it. Prepare for the re-adjustment process and be aware of potential challenges of the upcoming period of change.
- Prepare for “catching up” with what is happening in your country and in the lives of your friends and family.
- Keep in mind that even though people might politely listen to your stories about your experience abroad, you might soon discover that they are not overly interested. Be ready to discuss other subjects and show interest in their news.
- Do not be too critical. Refrain from judgements and comparisons “it is better over there”.
- Do not expect everything to be just as it was before you left.
- Talk to people who might be going through the same emotional phase. Contacting your former project classmates or communicating with peers via OCEANS Network might be useful.
- Reflect about how you have changed during your time abroad. Think about which skills you would like to use now and which interests you want to pursue. Come up with concrete career goals and steps to further enhance your personal development according to your new attitude, and which would help to incorporate the positive aspects of your international experience into your life at home.



INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

When you prepare to move abroad to study, it is always advisable to find out some facts about the city and country in advance: main attractions, dominant religion, large industries in the region, transport networks, proximity to other places, population statistics, etc. Moreover, it is important to think about cultural essentials of the country you are going to. Preparing yourself for cultural peculiarities and the mentality in your destination country might help to avoid misunderstandings and potential conflicts. Besides, being aware of what exactly makes cultures differ from one another would be of assistance when dealing with your classmates from all over the world and when reflecting about your own culture.



Cultural dimensions



There is a famous quotation: “A fish only discovers its need for water when it is no longer in it. Our own culture is like water to a fish. It sustains us. We live and breathe through it”². Indeed, when we live in our own culture, we might not realise what makes it different from others and how it affects us. Culture in a sense can be compared to an iceberg: the top of it is above water and thus can be seen – those are visible culture elements (art, literature, architecture, holidays, cuisine, music, etc.), but in fact, most of the iceberg is hidden under water – those are non-visible culture elements (values, beliefs, habits, attitudes).

Renowned scholars such as Geert Hofstede, Frans Trompenaars, Edward Hall and others have researched cultural differences by defining certain dimensions that make cultures different. A few of the most important dimensions to be considered during your exchange are:

Individualism vs. collectivism

While in some societies individual work and responsibility is very encouraged, in others collective achievements are given priority. In more individualistic countries individual rights are supreme; people are encouraged to express their individuality; people in

² Trompenaars F. *Riding the waves of culture*, 2006

those societies tend to have a lot of relations with others, but they might not be very deep or intense. In more collectivist societies, friendship and family ties tend to be stronger. Group goals in this case might prevail over the individual desires. In general, Russia, Asian and Latin American cultures tend to more collective-oriented, than Australia, North European and North American societies.

Power Distance

This dimension signifies the level of perceived equality/inequality between people and also reflects the importance of hierarchy in a given society. In countries with low power distance people usually do not emphasise differences in status, wealth or power, but value equality. Superiors can also be criticised. Also, the perception of hierarchy in those countries is, as a rule, low; less stress is put on politeness and etiquette norms. Australia, the USA and Europe are characterised as societies with lower power distance; however, there is a distinction within Europe. In Southern Europe the power distance index is higher than in Northern countries. Arab and Asian countries, East African societies, Russia turn out to be countries with high power distance, which means that members of society with less power accept and expect the unequal distribution of power. For instance, professor's views are rarely challenged or questioned by students, but rather accepted, due to his higher status.



Avoidance of Uncertainty

Cultures differ in their perception of uncertainty and acceptance of ambiguity. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance scores tend to be very rules-oriented and favour thorough planning. Their existing laws and established regulations are valued unconditionally (the USA, Great Britain, China, Sweden, and Japan). Representatives of societies with lower uncertainty avoidance scores are more eager to experiment, take risks, and tolerate improvisation (Russia, Eastern European countries, Latin countries, Greece). Most Western European countries show scores in the middle.

Indirect vs. Direct Communication

There can be significant differences in how directly members of certain cultures express themselves compared to those belonging to other cultures. In societies which

prefer a more direct method of communication (the US, Germany, the Netherlands), people are used to openly state their opinion, even if it involves criticism. People in countries that tend towards more indirect models of communication (Russia, Japan, China) avoid direct confrontation and open criticism, and are more concerned about preserving harmony in relations and “saving face”.

Relationship vs. Task Orientation

In some cultures people concentrate on the task right away and focus on its completion (USA, Germany), while for other cultures it is important to get to know your partners first and maintain good relations (France, Japan, China, Russia). Representatives of the latter tend to engage in a small conversation before they actually start a project discussion, it is important for them to have a pleasant working atmosphere.

Time Management

Here it is possible to distinguish between linear time management and parallel time management. For countries tending towards linear time handling, it is typical to value planning, to arrange most issues by appointments and deadlines, to confirm the decisions discussed in writing, to do things step by step; punctuality is very important. Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Scandinavian countries, Japan, and the USA tend to be more monochrome (linear) in their time management. African countries, South Asian states, Middle East and Latin American countries are inclined to be polychrome (parallel), which means that many tasks are handled at once. Changes of deadlines and unplanned meetings are considered more normal. As a rule, people in these cultures do not pay much attention to punctuality.



You should realise that differentiation of cultures according to these dimensions is not absolute, and that the tendencies describe prevailing preferences. Concrete context, personal character, together with the cultural background all influence people's behaviour. However, being aware of cultural differences helps you prevent misunderstandings and conflicts, to better understand the

reasons for certain actions and achieve more effective results in any type of intercultural teamwork³.

Culture shock

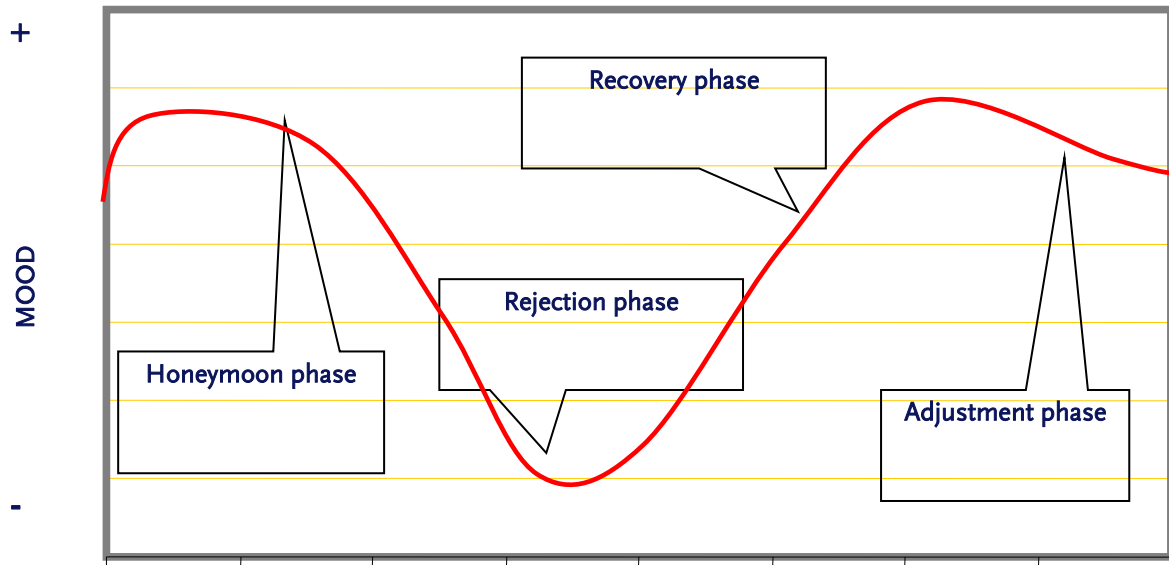
Extensive research conducted in the field of the psychological effects of living abroad shows that there might be several phases of cultural adjustment:

1. Honeymoon phase: You are fascinated by the new country, are excited and tend to idealise it. All the differences between your own culture and the host culture are seen as positive; you take pictures of every pretty building, try local food and drinks, discover nice places and feel very content.
2. Rejection phase: You settle down, fall into a daily routine and begin to encounter misunderstandings, feel incompetent and disillusioned, and start seeing the host country's disadvantages. Local people start to seem unpredictable, unfriendly or ignorant. You might start missing home where everything, just all of a sudden, seems better. It is natural during this phase to think in terms of stereotypes and conclude that all Germans/Dutch/Spanish/Swedes... are rude/reserved/crazy/stupid/snobby...
3. Recovery phase: You begin to observe the cultural differences, accept them and even sometimes adopt certain behaviour patterns from the new culture. You start feeling like you belong to the new community; you understand how things are done and feel less isolated.
4. Adjustment phase: You feel normal and get used to the routine in the foreign country. Rather than using stereotypes, you begin to understand the reasons why those stereotypes exist and see the reasons for certain national behaviour patterns.

No doubt, everyone experiences different phases of culture shock at different periods of time; the phases might switch or last for different lengths of time. The intensity of culture shock also depends on personality type, previous experience, financial conditions, family relations, level of education and language skills.

³ If you would like to know more about intercultural communication, you can read the following books:

Hall, Edward. T./ Hall, Mildred R.(1990): *Understanding Cultural Differences*, Yarmouth.
Hofstede, Geert (1991): *Cultures and Organizations. Software of the Mind*, London.
Trompenaars, F., Hampden-Turner, C. (1997). *Riding the waves of culture: Understanding cultural diversity in business*. London.



There are several hints that can help you to prevent a negative experience of culture shock:

- 🌐 Study the host country's language and history, and participate in community life. The more you know, the more you try, the more you will be able to understand the reasons for certain behaviour or traditions.
- 🌐 Be positive, optimistic and do not forget to maintain a sense of humour. Your complaints and criticism will not change your host countries' culture and environment, just see it from the bright side, and do not take it too seriously.
- 🌐 Keep in touch with your friends and family at home. With all the technology available now, it is very easy to update your beloved ones on what is going on in your life, share your impressions and hear their news. This will help you prevent feelings of loneliness, the sentiment of being behind on your normal home life and not knowing what is going on there anymore.
- 🌐 Exercise. Without you noticing it, your body and brain are under significant stress when you study (which is already hard) in a foreign country (double hard) in a foreign language (very challenging). Help your body maintain its immune system by doing some sport. This can improve your mood.
- 🌐 Be active. Besides doing all the study assignments on time, try to manage your time in an effective way so that there is time for extracurricular activities, social life, meetings with new friends and little trips.

- Take some time to think about yourself and what you are going through, to figure out what bothers you exactly, what the specific reasons for your difficulties are. Calm reflection can help you see what you personally can do to make your abroad experience pleasant.

GLOSSARY

Bachelor/Master/Doctorate – The most commonly used academic degrees throughout the world. The European higher education is primarily organised in this three cycle education system (bachelor-master-doctorate), introduced with the Bologna process succeeded by the EHEA (=European Higher Education Area) in order to make the education systems more easily comparable.

ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, a European credit system which details the study load of each course, including contact hours (lectures, seminars and study groups), time spent completing papers and assignments, and preparing for examinations. Credits obtained in a European degree are called ECTS credits – one year of full-time studies will normally entitle you to 60 ECTS credits.

ICI-ECP is an abbreviation for Industrialised Countries Instrument – Education Cooperation Programme and is the name for all bilateral projects in education between the EU and Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea.

IELTS – stands for *International English Language Testing System*. This test was prepared by the University of Cambridge and assesses the communicative skills in English in two modules – Academic and General training. (www.ielts.org)

Joint degree is defined as a single diploma issued by at least two of the institutions offering an integrated study programme.

Multiple degree is defined as two or more nationally-recognised diplomas issued officially by two or more institutions involved in an integrated study programme. Delivery of joint vs. multiple degrees depends on the national legislations.

Plagiarism - using someone else's phrases, words or ideas and representing them as one's own original work in academic writing; or falsification of the results of data collection and analysis. Plagiarism is absolutely not tolerated at any university.

Pre-paid mobile phone – if you already have a mobile phone, you can simply buy a SIM card from almost any cellular provider. This means that you have no contract and no monthly payments, but simply pay per minute or SMS. To “top-up” money on your phone you can buy pre-paid cards or use an online payment system. Staff at any mobile phone shop is able to explain to you how it all works.

Residence permit - Official permit, which allows the holder to live in a country for a certain amount of time. For students, a permit is normally issued on the basis of enrolment at a university there.

Schengen zone – European countries which have signed the Schengen Agreement and thus abolished border controls. Likewise, a visa granted for any Schengen Agreement signatory country is valid in all other countries that signed the treaty. Sometimes only national visa are issued without the right to travel. Not all EU members have signed the Schengen Agreement and not all Schengen Treaty countries are members of the EU.

TEP and TDP – The Transatlantic Exchange Partnership (TEP) and Transatlantic Degree Partnership (TDP) **together form the EU-Canada mobility programme**: The Agreement focuses on four activities to benefit higher education students, vocational education and training teachers, trainers, administrative staff, and youth.

TOEFL - stands for Test of English as a Foreign Language. This examination was developed in the USA and measures the ability of non-native speakers of English to use and understand English as it is spoken, written, and heard in university settings (www.toefl.org). Both TOEFL and IELTS exams are internationally recognised, and scores from both are valid for two years from the date of the exam.

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