

Guidance – Have a Successful Exchange Semester

Introduction

An overseas stay can be summarized in three phases:

1. Before
2. During
3. After

Being aware of these three distinct phases and knowing what to do in each phase to enhance the value of your stay increases the chances of a successful and meaningful experience.

Before

Good preparations before the trip will allow you to have a much higher quality experience during your stay than if you don't prepare. While there should be room for spontaneity, having a clear picture of what you want to achieve allows spontaneity to occur at the right moment and be much more rewarding. Sometimes, it's said that LUCK = preparation meeting the right opportunity. Test this theory during your trip!

Consider the following questions before your trip. The answers will prepare you to have the "right" perspective during your stay, enabling you to be as effective (in a positive way) in your learning and personal development as possible.

- What do you want to achieve from the stay from an academic, personal, social, networking, and professional perspective?
- Purpose of the trip?
- What goals do you want to achieve?
- What do you want to learn in terms of studies, language, culture, geography, etc.?
- Who do you want to meet and get to know? Be brave and try to contact and book meetings with some interesting people, preferably someone "impossible" to challenge yourself.
- What environments do you want to explore and experience?
- Which of the following skills do you want to develop during the stay, and what do you want to say about yourself in each skill when you return home? If you articulate this for yourself, you will have a goal that helps you achieve development more effectively. If you have clearly formulated your desired change for yourself, you will "automatically" use arising situations to strive towards them and thereby develop in the desired direction.

CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE You possess a deep knowledge of your own culture in the global context. You also acquire knowledge about other cultures during your mobility. This means that you know about some cultural characteristics, history, values, beliefs, and behaviors of another ethnic or cultural group.

SOCIAL SKILLS You hold the skills to listen, observe, and relate, as well as communicate and connect with people from other cultural backgrounds. You have the ability to transmit and defend

effectively arguments, ideas, feelings, or information through verbal and non-verbal messages. You are open and keen to interact in intercultural environments. You can effectively interact with people from other cultural backgrounds.

CURIOSITY / OPENNESS ATTITUDES You are tolerant and respectful of cultural differences and ambiguity, and you have an open and curious attitude towards intercultural opportunities and discoveries.

DISCIPLINE AWARENESS You possess specific higher education knowledge (higher education system, methods, and field-related knowledge). In your field, you have the ability to acquire, analyze, and evaluate information using cultural references to think critically and solve practical learning problems.

COMMUNICATION IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES You acquire a sociolinguistic awareness and knowledge of (at least) a foreign language. You have the ability to transmit and defend effectively arguments, ideas, feelings, or information through verbal and non-verbal messages in (at least) a different language.

ADAPTABILITY TO CHANGE You have the ability to deal with changes and uncertainty and to adapt to new situations and new environments easily. You have the capacity to use acquired knowledge to create adaptable solutions based on open-mindedness and flexible attitudes.

TEAMWORK IN DIVERSE ENVIRONMENTS You hold the skills to listen, observe, and relate, as well as communicate and work collaboratively with people from other cultural backgrounds.

PLANNING & ORGANIZING You have the ability to set goals and priorities through the selection and distribution of tasks and resources. This encompasses time management, organization, responsibility, and self-reliance. You have the ability to acquire, analyze, and evaluate information, using cultural references for planning, organizational, and decision-making purposes.

CREATIVITY You have the ability to think outside of the box. You have the capacity to use acquired knowledge to extend your access to the unknown and express yourself creatively.

During

Once you are on-site, time will fly. It's good to have thought through the questions/plans in point one before the trip so that they can be implemented and not "invented" on the spot. One can say that the preparations in phase 1 determine the quality and outcome in phase 2 (and phase 3, which we'll get to).

- For example, booking meetings in advance with some people you wish to meet can lead to exciting encounters that otherwise wouldn't happen. This doesn't exclude spontaneous meetings, but they can lead to spontaneous meetings in an environment where you meet people you want to meet (luck = preparation meeting the right opportunity).
- Keep a daily logbook and record video and/or audio in various situations you encounter so that you can bring the experiences with you when you return home.
- Make short notes every day based on the purposes, goals, plans, and skills you want to achieve/develop and describe how, where, and with whom/in what context you developed them.

- This will allow you to build a rich foundation for your CV, cover letter, and interview situations where you bring to life how the development of your personality, experiences, and the skills you particularly developed during the stay actually took place. This makes your story more authentic and credible.

After

When you return home, phase 3 will be the result of the planning in phase 1 and the implementation in phase 2. With good preparations and a planned and spontaneous implementation, you will bring home a rich harvest of experiences. You will see the contrast in your personality and skills before and after the stay, so be sure to immediately articulate and describe the differences as they are an important part of your "storytelling" for how you developed during the stay. This description is the "fruit" of what you "planted" in phase 1 and "cultivated" in phase 2. It's a very exciting task to do when you return home, but it's very easy to forget and then, after a while, difficult to recreate.

Summary

1. Prepare well.
2. Implement your plan and be spontaneous at the same time.
3. Consider the stay "completed" only when you are satisfied with your documentation of the experiences. Work through the description of your personal development and the development of your skills. Write your story about how it happened and what difference the trip made. Make it clear to yourself, and thereby to others, what difference the trip made by creating vivid stories from the country/culture you visited!

Have a great trip!