

ICES High School Study Abroad Academic Guide



Talk to your counselor

Notify your counselor of your plan to study abroad, as early as possible. Even if you intend to study abroad in a year or two, the earlier you bring this up the better prepared you will be.

Your counselor may or may not have experience with students going abroad, so don't be discouraged if you're the first student to propose this – you will be prepared with the information in this guide. Show that you appreciate the help your counselor gives and take the leadership role in defining what type of program you want to create for yourself.

CREATE YOUR STUDY PLAN

Now that you have your counselor excited to send you abroad, collaborate on your academic plan. Here are some planning recommendations:

1. **Review your academic records:** See which requirements you still need to fulfill graduation requirements. Which courses can you take prior to study abroad or after you return? Doubling up on classes before or after means you will have more time for cultural exploration abroad!
2. **Alternatives:** There may be courses you cannot take at your school before or after your study abroad experience. Ask for acceptable alternatives for fulfilling these requirements, such as:
 - Summer classes
 - Community college courses
 - Online courses

Your school may already have connections with other local institutions or online course programs to suggest. There are some available programs that have widely recognized and ample selections of online high school courses.

If you decide to follow courses outside of your normal studies while abroad, follow no more than ***two courses total***. Students taking outside courses who do not manage their time properly will be asked to drop their outside courses.

3. **Get credit while abroad:** Ask if your school is willing to assign credit for coursework you complete while abroad.

4. **Independent study:** You may be able to follow some of your U.S. high school courses while abroad. In this case, your teachers agree for you to independently study material that your class will be covering while you are abroad. If you choose to do independent study, again, be sure to take on no more than ***two courses total*** outside of your host school.
5. **Propose a project:** Ask if your counselor or teachers will honor credit for a student project. Taking on a meaningful project like this will also help you get more out of your experience and will look great as part of a college application and your resume! Here are some ideas:
 - Become an ICES Global Ambassador – Motivate your fellow classmates to study abroad. After you return, collaborate with ICES staff, give presentations about your experience at a school event and in your classes.
 - Make a special assignment – Ask your English, foreign language or history teachers for a study abroad-themed assignment, like an essay or a class presentation.
 - Write a blog – Decide specific themes to cover and how often you will post.
6. **Write it down:** Record your study plan, and sign this with your guidance counselor. Make two copies – one for you and one for the school.

SAT/ACT exams

Students are encouraged to take these exams while in the U.S. and not while studying abroad. The studying that goes into these exams can be time-consuming and detract from a student's experience in the host country. After all, you didn't travel the world to have your head buried in books! Furthermore, availability of these exams abroad is limited both in locations and in testing schedules.

Transfer coursework

Explain to your academic counselor that you will send this in once available, but you won't have your confirmed schedule until after you arrive in the host country. You will not have contact with your host school or receive your schedule prior to your arrival. Your host school is not responsible for communicating directly with your U.S. school.

Discuss what courses could be assigned credit. For example, will a biology class taken abroad fulfill your science requirement, or does your school absolutely require chemistry? Ask for alternatives to expand your opportunities for credits. However, don't expect that all of these requirements can be fulfilled, and plan to get credit using the other tips listed in this guide.

Consider your language level. Your U.S. school will decide if you can comprehend enough of the target language to consider awarding you credit for the coursework.

Lastly, be clear about what documentation your U.S. high school will require of you to consider honoring academic credit. See 'Keep Records' below for ideas of what you should compile. Your host school may not offer all of the information that your U.S. school requests, so be sure to have a Plan B. Students are responsible for requesting and obtaining the documentation needed from the host school.

If there is no equivalent for a course that you took abroad or the number of credits it would qualify for at your U.S. high school, find similar courses in your local college or university to serve as a reference. See 'Grading' to prepare for the documentation that you may receive from your host school.

HIGH SCHOOL ABROAD

Your Host School

Just as each school in the U.S. is different, you will have a unique experience in your host school and in your classroom. Don't think "better" or "worse" – think "different." ICES students should welcome the challenge to find their way in the host country's culture – rather than expecting others to adapt to American culture!

Participation

This is the bulk of what your school expects from you, so prepare to share! While it is impressive to pull off academic feats, what your school is really interested in is your role as a *cultural ambassador*. Your presence strengthens the school's diversity and gives others a glimpse into another way of life.

Even as an academically motivated student, it can be hard to achieve mastery over the material in the classroom, especially because it is in a different language. Let go of some perfectionism and remember what is required of you: *participate, share, and do the best that you can.*

Obey all school rules and be respectful of your teachers and fellow classmates. While many basic rules will be the same, some may vary, and you will learn what is expected of you in your host school.

You may or may not be assigned the same work as your classmates. You could be asked to assist the host school's English teachers or prepare a presentation about your home. Offer to share before being asked. If your class is studying English phrases, offer to give a lesson on your favorite phrases!

Be conscious of putting enough energy into your host school, especially if you are balancing outside classes and independent study. Manage your study time wisely so that it doesn't interfere with school or host family life. If you are required to be online at certain times for online tests, these must not conflict with your host school or your host family schedule. Students that do not properly manage outside classes will be required to drop one or both classes.

Curriculum

This will vary greatly depending on your host country and school. Some differences may be:

- Material is more or less demanding than you're used to in certain subjects
- Student independence and responsibilities differ
- Student-teacher interactions are more or less formal than in the U.S.
- Number and scale of homework, quizzes, tests and projects will vary
- Courses may cover material uncommon in American classes – learn a new perspective!

You will receive your schedule when you arrive at your host school. You should assume that you will *not* select your courses – these are assigned depending on school resources, requirements, your language level and academic record. Anticipate scheduling adjustments within the first few days of school.

It is not the school's responsibility to offer you courses in English, advanced placements or courses for a specific track like an IB program. You will not have U.S. history or U.S. government. On the other hand, you may have interesting classes not offered at your home school either, like meditation in Thailand, or sports theory in Germany.

Even if you arrive in the beginning of fall, it may not be the beginning of the school year in your host country. Some countries' academic years are quite different from the U.S., starting close to the beginning of the calendar year. Your host school may divide the school year into terms or quarters rather than semesters.

Language

Are you nervous about understanding all of your classes in a foreign language? You won't grasp everything due to the language difference, but as your language skills improve, you'll understand more and more. Remember, you are not expected to follow the same pace as the local students. *Participate and do the best you can.*

Some country programs require a minimum level of fluency in the local language to participate; these requirements are listed on each country's information

page.

In areas that require students to study two foreign languages in school, you may be required to enroll in an additional foreign language class. This is typical in European countries. You may also have a class for foreign students to learn the local language, if there are other international students at your school.

If you are enrolled in an English class, this will likely be English *as a second language*, rather than English literature. Don't assume you can't learn anything in an English class though – often there is a greater focus on grammar in English classes abroad than here in the U.S. Who knows, you may learn what a gerund and phrasal verb are! You could also be the classroom's native speaker assistant, which is a fun role that many ICES alumni have had.

Keep records

Even if you aren't planning on transferring credit to your U.S. school, these may come in handy! Request and collect documentation from your host school and teachers. Make sure that all is collected and in your possession, before you depart and before your school closes for vacation. This is a student responsibility, and it can be difficult for you to obtain records once you have returned home.

Key items for your academic records:

- Profile sheet of your host school – create one if not available from the school
- Course schedule, syllabi and a description of each class
- Samples of your work including homework and tests
- Certificate of participation
- Certificate of any language exams taken outside of your school
- Details that your U.S. school may need, like pass/fail marks or grades (if available), or chair hours
- Summary of participation from your teachers – your teachers may not be used to requests like this so ask politely. These make good references too.

Grading

Grading systems in other countries differ. You may receive a number rather than a letter grade, or comments on your performance rather than an assigned mark.

In some countries it will be rare to receive a perfect mark even with great effort. This is particularly true in some European countries, where the highest marks are reserved only for truly exceptional work.

RETURNING HOME

Present your documentation

Meet with your U.S. counselor and bring your academic record with you, as well as a copy of the signed study plan that you created with your guidance counselor.

In addition to the documentation that you collected abroad, you will receive an ICES certificate with a summary of your participation and comments on your performance in school and your host family home. To ensure the most accurate and complete details, send your host school schedule and grade report to your ICES Study Abroad representative, and be sure to take part in the follow-up call after your return to the U.S.

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