

STUDY ABROAD STUDENT HANDBOOK

2022 - 2023

Welcome to your study abroad adventure!

This is the start of what could be the most exciting and memorable experience of your life. You could be spending a semester at one of our partner universities in Europe, North America, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Asia, or Latin America.

Not sure if this is for you? Take a look at these 10 reasons why you should study abroad:

1. You have the opportunity to **break out of your academic routine**, while still graduating in time.
2. You can **learn a new language**.
3. You will **get to know another culture** first-hand; their food, customs and traditions.
4. You will **make lifelong friends** from all over the world; locals as well as other international students.
5. You will **learn about yourself** and return home with new ideas and perspectives.
6. You will **get challenged academically**; you can prepare yourself for an international Master's.
7. You **don't necessarily spend more money** than at home! You only pay your tuition fee at VU Amsterdam.
8. You go beyond a purely academic experience to **develop skills** outside a classroom setting.
9. You will **be attractive to future employers**; you look motivated, independent and up for a challenge.
10. You will **start a once-in-a-lifetime experience**. Studying abroad opens a world of possibilities!

Still not sure if studying abroad is for you? You can always contact us with questions!

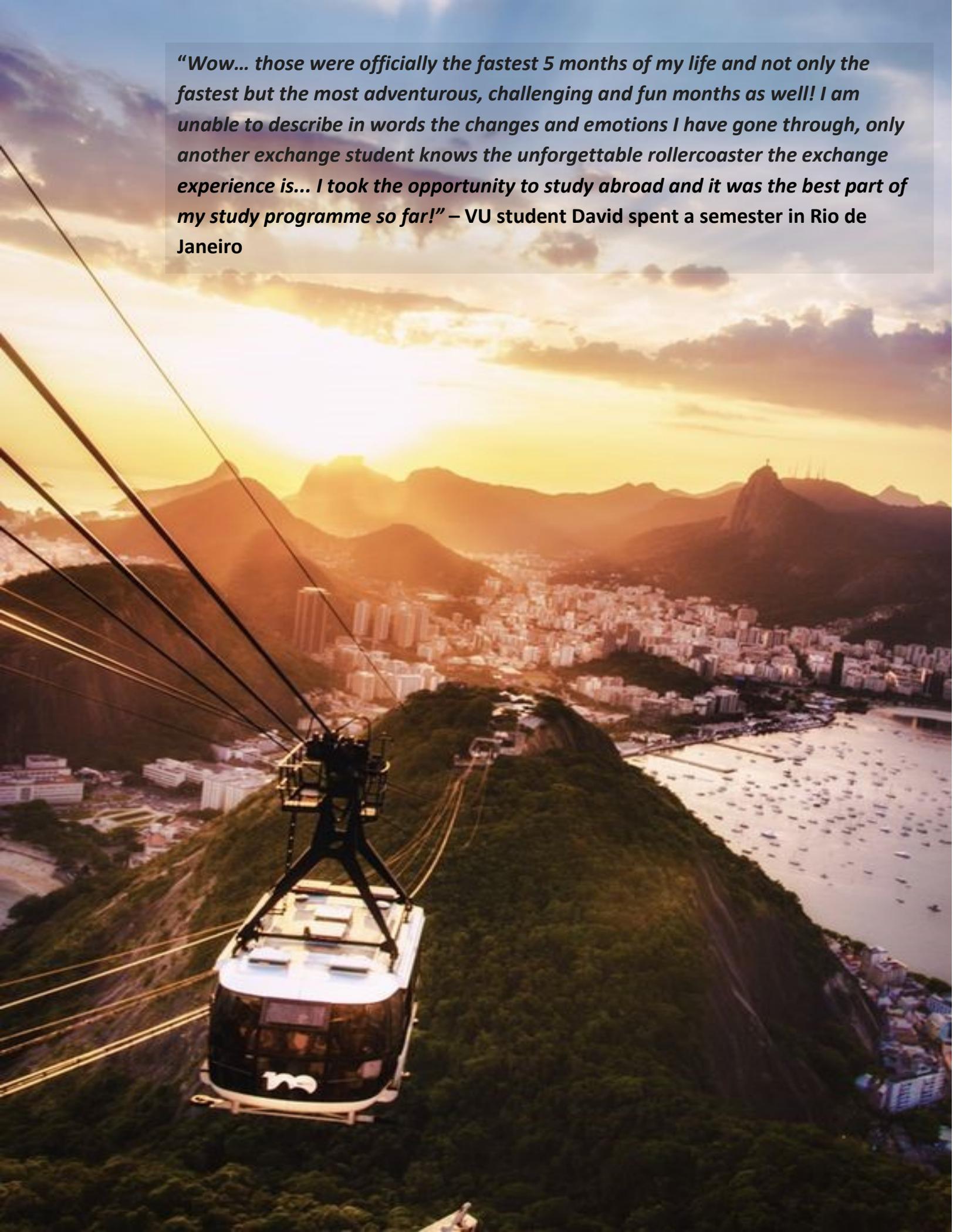
This handbook was designed to provide you with key information to inspire and support you throughout the study abroad process; from the moment you start preparing, until after you return home. More details can also be found on [this page](#).

We're looking forward to facilitating your international experience in our exchange programme!

Renee, Insa, Judith & Gioia

Outgoing Student Exchange Team - VU International Office

“Wow... those were officially the fastest 5 months of my life and not only the fastest but the most adventurous, challenging and fun months as well! I am unable to describe in words the changes and emotions I have gone through, only another exchange student knows the unforgettable rollercoaster the exchange experience is... I took the opportunity to study abroad and it was the best part of my study programme so far!” – VU student David spent a semester in Rio de Janeiro



What can you find in this handbook?

1. Meet the Outgoing Student Exchange Team	7
2. Studying abroad	8
2.1 Advantages exchange through VU International Office	8
2.2 No study delay	8
2.3 Information sessions	8
2.4 Application deadlines	9
2.5 International Travel Policy	9
2.6 Green Travel Grant	9
3. Where to go on exchange?	11
3.1 Where can I go?	11
3.2 Setting your priorities	11
4. When to go on exchange?	14
4.1 Bachelor students	14
4.2 Master's students	14
4.3 Study planning	15
4.4 Studying abroad with a disability	15
5. Application and selection process	18
5.1 Selection criteria	18
5.2 Selection method	18
5.3 Have you been selected?	18
5.5 Cancelling or making changes after selection	19
6. Between selection and exchange	21
6.1 Nomination at the host university	21
6.2 Application at the host university	21
6.3 Courses at the host university	22
6.4 Approval of courses by the Examination Board	22
6.5 Language skills	23
6.6 Pre-departure meeting	23

7. What else to prepare?	25
7.1 Travel documents.....	25
7.2 Visa.....	25
7.3 Insurance and vaccinations.....	25
7.4 Accommodation.....	25
8. Financial matters	28
8.1 Student grant/ OV student card	28
8.2 Scholarships	28
8.2.1 Erasmus+ scholarship.....	28
8.2.2 GLOBE Scholarship	29
8.2.3 HSP Scholarship.....	29
8.2.4 Green Travel Grant.....	29
8.2.5 Other scholarships	29
9. During exchange.....	31
9.1 Courses (changes)	31
9.2 Culture shock	31
9.3 Emotional well-being	31
9.4 Safety	32
9.5 In case of emergency	33
9.6 Early return	33
10. After your return	35
10.1 Transcript of records (<i>cijferlijst</i>).....	35
10.2 Share your exchange experiences in a report.....	35
10.3 Erasmus+ scholarship.....	35
11. Other international study options	38
11.1 Free mover.....	38
11.2 Internship abroad.....	38
11.3 Summer and winter school.....	38
11.4 Full degree programme abroad	38
11.5 Study trips	39
11.6 Buddy programme at VU	39
Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms	40

Appendix 2: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) 43

General..... 43

Application 43

Selection..... 44

Choosing courses 44

Application at host university 45

Costs and scholarships 46

Pre-departure..... 46

After your return..... 47

1. Meet the Outgoing Student Exchange Team

The Outgoing Student Exchange Team of VU International Office is part of the department of Student & Educational Affairs and facilitates the international mobility of students. The Outgoing Student Exchange Team consists of Renee, Insa, Gioia and Judith.

We are happy to help you with all the necessary steps if you are considering to study abroad. We organize information meetings, consultation hours and we are in charge of the application and selection process. If you have any questions about studying abroad, please feel free to contact us. We are here to answer all questions you might have, inform you about the possibilities and provide you guidance - not only before, but also during and after your stay abroad. We have also studied abroad ourselves, so feel free to ask about our own experiences as well!



Contact and consultation hours

Email: outgoing@vu.nl, or use the [contact form](#)
Phone: + 31 (0)20 59 85745 from 10:00 – 12:00 from Monday to Friday.
Consultation hours: Visit us in the Global Room (VU Main building, room 1A36 on Tuesdays between 12:30 and 13:30).

2. Studying abroad

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU Amsterdam) has partnership agreements with more than 200 universities worldwide. All of our partner universities have an excellent reputation and provide students with a rich academic and social environment. We are very proud of the quality and diversity of our partner universities. VU students have the opportunity to study at one of our partner universities for one semester. In return, we welcome a group of international exchange students at our university. This is what we call an *exchange*.

2.1 Advantages exchange through VU International Office

If you apply for an exchange through VU International Office, you will enjoy the following advantages:

1. You won't pay extra tuition fees at the partner university; you will only pay tuition at VU Amsterdam.
2. If you receive a student grant or loan from the Dutch government, you will continue to receive it (for international students: this only applies when you [meet all requirements](#)).
3. The courses that you complete at the partner university will count towards your degree, provided they meet the requirements of your examination board.
4. You can benefit from the services of VU International Office: we will select and nominate you at the partner university and will be there to help you with issues that may arise before, during or after your exchange.
5. If you meet the requirements, you might be eligible for an Erasmus+, HSP or GLOBE scholarship.

2.2 No study delay

You will take courses at a partner university that count towards your degree at VU Amsterdam. Note that the examination board of your faculty needs to approve the courses you want to take abroad. In this way, an exchange semester will not lead to study delay. However, if you have any doubts, please contact your academic advisor. If you are a Master's student, please carefully read through the relevant chapter ([4.2 Master's students](#)).

2.3 Information sessions

To inform you about the exchange programme, VU International Office organizes information sessions:

In April/May: information sessions for first-year students

This is a general presentation about studying abroad, the benefits, tips and tricks, plus a talk by a returned VU exchange student. The perfect start of your orientation!

In November: Study Abroad Weeks

During the Study Abroad Weeks, we will provide you with hands-on information about the selection criteria and the application procedure. You will also have the chance to visit different workshops and sessions and to ask us all your questions. It is **mandatory** to participate in the Study Abroad Week if you wish to apply for exchange.

Please check our [pages](#) regularly to be informed about the exact dates. During our consultation hours, we are available to advise you one-on-one about our partner universities, different regions, and how to choose your courses abroad.

2.4 Application deadlines

If you would like to go on exchange during the first or second semester of the 2023-2024 academic year, you should apply through our application module during the first or second selection round.

January: First round

The deadline for application in the first round is Thursday 5 January 2023 before 13:00h. You can apply as of Thursday 1 December 2022.

February: Second round

Places that remain after the first round will be offered in the second round. A list with available places will be published on our Canvas page. The deadline for the second round is Monday 20 February 2023 at 13:00h.

2.5 International Travel Policy

Going abroad is a valuable experience, but a solid preparation is essential. [This page](#) provides practicalities to prepare for your stay abroad and what to do or whom to contact in case of a crisis. Please carefully go over this checklist as a guideline to properly prepare yourself. Inform yourself thoroughly about safety and security conditions, health-related topics and entry requirements of your destination. VU follows the travel advice of the [Dutch government](#). We advise you to download [Reisapp](#) and/or register on the website of [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#). When you are registered, you will automatically receive a notification in case of crisis or if the travel advice for your destination changes. You can also register with the embassy on this page. In case of an unexpected termination of your stay abroad, we will do our utmost to support your return and avoid study delay as much as possible. Please note, VU Amsterdam is not financially responsible for any emergencies abroad.

2.6 Green Travel Grant

If you are doing an exchange semester in Europe (incl. UK) via VU International Office, you have the chance to receive a Green Travel Grant of up to 185 EUR, when taking the train to your exchange destination. Next to being a sustainable mode of travel, taking the train has many other benefits, such as seeing more from the European landscape, being able to make a stop in a city on the way and the possibility to take more luggage with you.

Have a look at our [Green Travel Guide](#) for more tips and information around travelling to your exchange destination by train. You will receive more information on how to apply for the Green Travel Grant after you have been selected.

“It is an amazing experience to live in a different culture for half a year and learn about the food, habits and traditions. The community of international students here is really nice and it is very easy to make a lot of new friends from all over the world. China has so much to offer, who else can say that I visited the great wall in the weekend and Shanghai during a short holiday? I would recommend everyone to go on exchange, you will have so many great experiences and make a lot of new friends!” – VU student Lisanne when she just returned from Beijing



3. Where to go on exchange?

The world is big and the opportunities are endless. Do you want to stay nearby or would you like to spend a semester on the other side of the world? Whether you choose an exchange period in Belgium or in New Zealand, an exchange semester is without a doubt a unique experience and a source of inspiration for your future plans and career!

3.1 Where can I go?

VU Amsterdam has student exchange partnerships with over 200 universities in more than 50 countries. An overview of all exchange partners is provided on the [VU Study Abroad Map](#). Always select your own study programme before searching by region or country. You can find more detailed information about each partner university on the Study Abroad Map, such as the course offer, costs of living and language requirements.

3.2 Setting your priorities

You will need to do thorough independent research into the host universities available for your study programme. Before starting your research, it is important to identify your priorities. Would you like to challenge yourself academically or will your decision be purely based on personal and social needs? We would advise you to make a list of pros and cons, or to create a mind map, which can help you with your decision on where to go. During our Study Abroad Weeks, we are also offering a workshop about this topic, so make sure to register for it if you would like to learn more about how to choose wisely.

You can use the themes and questions below as a guideline:

Academically:

- Which partner university has the best ranking in your field of interest?
- Does the university offer enough courses that fit your interests? Please note that you need to select a few back-up courses as well, in case courses are full or not offered. Usually, you cannot choose courses in a different field of study, as you will need to meet the prerequisites.
- Does the university offer courses to prepare you for the Master's programme of your choice?
- Do you have the right language skills? Or could you reach the required level before your exchange? This is especially important in Southern Europe and Latin America.
- Please note: Business Schools abroad are only open to students from VU School of Business and Economics, unless exceptions are clearly specified on the [VU Study Abroad Map](#).

Location:

- Do you want to stay within Europe or outside Europe?
- Do you want to go to a country where the culture is similar to yours?
- Do you feel more comfortable in a large city or a smaller town?
- What influence does climate have on your mood?
- Do you have friends or family abroad who could offer you support?

Financially:

- What are the costs of living at the destination(s) you prefer to go to?
- What will your travel and visa costs be?
- When looking at your budget, how much money can you spend per month?
- What are the scholarship opportunities (e.g. Erasmus+ scholarship)?

Personally:

- How is your (mental) health? Did you experience mental health issues in the past, that could occur again while on exchange? Are you used to being far away from your family and friends or could that be a problem?
- How can you personally deal with a very different culture, where communication for example might be more vague, implicit and less straightforward?
- How is your need for security? Are you feeling okay in a country with higher crime rates or a greater chance for natural disasters?



“South Africa may not be the first country you think of when you want to go on exchange, but I am sure it is the best place to go! Studying at Stellenbosch University was an amazing experience. I have met great people, learned a lot about other cultures and the travel opportunities are unique. The university offers quality education and has an international atmosphere although the town is quite small. Stellenbosch is completely organized around students and the wine farms, which makes this place one of a kind. How about studying in a student city with Cape Town only a short drive away? – VU student Jazz spent a semester in South Africa

4. When to go on exchange?

Below we will explain the requirements you need to keep in mind when you want to apply for an exchange semester during your Bachelor's or Master's programme. **Please note that you are only allowed to go on exchange once during your degree.**

4.1 Bachelor students

If you are in the second year of your Bachelor's programme, you can apply for an exchange semester in one of our application rounds (see chapter 2.4 Application deadlines). Your exchange will most likely take place in the first semester of your third Bachelor year (during your free choice component). Most VU Bachelor programmes have no compulsory courses in this semester. Thus, an exchange semester won't lead to study delay.

- You need to have obtained at least 60 ECTS credits within your VU study programme at time of application.
- If you go on exchange in your third Bachelor year, you must take courses for a workload of 30 ECTS credits. In the factsheets on the [VU Study abroad map](#) you can find information on the credit conversion per host university.
- **Please check carefully if this partner university appears on the Study abroad map when you select your own study programme. Also check on the website of this partner university if they offer enough third-year courses in your field of study, in a language that you speak fluently.** For International Business Administration students and students of the study programme Philosophy, Politics and Economics it is mandatory to go on exchange during their studies.
- When you leave for exchange, you will need to have obtained at least 90 ECTS credits of your VU study programme. Check if your faculty has any additional requirements.
- It is possible to go on exchange in a later stage of your Bachelor programme, but please first discuss this with an academic advisor of your faculty. The courses you will take abroad will have to be approved as extracurricular courses by the Examination Board. Please check with the Examination Board of your own programme if they will approve extracurricular courses. If your exchange is extracurricular, this will lead to a study delay, which is not something VU Amsterdam wants to encourage. PLEASE NOTE: if you want to go on exchange within Europe, your exchange cannot be extracurricular but has to be part of your degree. This is an EU rule.

Important: you have to formally request to postpone your graduation. You can only do this once you have obtained all credits that you need for your degree (180 ECTS). You will receive an e-mail about your graduation. In this e-mail, you can find information about postponing your graduation.

4.2 Master's students

If you want to go on exchange during your Master, you have to look carefully at your study planning. It depends on the schedule of your own Master programme if you have the opportunity to study abroad.

- Master's students of a **two-year programme** should be able to participate in an exchange programme as part of their elective component without any delay in completing their programme. However, please also get in touch with your academic advisor to discuss the possibilities.
- **One-year Master's programmes** have usually no or very few elective components that you can take abroad. Students taking a one-year Master's programme may still take part in a foreign exchange

programme; however, this may lead to a semester's delay in their studies. You should discuss your possibilities with your academic advisor.

- You need at least 12 ECTS credits at the time of your application.
- Premaster students cannot go on exchange, nor can they apply for exchange. They need to wait until they are regular Master's students. Master's students of the School of Business and Economics cannot go on exchange. Students of the Master programme Environment and Resource Management also cannot go on exchange.
- Take a close look at which partner universities accept exchange students at Master's level. If the factsheet on the Study abroad map mentions 'Application at VU open for:' *All Bachelor's students and all Master's students*, it does not mean that this host university offers courses in all study fields. **Please check carefully if this partner university offers enough courses in your field of study at Master level (in English).**
- According to the rules of EU's Erasmus+ Programme, **one-year** Master students **cannot** take extracurricular courses in EU countries. Other rules apply to Law Master's students, as they do have elective components. However, if they wish to go on exchange within Europe, they must find 1 substitute course in order to obtain at least 18 ECTS credits that count towards their degree.
- If you choose to study abroad during your one-year master programme, you must complete all of the components of your Master's programme and postpone your graduation before going on exchange. Please note: you have to formally request to postpone your graduation. You should always discuss this with your academic advisor. The courses you sign up for abroad have to be approved by the Examination Board.
- Master's students studying Law can go on exchange in the second semester of their 1-year master.

4.3 Study planning

Studying abroad does not necessarily lead to study delay, but please keep the following things in mind:

- Make sure that you look carefully at the academic calendar of the university that you wish to go to: some universities schedule examinations as late as mid-February, which means there will be an overlap with the second semester at VU Amsterdam. Please ask your professors (both at VU Amsterdam and at the host university) if it is possible to make special arrangements. Universities in the southern hemisphere (Latin America, Oceania and South Africa) usually start in July already.
- If you fail a course while you are abroad and as a result do not have enough credits to graduate, you will need to complete an extra course at VU Amsterdam. This course also has to be approved by the examination board of your faculty. It has to be on the same level (or higher) as the course you failed abroad.
- Only students of the School of Business and Economics might be able to take one VU exam while abroad. This possibility is arranged by the examination board of SBE, not by the VU International Office. For further questions, please get in touch with your faculty.

4.4 Studying abroad with a disability

We would like to make studying abroad available to every VU student. For some students, studying abroad may present some additional challenges. This is particularly true for wheelchair users, those with psychological problems, dyslexia or chronic fatigue, for example. Fortunately, studying abroad is still an option! Please consider sharing these matters with the Outgoing Exchange Team. It will not prevent you from

participating, but sometimes it is good to let the partner university know before your arrival. In certain cases, it's possible to apply for an supplemental Erasmus+ scholarship or get extra assistance at one of our partner universities. In case you have any questions about studying abroad with a disability, please contact outgoing@vu.nl.



"I chose this beautiful University in Lund because this highly-ranked university offers a lot of interesting business courses in English, is very internationally oriented and located in an amazing area. Lund is a small lively student city, which keeps it easy to get around (by bike!) and offers great opportunities to explore Sweden as well as Denmark; Copenhagen is just 40 minutes away by train. I had a great time and I still think of my Lundian life every day. Be prepared: this city and country will get into your soul." – Student exchange experience from Lund University, Sweden.

5. Application and selection process

You have decided to study abroad! Now you can start with the application process. In your application you have to list five preferred universities. For your number one university, we ask you to explain why you would like to study there. For all universities in your top five we ask you to provide us with a selection of at least three courses you would be interested in taking. Please note this is not your final course list, but it is your responsibility to check the availability of suitable courses at the partner university. Please also make sure that you find enough courses in a language that you speak fluently. To increase your chances, we recommend you to apply for five universities. However, if you are really convinced that you only want to go to one partner university in particular, it is possible to apply for one university.

5.1 Selection criteria

For all universities there is a maximum number of places for VU students. If there are more applications than the available number of places, we will select the most suitable candidates.

We will look at the following criteria:

- VU motivation form
- Grade average
- Language skills (this only applies for universities where the language of instruction is other than Dutch or English)

We are very interested in hearing about your current or previous experience that shows a clear link to your motivation for exchange, such as a part-time job, an active role in a student association, volunteer work, internships, your own company or international experience.

5.2 Selection method

The VU International Office uses a selection score card. This selection card enables us to select students in an honest and transparent way. Students can find the selection card on [this page](#). The student with the highest score will be first allocated to one of their five choices, then the second highest-ranking student, etc.

5.3 Have you been selected?

After the application deadline, the International Office will contact you within 3 weeks with the selection results. What can you expect?

1. You will be notified if you have been selected for one of your five preferred universities. You will then have three days to accept your spot.
2. If you receive an e-mail that you have not been selected, you can apply for the second selection round for universities that still have places remaining. We will send you the list of available places per e-mail and it will be published on our Canvas page.

If you have not been selected, it may have to do with one of the following reasons:

- You have a lower overall score than other students who applied for the same university;
- The courses you chose did not match your study programme and motivation;
- You chose courses in another field of study which is not allowed at that university;

- You did not meet the language requirements, or did not sufficiently explain how you would meet those requirements;
- The university has a grade average requirement which you do not meet;
- You did not use our motivation form, but wrote a letter instead;
- You did not upload your motivation form in time.

5.4 Cancelling or making changes after selection

Once you have been selected, you are expected to take part in the exchange programme.

- After you have accepted your place, it is no longer possible to change your destination even if there are still places available elsewhere.
- In very exceptional cases, it may be necessary to cancel your exchange semester, for example due to health issues or a change in your study schedule. If this is the case, you should always inform the VU International Office via outgoing@vu.nl and withdraw your exchange in your Mobility Online workflow under 'cancel exchange (irreversible)'. Please note that we expect you to not take the selection lightly. When you have accepted your exchange offer, we do expect that you have thought about whether you want to go thoroughly. Keep in mind that if you cancel your exchange, you took a place from another student, who will not have the chance to go anymore.

“Friendship. Travel. Experience. Memories. Culture. These 5 words are all I need to describe how grateful and lucky I am to study abroad. I am in Oz for a little over 3 months now, but I’m meeting new people and making new memories every day. Still heaps of fun! And as you can tell, the Australian slang already got me!”

– VU student Jordy spent a semester at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia



6. Between selection and exchange

Congratulations, you have been selected to go on exchange! If you have been selected by VU International Office, you will have to apply at the host university, arrange approval of the examination board, make practical arrangements (visa, housing, etc.) and possibly apply for a scholarship. **Being nominated for an exchange programme does not mean the end of the application process, it is just the beginning!**

6.1 Nomination at the host university

VU International Office will nominate you. This means that we will officially present you as an exchange student to the partner university. Please note that this process, depending on the deadline of the host universities, can last until mid-March. Many universities will contact you after they have received our nomination, but this is not always the case. Please take a careful look at the application procedures and deadlines on the website of the host university and the [VU Study abroad map](#).

6.2 Application at the host university

If you have been selected by VU International Office, the host university will then decide whether or not to admit you. The chances of you being accepted are very high, but it is not 100% guaranteed. After your nomination, most host universities will send you their (online) application form, which you will need to complete before the deadline. The host university **may** require you to send:

- a copy of the passport and/or a passport photo;
- the results of an official language test, please check the [VU Study abroad map](#) if this is necessary for your destination;
- an official VU transcript of records (*cijferlijst*) in English (you can download this in your VU.nl dashboard, under *Results overview > Certified grade list*)
- letter of selection; you will be able to download this yourself in your Mobility Online workflow after selection
- a bank statement showing that you have access to sufficient financial means to complete your programme abroad (in most cases screenshots of your online bank account are not accepted and the statements needs to be in English);
- documents that show you are in good health;
- a deposit for accommodation;
- a proof of your health insurance;
- your birth certificate;
- a motivation letter;
- a recommendation letter from someone within your faculty, such as a professor.

When you will receive more information about your application and the required documents depends on the host university and their deadline. Please take a look at the [VU Study abroad map](#) to see when your application needs to be completed. If you have not heard from your host university **2 weeks before the deadline**, please contact the Outgoing Student Exchange Team.

A few things to keep in mind:

1. Don't miss the application deadline: submit all required documents on time.
2. Please wait until you have officially been admitted before spending money on things like airplane or train tickets. If you really don't want to wait, please consider to book a ticket that can be changed or cancelled.
3. Contact the international office of the host university if you have any questions about the application procedure, the course offer or any other practical matters.
4. We advise you to check your **spam box** as well. Some e-mails from the VU International Office or your host university may end up there. Also make sure to check your VU mail, and not only your private e-mail, as many universities in Asia cannot use Gmail or Hotmail addresses.

6.3 Courses at the host university

On the website of the partner university you can usually find a course overview with all (English taught) courses for exchange students (see the link on the factsheet at the [VU Study abroad map](#), under *Courses and Credits > Disciplines*). At many host universities you have to search for courses for 'exchange students' (and within Europe sometimes for 'Erasmus students' or 'visiting students'). In many cases you will not be seen as an 'international student', as you will not be enrolled in a full degree programme. As changes due to timetable overlap or full courses etc. may occur, we advise you to choose a few extra courses. It is your responsibility to find courses that fit into your curriculum, and that also fit within the scope of the exchange agreement.

On the [VU Study abroad map](#) you can find a brief description of the credit and grading system per host university. If universities do not use ECTS, the correct credit conversion can be found here as well. Usually course codes are divided in figures of hundreds (100, 200, 300). In general, you can assume that 100 stands for a first-year course, 200 for a second-year course and so on. However, this is not the case at every host university, so have a look at the [VU Study abroad map](#), as well as at the website of the partner university!

6.4 Approval of courses by the examination board

Once you have been selected, you have to request approval from the examination board of your faculty for the courses that you would like to take during your exchange.

- Read the requirements of your Examination board carefully before submitting your application.
- Start this process as soon as possible, as **it can take up to six weeks** before the examination board reviews your request. Make sure that your request is complete, if there is something missing (e.g. the level of the courses), it might take another six weeks until you hear back from the examination board.
- The credits you obtain abroad only count towards your degree with the approval of your examination Board.
- If the courses at the host university have not yet been announced for the next academic year, you can select courses that were offered in the previous academic year, even though there might be changes. Please make sure the courses are offered in the right semester (fall/spring).
- Do not wait for the decision of the examination board to register for courses. It is important to register for courses before the deadline of the partner university. If you register for your courses and

are later informed that not all the courses are approved or there is a timetable clash, you can submit another request to the Examination Board.

- Try to be flexible in your choice of courses. Sometimes courses at the host university are already full. In that case, you will need to change your courses, sometimes in a short period of time. In that case, it might be difficult to get the approval of the examination board on time. Just keep the requirements of your examination board in mind and try to get into 3rd-year level courses that don't overlap with courses that you already took at VU.

6.5 Language skills

Sufficient proficiency in English is required at most universities. In some cases a proof of your language proficiency is required, especially at universities, where the language of instruction is other than Dutch or English. This will be mentioned on the [VU Study abroad map](#), so please check the language requirements carefully.

If you need to proof your English proficiency, you usually need to take a TOEFL or IELTS test:

- The test can be done at only a few locations across the Netherlands. You can check if you can take the test online. Make sure the host university accepts the online version.
- Please keep in mind that available test dates and places are limited.
- About two weeks after the test, you can check your results online.
- Some universities accept the [VU Institutional TOEFL test](#). This test is much cheaper than an official TOEFL or IELTS test. If a host university accepts this test, it will be mentioned in the factsheet on the VU Study abroad map.
- At most host universities you must already submit the results when you apply, so please make sure to schedule your test as soon as possible.

In many cases it may be sufficient to receive a proof of English, French, German or Spanish Proficiency from the Outgoing Exchange Team. If VU Amsterdam has this arrangement with the host university you can find it on the [VU Study abroad map](#) (under *Courses and Credits > Language of Instruction*). If you need a letter of English proficiency for your application, you can download it yourself in your Mobility Online workflow. For other languages, please contact us directly with your request.

6.6 Pre-departure meeting

The VU International Office organizes pre-departure meetings per region to inform you about what to expect and what to arrange once you have been selected. The pre-departure meetings will be organised in February/March. These sessions are mandatory. We will inform you via e-mail and Canvas once we know when the meetings will take place.

Mexico



7. What else to prepare?

In addition to arranging the application and selecting courses, there are a few more practical things to arrange before going abroad.

7.1 Travel documents

Every student going abroad needs a valid passport or ID card to travel. Your passport or ID card has to be valid for at least your study period abroad, plus usually **6 months after your return in the Netherlands** (depending on your host country). If you need to apply for a passport, make sure you do this well in advance, in particular if you have to apply for a visa.

7.2 Visa

It is your responsibility to check whether you need a visa for your host country by consulting the concerned embassy or consulate in the Netherlands. The host university will usually inform you via email, as they will also be familiar with visa procedures. Please reach out to the partner university if you have any visa related questions. For non-EU students: your residence permit in the Netherlands is not valid in other European countries for your exchange semester. Thus, you usually need to apply for a visa.

7.3 Insurance and vaccinations

Please review your travel, health and liability insurance to make sure it provides adequate coverage during your exchange abroad. For some countries you will need to get vaccinations, which you will be able to find on the [GGD website](#). At some host universities, especially in North America, you will need to arrange an additional health insurance at the host university. If you go on exchange in Europe: get the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) through <http://www.ehic.nl>, to be covered for medical needs as a European citizen within the EEA (European Economic Area).

7.4 Accommodation

Most universities provide services to find accommodation for exchange students. Please start by taking a look at the [VU Study abroad map](#) (under *Accommodation and Costs*), where you can read what kind of housing your host university offers. In some cases you have to find your own accommodation. However, most host universities will give you advice on finding off-campus accommodation. We would recommend to always follow the host university's advice. Sometimes there are also Facebook groups run by local student organisations. Many of these online platforms offer rooms for exchange students. You could also check the website of [Housing Anywhere](#) for available rooms.

If the university provides housing, please make sure to submit your housing application in time: the sooner the better!

7.5 Unpack your Study Abroad

When you choose to study abroad for a semester at one of our partner universities, you will gain a whole new experience in terms of personal growth and a better understanding of the world around you. How do you view the world after an international experience and how can you contribute or assist in using that experience back at VU and in your future career? With the (online) programme *Unpack your Study Abroad* we aim to help you to prepare, develop and make the most out of your stay abroad. After selection, you will

have access to the Unpack Your Study Abroad Canvas page. Here you can find all the information and assignments you need to prepare the best for your exchange experience. More information about this programme will follow when you are selected for exchange.

Portugal



8. Financial matters

A study abroad experience always involves additional costs such as insurance, travel expenses, visa costs and possible language course fees. However, please keep in mind that you would incur costs like living expenses at home as well. In some cases these expenses may even be cheaper abroad. The total amount of additional costs depends on the destination and your personal expenses.

Please make sure that you make a realistic budget for yourself before deciding where you would like to go. If you are going on an exchange outside of the EU, do not count on getting a scholarship, as you are not guaranteed to actually be granted a scholarship. If you are going on exchange to one of our partner universities in Norway, Iceland, Turkey or any EU country, the Erasmus+ scholarship is guaranteed, provided that you hand in all necessary documents on time.

8.1 Student grant/ OV student card

Dutch students will continue to receive government loans while abroad. If you receive a DUO loan which depends on working 56 hours per month, you will only be eligible to continue receiving it during your time abroad, if going abroad is mandatory for your study programme. This is currently only the case for International Business Administration and Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE). If you are going abroad within one of these two programmes, we can issue you a letter stating that going abroad is mandatory for you. You can apply for this letter by e-mailing us. If your exchange isn't a mandatory part of your exchange or if you would like to get more information on this topic, please contact [DUO](#) directly.

After you have been registered for the upcoming academic year, you can apply for compensation for your OV student card (only if you are currently entitled to a public transport student card from DUO). The compensation will be around € 95 per month. You should submit your request to DUO at least two months before departure. You can have your [form](#) signed at the VU Student Desk (not at the International Office!) in the VU main building. Make sure that you are re-enrolled and have paid your tuition fee for next academic year when you go to the Student Desk!

8.2 Scholarships

The International Office offers some scholarships. Besides VU Amsterdam, there are also external organizations that can provide grants and scholarships. You will find an overview of scholarship opportunities via [Wilweg](#).

8.2.1 Erasmus+ scholarship

The Erasmus+ scholarship programme is an EU programme aimed at promoting international student mobility through funding for education, youth and sports. As a student, you can receive an Erasmus+ scholarship if you will be studying in an EU country, Norway, Iceland, Serbia or Turkey (please note: not the UK or Switzerland¹).

¹ For Switzerland, you will get a scholarship from the Swiss government instead. See chapter 8.2.4 Other scholarships

If you will be going to one of the above mentioned countries, you will automatically receive more information from the scholarship department of VU International Office. For details please see [this page](#). The following conditions apply:

- You must be enrolled as a full-time, tuition fee-paying student at VU Amsterdam during your exchange
- There must be an exchange agreement between VU and the host university. You can find an overview of all VU Amsterdam's European partner universities on the [VU Study abroad map](#).
- You must be selected to go on exchange by VU International Office
- You need to complete and submit all Erasmus+ forms in time
- You will have to take the Erasmus+ Online Language Test *before* your departure. You will receive an e-mail from the European Commission with information about the test.

The scholarship amount depends on the host country. Countries are divided into three categories based on cost of living. In 2022-2023 students received between € 240 and € 360 per month. The grant will be paid in two instalments, 70% in September (February for the 2nd semester) and 30% one month after your return (after all required paperwork is submitted).

8.2.2 GLOBE Scholarship

There are GLOBE scholarships available for students who are selected for an exchange at a non-EU partner university. VU International Office will award scholarships based on our selection procedure (see [5.2 Selection method](#)). We will invite the selected students to apply for a GLOBE scholarship. Without an invitation, your scholarship application will be declined. Please note: in 2022-2023 there were only 30 GLOBE Scholarships available. The amount of this scholarship is € 1250 in total.

8.2.3 HSP Scholarship

HSP scholarships are available for students who are selected for an exchange at a VU partner university in Indonesia and South Africa. VU International Office will invite the selected students to apply for HSP scholarship. Without an invitation, your scholarship application will be declined. The amount of this scholarship is € 1250 in total.

The scholarships offered outside Europe are partly funded by [VU Vereniging](#).

8.2.4 Green Travel Grant

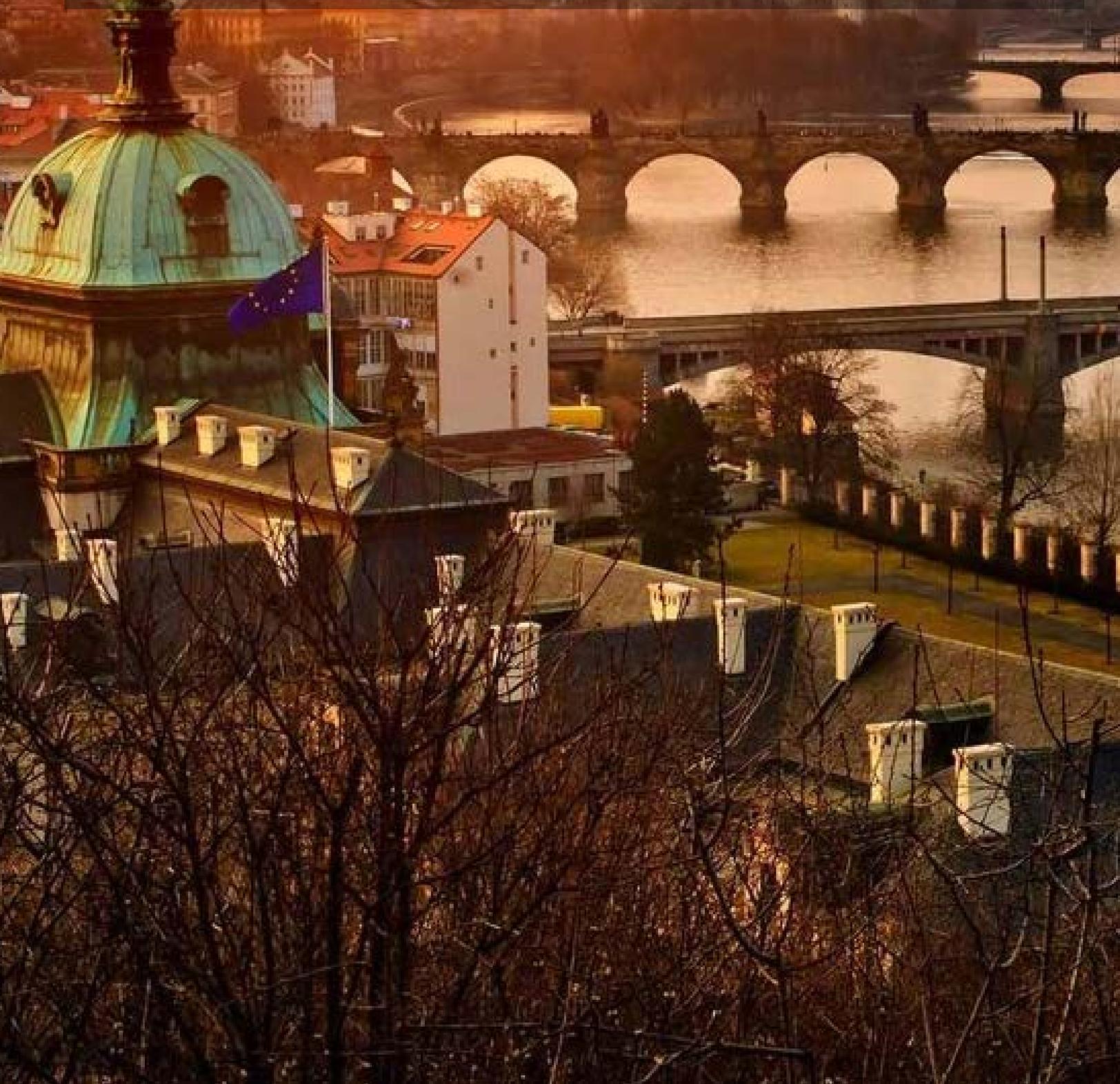
Please have a look at section 2.6. to learn more about our Green Travel Grant that you can apply for when travelling by train to your exchange destination in Europe (incl. UK).

8.2.5 Other scholarships

There might be other scholarships available for specific partner universities or destinations. For example, universities in Switzerland have their own scholarship programme (SEMP). Incoming exchange students will get a scholarship from the Swiss government. More information can be found on the [VU Study abroad map](#) or their websites. Some other governments might also award scholarships, such as in [Germany](#).

Please take a look at the website of [WilWeg](#) for more scholarship possibilities.

“Studying abroad has introduced me to a country no holiday or city trip could. I didn't visit Prague, I lived there. An exchange doesn't only give you five months of a new culture, language and country, but it gives you a lifetime of opportunities. It was great to mix up with local people and international students. Every faculty at the university has its own international student club, which made it easy to make new friends. The clubs organize various kinds of meetings, excursions and longer trips to different parts of the Czech Republic and to neighboring countries. A great way to get to know this area of Europe from the inside.” – VU student Mike spent a semester in Prague



9. During exchange

You've arrived in your host country, hopefully you are already starting to feel comfortable in this new chapter of your student life!

9.1 Courses (changes)

At some universities, courses fill up quickly or courses you selected may no longer be offered. Thus, you might want to revise your courses. In such a case, just relax and take a deep breath, studying abroad always requires flexibility, as changes can easily occur. You can submit another request to the examination board with your new courses. Please make sure to carefully consider the requirements of the examination board when you select your new courses, as you might not receive their approval before the start of your courses (this can take up to 6 weeks). If you do not have the approval of the examination board, we cannot guarantee that you will receive credits for those courses.

For students receiving the Erasmus+ scholarship: please make sure to fill out course changes in the 'During Mobility' part of your Online Learning Agreement.

9.2 Culture shock

Being an exchange student is a once in a lifetime experience! Arriving in a new country and getting familiar with all the differences can be an exciting, but sometimes challenging experience. One of the most exciting things about studying abroad is the opportunity to explore and understand a new culture. As you'll be living in a new country for a semester, you'll have a unique opportunity to get to know and integrate into a new culture.

When you study abroad, your daily routine, culture, and the attitudes of people around you are no longer familiar. The initial excitement of moving to a new country often subsides when the new country challenges a lot of things that you had previously taken for granted. Getting involved with local culture and university student life (joining student clubs) are great ways to reduce culture shock. And please remember: you are not alone! Many students who study abroad experience culture shock or homesickness at various times. Find a balance between studying and social and cultural activities.

By choosing to study abroad, you have given yourself the opportunity to see and experience things from a different point of view. It will not always be easy and at times it might actually be quite challenging. Go for it! Take advantage of being outside your comfort zone. While sometimes it may be difficult, remember that this experience can leave you with broader perspectives, deeper insights and wider tolerance.

In the Unpack Your Study Abroad Canvas group you can also find tips and tricks. The assignments could help you to process new impressions.

9.3 Emotional well-being

In general, studying abroad is a great way to step out of your comfort zone and gain a new perspective on the world. However, you may also be challenged in (emotional) ways you did not expect. Sometimes it can be difficult to adjust to an unfamiliar culture and a new academic environment, which can lead to unexpected and overwhelming reactions. Knowing what you might expect when you first arrive in your host country can

ease the effects of culture shock and make you feel less stressed or overwhelmed. You can get to know your destination by reading the testimonials of students who already returned from an exchange period in your host country or get in touch with international students at VU Amsterdam. You can always contact the embassy, consulate or tourist office to obtain more information. It is important to have realistic expectations before you go. We would also advise you to try to keep an open mind and be flexible when things do not go as planned. Not every country is as organized as the Netherlands and people might do things differently. Please also pay attention to your nutrition, exercise and make sure you get enough sleep!

Most students expect to easily adapt to a new environment, but this might take some time. It is normal to feel homesick, frustrated or nervous when trying to settle down in a new environment. Many students are not prepared to feel differently, but in the long term it can seriously affect your emotional well-being. If you feel stressed, sad, scared, isolated, lonely, overwhelmed or nervous for a longer period of time, we would advise to talk to someone about your feelings. **It's important to know that you are not the only one experiencing these feelings while on exchange.** If you're having a difficult time, you can always contact the VU Outgoing Exchange Team or the international office at your host university, as they can usually provide assistance.

If you currently have a mental health issue, please consider sharing this with the Outgoing Exchange Team. It will not prevent you from participating, but sometimes it is good to let the partner university know before your arrival. They might have counselling services available to you and it would be good to arrange this in advance. Please know that studying abroad could aggravate pre-existing concerns. If you are currently seeing a therapist, please discuss your travel/exchange plans with them. You will need to consider your plans for support whilst away. If you are currently taking medication, you should also discuss this with your therapist.

9.4 Safety

Please be aware that the Netherlands is fairly liberal in its attitudes. Therefore, we would advise you to familiarize yourself with the cultural and societal differences of your exchange destination, but also to do research into local laws. A few examples: importing chewing gum in Singapore is illegal; some countries impose strict requirements about what can or cannot be photographed (e.g. government buildings); in some countries sending obscene pictures of yourself can be seen as a sexual assault crime.

Please keep the following matters in mind:

- Stay informed on the security situation in the country where you are staying
- Follow the safety instructions provided by your host university
- Download the [Reisapp](#) of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and register for notification for your destination (only in Dutch)
- Check the [travel advice](#) on the website of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- The legal drinking age may be different from the Netherlands
- Punishments for illegal drug use/possession of drugs can often be severe
- Public displays of affection may be perceived differently in your host country

9.5 In case of emergency

In case of emergency, such as natural disasters, illness, or terrorism, you should contact the International Office at +31 20 59 85745 during office hours (Mon-Fri, 10am – 12am) or send an e-mail to outgoing@vu.nl. Outside office hours you can call the VU emergency number: +31 20 6444117. Please note that this number is only meant for real emergencies. The International Office will do everything it can to offer you advice and assistance.

We always follow the travel advice of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On [the website](#) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs you will be able to find more information about the travel advice per country. We advise you to stay in close contact with the International Office of your host university and stay informed through them as well. Please always follow the advice of local authorities and your host university.

Our International Policy in Case of Crisis can be found [here](#). In case the travel advice changes to orange or red, you are expected to leave the country (or specific area) immediately.

9.6 Early return

If, for any reason, you need to leave your exchange destination at an earlier stage, please inform the host university as well as the VU Outgoing Student Exchange Team via outgoing@vu.nl. An early departure might lead to study delay and might have consequences on your scholarship amount.

A wide-angle, high-angle photograph of the Grand Canyon National Park in the United States. The image captures the vast, layered rock formations of the canyon, with various shades of red, orange, and brown. In the foreground, two people are standing on a rocky ledge, looking out over the canyon. One person is wearing a red jacket, and the other is wearing a tan jacket. The scene is illuminated by bright sunlight, creating strong shadows and highlighting the textures of the rock. The text "United States" is overlaid in the upper right corner.

United States

10. After your return

Welcome back! We hope you had an amazing exchange period. We know it is not always easy to settle back in after a semester full of new experiences. Perhaps you can join the VU buddy programme, so you can still be in touch with international students and support them during their exchange at VU Amsterdam. Or share your experience with upcoming VU exchange students during our Exchange Event in April! As you begin to settle back into your life in the Netherlands, there are still a few matters regarding your exchange that need your attention. In your Mobility Online workflow you will be able to download a checklist for this stage of your exchange.

10.1 Transcript of records (*cijferlijst*)

After your studies abroad, you will receive a transcript of records from your host university.

- It is your responsibility to make sure we receive the transcript from your host university.
- Digital copies need to be sent directly from your host university to internationalrelations@vu.nl. We do not accept digital copies sent by students.
- When we have received your transcript, we will forward it to you. You will have to upload the transcript of records on vu.nl. The Educational Office of your faculty will process the credits.
- If your grades need to be processed before a certain date, please make sure we receive the transcript well in advance.

Important remarks:

- If you are an Erasmus+ student: you also have to send the transcript to erasmus@vu.nl, but don't forget to upload your transcript in your VU.nl dashboard.
- For courses that you completed with a 'pass' grade, the code 'VD' (pass) will appear on your VU transcript.
- If you have questions about processing the credits, please contact the Educational Office of your faculty.

10.2 Share your exchange experiences in a report

For all students who have been on an exchange it is compulsory to write a report of their time abroad for VU Amsterdam (please note: this is not the same as the Erasmus+ participant report). We kindly ask you to write a report about your stay abroad in your Mobility Online workflow. Now that you are an expert on your host university and city, share your experiences and tips with future exchange students! As you know, preparing your exchange can be quite a challenge, so it is nice for prospective exchange students to have insider information about your host university. Your report is the perfect opportunity to reflect on your semester and give future students the information you wish you knew before going. Please also share a few pictures! Your report will be published on the [VU Study abroad map](#).

10.3 Erasmus+ scholarship

Students who are selected to receive an Erasmus+ scholarship will need to upload their complete Learning Agreement and Transcript of Records in their VU.nl dashboard. This is for the post-payment of your scholarship. You will also need to complete the Erasmus+ participant report online. This is in addition to the

report that you are required to write for the International Office. You will receive a separate email about this. If you have any questions about this process, please contact erasmus@vu.nl.

“At the moment I'm studying for 5 months in this beautiful country: South Africa. This exchange period is certainly one of the best experiences in my life. The combination of starting in a new environment, meeting new people, making awesome trips and learning new and different things is amazing. I'm studying in Port Elizabeth, a really friendly city along the southern coast. Go for it if you have the chance!” – VU student Niels spent a semester in South Africa



11. Other international study options

Besides doing an international exchange via the VU International Office, it is also possible to arrange (part of) your studies abroad, or get an international experience in another way:

- Arrange your own study period abroad as a **free mover**
- Internship abroad
- Summer and winter school
- Full degree programme abroad
- Study trips
- Buddy programme at VU

On [this page](#) you can find a detailed explanation of these possibilities.

11.1 Free mover

If you would like to study at a university that is not a partner university of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, you can also choose to go abroad as a free mover. As a free mover, you will arrange and manage the study abroad yourself. You have to contact the university that you would like to attend yourself. Please pay attention to the quality of education and the level of the courses. If you would like your foreign courses to count towards your degree, you have to get approval for these courses from the VU examination board of your faculty/programme. As a free mover you enrol and pay tuition fees at VU Amsterdam. Apart from that, you probably have to pay tuition fees at your host university as well. Moreover, you cannot apply for the Erasmus+, HSP and GLOBE scholarships.

11.2 Internship abroad

During your studies, you may have the possibility to do an internship abroad. You are responsible for arranging an internship yourself. Unfortunately, VU International Office does not facilitate any internships, but you can enquire at your study programme or faculty about the possibilities. Some faculties or study programmes have an internship coordinator. For more information, please check the information on our website and the study guide of your study programme. Once you have arranged your internship, you will need to register this in your Dashboard (*My Dashboard > Study/internship abroad > Register internship/free mover abroad*). For some internships, VU International Office can arrange a scholarship for you. Within Europe, this will usually be the Erasmus+ scholarship for internships, and outside Europe it can be a Fondsendesk scholarship. More information can be found [here](#).

11.3 Summer and winter school

Instead of going abroad for a semester you can also do a short programme abroad during summer (a so-called summer school) or winter (a so-called winter school). Most universities offer summer schools from 2 to 6 weeks in many different subjects and for a broad range of prices. Sometimes you can get a discount for summer schools if they are offered by one of our partner universities. Please inquire at the International Office for this or take a look at our [website](#) to see the summer school programmes of VU partner universities.

11.4 Full degree programme abroad

It is also possible to do a Bachelor's or Master's programme abroad. However, you will need to arrange everything yourself, as this means that you are not a VU student anymore. We would advise you to start

looking for a study programme early. You can often ask a professor from your degree programme which universities he or she would recommend. On www.mastersportal.eu you can compare different Master programmes worldwide.

11.5 Study trips

Some faculties and/or student associations organize study trips or fieldwork excursions abroad. During these study trips, you will broaden your knowledge in different fields with your fellow students. For more information, please contact your faculty or a student association.

11.6 Buddy programme at VU

If you would like to do something international at home, you can participate in our buddy programme. VU International Office organizes this buddy programme, in cooperation with the Erasmus Student Network VU Amsterdam (ESN VU Amsterdam). As a buddy, you will be matched to 3-5 international students who come to study at VU Amsterdam during the first or second semester. You will be expected to answer the students' questions about what it's like to study at VU Amsterdam and you can partake in social activities with your international students. It will improve your language skills, you will learn to communicate with students from different countries and you will make friends from all over the world! Would you like to know more? Please take a look at the [website](#).

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

Conditional acceptance	This means that you will be admitted to your host university on the condition that you make up for a certain requirement you do not yet meet.
Examination board	Each faculty has an examination board that is responsible for approving your courses abroad. VU International Office is NOT involved in this process. You can contact them via this link .
Exchange student	If you are going on exchange via VU International Office, you are seen as an exchange student. You will be nominated by us and you do not have to pay tuition fee at the partner university. You will remain enrolled at VU.
Free mover/visiting student	A free mover or visiting student is not nominated by the home university. This means that students will arrange their own stay abroad. Usually this university is not one of our partners. Also, students will pay tuition fee directly to the host university. Please note that as a free mover you still need to pay tuition fee at VU as well.
Home university	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU Amsterdam). May also be referred to as sending institution.
Host university	The university at which you will spend your exchange semester. May also be referred to as receiving institution or partner university.
IELTS	The International English Language Testing System is an international standardised test of English language proficiency for non-native English language speakers. Some partners request students to take an IELTS or TOEFL test. Please see 6.5 Language skills .
Learning Agreement	The Learning Agreement sets out the programme of the studies to be followed abroad and must be approved by the student, the sending and the receiving institution before (and after) the exchange. This only applies to students going on exchange within the European Union or Norway, Iceland, Serbia and Turkey. Students will receive the Online Learning Agreement (OLA) automatically via email, which can be prepared, shared and signed online.

Letter of Acceptance	Formal indication of your official acceptance at the host university. You will receive this letter/notification from the partner university after they have reviewed your application.
Letter of English Proficiency	A letter written by VU International Office confirming your English language proficiency, corresponding to a B2 level. If your host university accepts a letter from VU International Office, you can download this letter in your Mobility Online workflow after selection.
Letter of recommendation	A recommendation letter is sometimes requested by the partner university as part of your application. The letter needs to be written by someone who can attest your academic performance. This can either be a professor or your academic advisor. VU International Office does not issue recommendation letters.
Letter of selection	A letter written by VU International Office confirming your selection for an exchange semester at a certain partner university. You will automatically receive this letter from VU International Office.
Nomination	Once you have been selected as an exchange student you will be nominated to the host university. This means that we will contact the host university confirming we selected you for an exchange semester at their university.
Proof of enrolment	An official letter confirming your current enrolment at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. You can get this at the Student Desk.
Semester	One of the two main periods into which a college year is divided. Most students go on exchange in the fall semester.
Study plan	Some universities might request you to submit a study plan. This means that you need to provide the host university with an overview of courses you would like to take, your learning goals and how you plan on achieving those goals.
Transcript of records	An official list of your grades (<i>cijferlijst</i>). You can get an official copy at the Student Desk . Make sure you request an English version, including an explanation of our grading system.

TOEFL

is a standardized test to
non-native speakers.

Test of English as a Foreign Language

measure the English language ability of

TOEFL ITP

This test has been developed especially for educational institutions. This is a shorter and less expensive version of the full TOEFL exam, and can be taken at VU's Taalloket. Please note that this test is not commonly accepted by our partner universities. If they do, this will be mentioned on the VU Study abroad map.

Appendix 2: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

General

1. Where can I go on exchange?
 - Refer to VU Study abroad map: <http://studyabroad.vu.nl>. Important: select your own study programme. Now you can see all possibilities for your studies.
2. Can I go on exchange as a Master student?
 - Please see [4.2 Master's students](#)
3. Can I go on exchange as an Honours student?
 - Yes. In most cases you will need to take an extra course while abroad (or before/after your exchange), but you can best confirm this with an academic advisor or your Honours programme coordinator.
4. Can I go on exchange as a premaster student?
 - No, you cannot go on exchange during your premaster. You would have to wait until you are admitted as a Master's student at VU Amsterdam before you can apply for exchange.
5. Can I study at a non-partner university?
 - Yes, but in this case you will be considered a "free mover" and the VU International Office unfortunately cannot offer any assistance in arranging your study abroad programme.

Application

1. As a Bachelor's student, do I need 60 ECTS credits in order to apply to study abroad at VU International Office, or at the time of selection?
 - You need at least 60 ECTS at the time of selection. They must be registered in the VU system by your professors.
 - We check the grade average and number of credits 2 weeks after the first application deadline, so most credits from the preceding period can be included.
2. How is my GPA calculated? Are failures, re-sits, no shows, and extracurricular courses taken into account?
 - We refer to your weighted GPA, which is only based on passed courses and only for your current programme. Students who are enrolled in two programmes must indicate their main programme on their motivation form.
 - Please check the Study Monitor in your dashboard to see your GPA.

3. Some universities require a minimum 7.0 GPA to qualify for selection.
Do I need to have a 7.0 GPA at the time of selection for study abroad or at the time of applying at the host university itself?
 - You need a minimum 7.0 GPA by the time of application for studying abroad *and* by the time of applying to the specific host university

4. How do I know if places are reserved for students of particular study programmes or shared with students from other programmes?
 - The factsheet for each partner university (as found on the [VU Study abroad map](#)) will indicate the number of available places per study programme or indicate if the places are open to students from all study programmes.

5. My minor programme allows me to take courses in a different field of study. Does this mean I can apply for universities that are not available on the Study abroad map for my study programme?
 - During an exchange semester, you need to take at least 12 ECTS on an **advanced Bachelor's level (3rd year level)**, which ultimately means that you need to have academic background knowledge of the subject. This limits your choices to fields which are more or less related to your main studies. Remember to always select your own VU study programme when looking at the options on the VU Study abroad map.

6. Should I rank my choices in order of preference?
 - Yes. Your first choice should be your first preference, your second choice should be your second preference, etc.

7. If I want to study at a university where the language of instruction other than English, do I still need to write my motivation in English?
 - If you're planning to follow courses in a language other than Dutch or English, you need to write your motivation in the language of instruction (e.g. French or Spanish).

Selection

1. On average, how many applicants are selected for exchange?
 - Nearly all applicants get selected, but not all are selected in the first application round due to limited places at certain universities.

2. Are my chances for selection higher if I submit my application early?
 - No. Please do make sure to submit your application before the deadline, as we do not accept late applications.

Choosing courses

1. How many credits must I take abroad?

- If you wish to take your elective programme abroad (*vrije keuzeruimte*), you need to take 30 ECTS credits to fulfil the requirements of the elective programme.
 - If the exchange semester at the partner university lasts until December, you could decide to take 24 ECTS credits abroad and fulfil the remaining 6 ECTS credits with a course at VU in January.
 - The policy of the International Office is that **all students on exchange** are required to enrol in a minimum workload equivalent to 24 ECTS credits abroad.
2. Who approves my courses abroad?
 - The examination board of your faculty will need to approve your courses. You can submit an approval request via our website. Getting approval can take up to 6 weeks.
 3. When should I apply for course approval?
 - You can apply for approval from your faculty's examination board only **after** being selected for exchange by VU International Office. Please apply for course approval as soon as possible after you have been selected.
 4. How do I prepare for the fact that course offerings might change between the time of application and your arrival at your partner university?
 - In general, we recommend that students include two extra courses in their request for course approval as back-up options in case there is overlap, or in case your original course options are no longer offered upon your arrival at the host university.
 - Should you arrive at your partner university and need to enrol in different courses, you can do so by submitting a new approval request to your faculty's examination board.
 5. Will I get credit for taking language courses at my host university?
 - This depends on the faculty, please check the requirements of the examination board.
 6. What if I fail a course abroad?
 - If you do not obtain 30 ECTS during your exchange, you will need to take an additional course at VU, which also needs to be approved by the examination board.
 7. What if the academic calendar at the partner university overlaps with the VU's calendar?
 - You are responsible for making arrangements with professors at VU and at the partner university to stay on track and minimize any potential study delays.

Application at host university

1. When can I apply at the host university?
 - You can apply at the host university only **after** being selected and nominated by the VU International Office. Once the nomination is approved you will hear from our staff or directly from the partner university with application instructions.

2. Do I have to take a language test?
 - This depends on the university. On the factsheet you can see whether the partner university requires you to take a language test.
3. I have a question about accommodation at the host university. Who can help me?
 - Please reach out to your host university.
4. For my application I need an (English) copy of my transcript of records. What is this and where can I get this?
 - This is a list of your grades (*cijferlijst*). You can request your transcript via [this link](#).
5. For my application my guest university asks for a proof of financial means to finance my time abroad. What exactly is required and where do I get this proof?
 - An overview of savings (either your personal savings or those of your parents) on official bank letterhead will suffice. This is NOT a screenshot—it should be an official overview. Alternatively, a letter signed by a bank official certifying that you and/or your parents have enough money to finance your time abroad should suffice.

Costs and scholarships

1. Why are costs for some partner universities quite high if tuition is waived?
 - Some universities charge administrative fees, health insurance fees, student activity fees, and other non-tuition fees.
 - High costs can also reflect high living costs in some exchange locations.
2. Does every student who goes abroad receive a scholarship?
 - No. Students who will study in an EU country (incl. Norway, Iceland and Turkey) will receive an Erasmus+ scholarship. However, The GLOBE and HSP scholarships for studies outside Europe are based on merit and sometimes destination. There are a limited number of HSP and GLOBE scholarships available.
3. When can I apply for a scholarship?
 - You can apply for a scholarship **after** being selected for exchange by the International Office. You will receive an e-mail from us if you are eligible for a scholarship. More information about the application process can be found on [our website](#).

Pre-departure

1. Where can I find the public transport (*OV-vergoeding*) form to request compensation?
 - This form can be downloaded from the DUO site: <https://duo.nl/particulier/ov-vergoeding-buitenland.jsp>.
2. Where can I get the public transport fee (*OV-vergoeding*) form signed?
 - This form can be signed at the Student Desk. VU International Office **cannot** sign this form.

3. Can I find private accommodation abroad?
 - Yes. You are not required to stay in university housing if you would rather arrange your own housing. However, in some cities it can be very difficult and expensive to find private accommodation.

4. Where can I find student experiences, connect with other students going abroad, or connect with international students?
 - Almost every partner university's factsheet on the VU Study abroad map features student testimonials from students who previously studied at that university.
 - Information about connecting with other students going abroad can be found on our Canvas page or by joining ESN VU Amsterdam, or by attending our special exchange events (information will be posted online).
 - During the Study Abroad Weeks we will invite returned students who will talk about their experiences abroad.
 - You could join VU's buddy programme in order to meet international exchange students.

After your return

1. I don't see my results online. When will they be processed?
 - Please see the procedure at [10.1 Transcript of records \(cijferlijst\)](#)

2. I uploaded my transcript of records, but the results are not visible yet. When will my results be posted?
 - You can best follow up directly with the Educational Office of your faculty.