



STUDY ABROAD STUDENT HANDBOOK

2023 - 2024

What can you find in this handbook?

Meet the Outgoing Student Exchange Team	4
Information sessions	4
Studying abroad.....	5
Quick facts about doing an exchange semester abroad	5
Application deadlines.....	5
Where can you go on exchange?	6
How to make a selection of universities	6
Studying abroad with special needs	6
¿Hablas español?	6
Green exchange	7
When can you go on exchange?.....	8
Study planning	8
Bachelor students	8
Bachelor students – extracurricular exchange	9
Master students.....	9
One-year Master’s programmes.....	9
Two-year Master’s programmes.....	10
Pre-Master’s programmes	10
Application and selection process for studying abroad.....	11
VU motivation form	11
Selection criteria	11
Selection method.....	11
If you have been selected	11
You accept your spot	12
You decline your spot	12
If you have not been selected.....	12
After selection – Application at the host university	13
Nomination at the host university – by VU International Office	13
Application at the host university.....	13
Our tips:	14

After selection - Courses at the host university	15
Grading system at the host university	15
Approval of courses by the examination board.....	15
Language skills	16
English language tests.....	16
Other languages.....	16
What else to prepare?.....	17
Travel documents	17
Visa.....	17
Insurance and vaccinations.....	17
Accommodation.....	17
Unpack your Study Abroad.....	18
Financial matters	18
DUO matters	18
Scholarships	18
Scholarships within Europe.....	19
Europe – Green Travel Grant	19
Scholarships outside of Europe.....	19
During exchange	20
Course changes	20
Culture shock and emotional well-being	20
Safety	20
In case of emergency	21
Early return	21
After your return	22
After return checklist	22
Other possibilities to go abroad.....	23
Summer Schools abroad and Aurora courses.....	23
Buddy programme	23
Free mover	23
Internship abroad	23
Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms	24

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. 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!

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

Information sessions

To inform you about the exchange programme, we are organising different 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 for second-year students and Master students

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 Weeks in your second year if you wish to apply for exchange.



Contact and consultation hours

E-mail: 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).

Studying abroad

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam has partnership agreements with more than 200 universities worldwide, you can find an overview of these partner universities on our [Study Abroad Map](#). 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*.

Quick facts about doing an exchange semester abroad

- If you are going abroad with our exchange programme, you will not have to pay tuition fee at the partner university; you will only have to pay your tuition at VU Amsterdam.
- 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](#)).
- The courses that you complete at the partner university will count towards your degree, provided they meet the requirements of your examination board.
- Because the courses count towards your degree you will usually not have study delay. (Are you a Master's student? Click [here](#).)
- 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.
- If you meet the requirements, you might be eligible for an Erasmus+, GLOBE or NL scholarship.

Application deadlines

If you would like to go on exchange during the first or second semester of the 2024-2025 academic year, you should apply through our application system during either our first or second selection round.

January: First selection round

The deadline for application in the first round is Monday 8 January 2024 before 13:00h. You can apply as of Friday 1 December 2023.

February: Second selection 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 19 February 2024 at 13:00h.

Where can you go on exchange?

Your starting point is our [VU Study Abroad Map](#). Always select your own study programme before searching by region or country. On the map, you can find more detailed information about each partner university, such as the course offer, cost of living and language requirements.

How to make a selection of universities

Making a selection of universities can take some time, as it requires you to do some research. Before you start looking at the different options for your study programme on our [VU Study Abroad Map](#), you should think about what's important to you. During our Study Abroad Weeks, we also have a workshop on this topic.

The following questions are examples that can help you set your priorities:

- Is the ranking of a university good for your field of study and is this important to you?
- Does the university offer enough courses that fit your interest, in a language that you speak?
- Do you need to do certain courses for your future Master's programme?
- Do you want to be able to travel sustainably to your exchange destination?
- Do you want to live in a culture that is very different or rather similar to yours?
- Do you prefer to live in a big city or would you like to stay in smaller town?
- Can you deal with a very different climate than what you are used to or would you rather not?
- Do you want to stay close to your friends or family, in case you need support?
- Can you afford the living costs in that specific city or country?
- Do you want to have a guaranteed Erasmus+ scholarship (for European destinations)?
- How is your need for security and the ability to move freely? Can you deal with higher crime rates or a higher chance of natural disasters?
- How is your mental health? Is now the right time to go abroad and if so, where do you feel comfortable going?

Studying abroad with special needs

For some students, studying abroad may present some additional challenges, for example for wheelchair users, students with mental health problems, dyslexia or chronic fatigue. If you require some extra support during your exchange, please reach out to us, the Outgoing Exchange Team, via outgoing@vu.nl. We can advise you on which destinations might be the best choice for you, provide you with information in regards to additional Erasmus+ scholarships and can help you contact the partner university for questions. More information can be found on [our website](#). On our Study Abroad Map, you can find information on student support on every university factsheet.

¿Hablas español?

Many universities in Spanish speaking countries do not offer enough English courses. Please read the information on the Study Abroad Map carefully, and consult us if you are unsure about the language requirements and/or your level of Spanish (or French, German etc.).

Green exchange

Sustainability is one of the key priority goals of VU Amsterdam and therefore we are working hard to make our mobility programmes more sustainable as well. We therefore want to encourage students to travel by train to their exchange destination, when going on exchange in Europe. To support you financially, VU Amsterdam has introduced a Green Travel Grant of max. € 185, depending on your destination. Please find more information below under [Scholarships](#). Students who have no other option than flying can still lower their CO2 impact, by following the tips on our [Green Travel Guide](#).

When can you 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 each study cycle (e.g. Bachelor or Master).** For students of the School of Business and Economics it is only possibly to go on exchange during their Bachelor's. This rule is prescribed by the faculty. There are also other things to keep in mind for both Bachelor and Master students in regards to study planning.

Study planning

Studying abroad does not have to lead to study delay, especially if you are a Bachelor's student, who is going abroad during the free choice component, or a Master student, who is doing a two-year programme (see below). However, please keep the following things in mind:

- Check the academic calendar of the partner universities on the VU Study Abroad Map. If there is an overlap with the semester at VU, you will have to ask your professors whether it's possible to make some kind of arrangements.
- If you fail a course abroad and don't have enough credits to graduate, you will need to complete an extra course at VU Amsterdam, which needs to be approved by the examination board and has to be on the same level or higher than the course you failed abroad. In some cases, this might lead to a study delay.
- Only Bachelor's students of the School of Business and Economics might be able to take 1 VU exam while abroad. For further questions, please have a look at [this website](#) and contact your faculty directly.

Bachelor students

If you are in the 2nd year of your Bachelor's programme, you can apply for an exchange semester in one of our [application rounds](#). Usually, you will go on exchange during the first semester of your 3rd Bachelor year, during your free choice component. Most students don't have compulsory courses during that semester, therefore the exchange won't lead to any study delay.

Please note that:

- You need to have obtained at least 60 ECTS credits within your VU study programme at time of application.
- You will have to take courses for a workload of 30 ECTS during your exchange. On the [VU Study Abroad Map](#) you can find more information on how to convert the local credits of the partner university to ECTS.
- You can only apply for universities that appear for your study programme on our Study Abroad Map. Please note that you will still have to check yourself, if the university offers enough 3rd year courses in your field of study, in a language that you speak fluently.
- For International Business Administration it is mandatory to go on exchange during their studies.

- Philosophy, Politics and Economics students have to choose between an exchange, internship or a minor at VU. Your programme will give you more information about the options.
- Before you leave for your exchange semester, you need to have obtained at least 90 ECTS at VU. Some faculties might have additional requirements, check this with your faculty.

Bachelor students – extracurricular exchange

At some faculties, it is possible to take courses abroad even though you have already filled your 3rd year free choice component, for example with a minor. This is called an extracurricular exchange. If you would like to go on an extracurricular exchange, please consult an academic advisor of your faculty about your study planning.

Please note that:

- You will probably have to actively [postpone your graduation](#).
- You still have to follow 30 ECTS abroad and you will need to stay enrolled at VU.
- You can only participate in the 2nd selection round.
- You can only go to destinations outside of Europe or the UK.
- An internship abroad, or a summer school course might be a better option for you. You can also think about going abroad as a free mover (independent study abroad student). Please find more information [here](#).

Master students

If you want to go on exchange during your Master's, you have to look carefully at your study planning. It depends on the schedule of your own Master's programme if you have the opportunity to study abroad. In general, we differentiate between one-year and two-year Master's programmes.

Students of Master's programmes at VUmc and the School of Business and Economics cannot go on exchange.

One-year Master's programmes

Usually, one-year Master's programmes have no or very few elective components. This means that your exchange abroad will always be extracurricular and will most likely lead to study delay. Please talk to an academic advisor before considering applying for an exchange semester.

Please note that:

- You cannot study abroad at our Erasmus+ partner universities, you will therefore have to study abroad outside of the EU.
- You must complete all of the components of your Master's programme and [postpone your graduation yourself](#) before going on exchange. This should always be discussed with an academic advisor.

- You need to have obtained at least 12 ECTS when applying for an exchange.
- The courses that you want to follow abroad, need to be approved by the examination board.

Two-year Master's programmes

These programmes usually have an elective component, therefore you should be able to study abroad without any delay in completing your programme. However, please still discuss your plans with an academic advisor to be sure that an exchange fits your personal study planning.

Please note that:

- You need to have at least 12 ECTS before applying for an exchange semester.
- Check on the Study Abroad Map, which partner universities are open for your Master's programme.
- Always check if a partner university has enough courses on Master level in a language that you speak fluently.

Pre-Master's programmes

Unfortunately it is not possible to study abroad during a pre-Master's programme. Once you start your Master's programme at VU Amsterdam, you can have a look at the options for your specific programme (see above).

Application and selection process for studying abroad

After you have visited our Study Abroad Weeks in November, you can start preparing your application for your exchange semester abroad. Please make sure to apply before the [deadline](#). You will be able to apply for a maximum of 5 of our partner universities in the process. However, if you want to apply for less universities this is also possible. Just keep in mind that this lowers your chances of being selected.

VU motivation form

In order to apply you will have to fill out our motivation form, which consist of multiple parts:

- Motivation for taking part in an exchange
- Motivation for your first choice university
- Courses that you would like to take at each of the partner universities (this is not your final course list)
- Confirmation that you speak the language of those courses fluently
- Questions about your practical experience (CV)
- Possible participation in the Buddy programme or mentor programmes

Selection criteria

For all of our partner universities there is a maximum number of available spots, which you can find on the Study Abroad Map under general agreement information. The placement of students for our agreement will be based on the following criteria:

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

Selection method

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 score 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.

If you have been selected

If you have been selected for an exchange semester, you will be contacted by the Outgoing Exchange Team within 3 weeks after the application deadline. You will then receive an e-mail with an offer for one of your 5 choices. You can be assured that we gave you the highest available spot on your top 5 selection. You will have 3 days to accept or cancel your spot in Mobility Online.

You accept your spot

After you have accepted your place, it is no longer possible to change your destination even if there are still places available elsewhere. If you do have to cancel your exchange due to for example unforeseen health problems, please contact outgoing@vu.nl.

You decline your spot

If you decline your spot or if you don't accept our offer in time, you will lose your spot for that university. It might still be possible for you to partake in the section selection round, however, please keep in mind that some universities might be full and there will be less spots available. A list of available spots for the second round will be published shortly after selection of the first round.

If you have not been selected

If you have not been selected for an exchange semester, you will also be notified via email 3 weeks after the application deadline. If this is the case, you can still apply again for our second selection round. That you have not been selected the first time, might have to do with the following reasons:

- You have a lower overall score than other students who applied for the same universities
- The courses you chose did not match your study programme or the agreement that we have with the partner 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

If you would like to discuss your options and get more feedback before applying for the second round, you can book an online one-on-one consultation with the Outgoing Exchange Team. We will be happy to help you!

After selection – Application at the host university

If you have been selected for an exchange semester at one of our partner universities, please keep in mind that the process is just starting. After we have selected you, you will have to officially apply at your host university, ask for course approval at the VU examination board, make practical arrangements (visa, housing, etc.) and possibly apply for a scholarship. **This is just the beginning!** We will dive deeper into the following steps after selection during our Pre-departure meetings in February and March, where you will also have the chance to ask questions.

Nomination at the host university – by VU International Office

The first step after being selected for one of our partner universities is that we will have to nominate you, to 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 the end of March. You can see whether you have already been nominated in your Mobility Online workflow.

Application at the host university

After you have been nominated, you will either receive information from your host university or us about the official application process. If you don't receive anything two weeks before the application deadline, please contact us. The chances of you being accepted at your host university are very high, but not 100% guaranteed. Please make sure to apply before the application deadline, which you can find on the host university's website or on the Study Abroad Map. When officially applying at the partner university, you might have to send any of the following documents:

- A copy of your passport and/or a passport photo
- The results of an official language test or language certificate, 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.

If you have not heard from the host university 2 weeks before the application deadline, please contact the Outgoing Student Exchange Team.

Our tips:

- Wait until you have officially been admitted before spending money on things like airplane or train tickets, or book a ticket that can be changed or cancelled.
- 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.
- Check your spam box of your VU and private e-mail regularly!

After selection - Courses at the host university

You can find the courses that you can follow during your exchange semester on the website of the host university. To make it easier for you, we have included a link to the university's course offer on the factsheets of the Study Abroad Map, under *Courses and Credits > Disciplines*.

Tipp: Search for courses that are open for 'exchange students' (or within Europe it might say 'Erasmus students' or 'visiting students'). 'International student' usually refers to students who are doing their whole degree programme at the university and does not apply to you.

Grading system at the host university

You can find more information on the grading system of your host university on the VU Study Abroad Map. If universities do not use ECTS, you can find the correct credit conversion there. Some universities use course codes starting with 100, 200 or 300 to indicate first year, second year and third year level courses. However, this differs per university so have a good look at the Study Abroad Map and the website of the host university.

Approval of courses by the examination board

The courses that you will follow abroad need to be approved by the examination board of your faculty at VU Amsterdam. You will receive a factsheet with the requirements of your faculty at VU already before you have been selected. Please read the document carefully before choosing your courses.

Please note:

- It is your responsibility to find courses that fit your curriculum and that also fit within the scope of the exchange agreement.
- Start this process as soon as possible after selection, as it can take up to 6 weeks (and sometimes longer!) until you hear back from the examination board.
- Include 1-2 more courses than you need, so you have some backup in case some courses are being disapproved or in case courses are full when you want to register for them at the host university.
- The credits you obtain abroad only count towards your degree if they have been approved by the examination board.
- If the host university did not announce the courses for the upcoming year yet, you can select courses that were offered in the previous academic year. There might be some changes, but the chances are high that most of the courses will be offered in the same semester next year.
- If the host university has a deadline for course registration and you haven't heard back from the examination board, you will already have to register before knowing if your courses have been approved.
- Try to be flexible! Courses might change last minute, which requires you to hand in another request at the examination board at a later point.

Language skills

Check the Study Abroad Map for the language requirements of your host university. In some cases you might need to do a language test as proof of a language proficiency.

English language tests

Many universities accept a letter of English proficiency from VU International Office, which you will be able to download in your Mobility Online workflow. However, some partner universities require you to take a test like the TOEFL or IELTS test. If this is the case please note:

- The test can be done at only a few locations across the Netherlands, some host universities might accept an online version as well.
- Keep in mind that available test dates and places are limited, so don't wait too long!
- Two weeks after the test, you will be able to 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.

Other languages

We can also provide a letter with proof of French, German or Spanish Proficiency if you can prove to us that you speak the language, for example by sending a copy of your high school diploma to us, or a certificate of a language course. Whether a partner university accepts this letter can be found on the VU Study Abroad Map. Please keep in mind that at some universities English courses are very limited, it might therefore be necessary to follow courses in the local language (e.g. Spanish).

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.

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 to 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.

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.

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).

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 most 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 or get in touch with former exchange students via the student experiences on the Study Abroad Map.

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

Unpack your Study Abroad

When you are studying abroad, you learn a lot about yourself, your own culture, as well as the culture of the country that you are studying in. To support you in the personal growth that you will experience and to prepare you culturally for your exchange, we have developed an online programme, called *Unpack your Study Abroad*, which will support you before, during and after your exchange. After you have been selected, we will add you to a dedicated Canvas page. Here you can find three assignments per mobility phase that will help you set goals for your exchange, reflect on your personal growth and gained intercultural competences during your exchange and help reflect on how you can use these skills in the rest of your academic career and potential future job.

Financial matters

The costs of studying abroad vary widely, depending on the choices that you make. We have many affordable destinations available in Europe, such as many destinations in Eastern Europe, with a guaranteed Erasmus+ scholarship, provided that you hand in all the necessary documents on time. Please make sure you make a realistic budget for yourself and choose your destination accordingly.

DUO matters

Dutch students will continue to receive government loans while abroad. If you are an international EU student, and 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 (IBA) and Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) students. If you are an IBA or PPE student and in need of a letter, please contact us via outgoing@vu.nl. If your exchange is not a mandatory part of your exchange or if you would like to get more information on this topic, please contact [DUO](#) directly.

If you have an OV student card, you can apply for compensation of about € 120 per month for the time that you are studying abroad via DUO. You can use this [form](#) and ask the Student Desk (!) to sign it. Please submit the request to DUO preferably at least 2 months before departure.

If you want to request the “uitwonendenbeurs” and the OV student card compensation, you can use [this form](#) and ask the student desk to sign it.

Make sure that you are re-enrolled at VU for the new academic year and that your tuition fees have been paid before asking the Student Desk to sign any form!

Scholarships

The International Office offers some scholarships for destinations within and outside of Europe. Please note that there is no guaranteed scholarship for destinations outside of Europe. There are also external organisations that can provide grants and scholarships, an overview can be found via [Wilweg](#). Some other governments might also award scholarships, such as in [Germany](#).

Scholarships within Europe

Students who are going on an exchange within the EU, Norway, Iceland, Serbia or Turkey (please note: not the UK or Switzerland) will receive an Erasmus+ scholarship, ranging between € 240 and € 360 per month. You will automatically receive application instructions from the Erasmus+ department in May. You can find more information on the conditions and the specific amounts for your destination on [our website](#). On the same website, you can also find more information about the Erasmus+ inclusion top-up, which is available to students with economic barriers, disabilities or health problems.

Students who are going to Switzerland cannot apply for the Erasmus+ scholarship but to a similar Swiss scholarship programme called SEMP. You can find more information on the VU Study Abroad Map.

Europe – Green Travel Grant

We would like to encourage students to travel sustainably to their host university. Therefore, you will be eligible for our VU Green Travel Grant if you travel to your host university by train, this includes the UK and Switzerland. The amount of the grant is a maximum of € 185 and varies between destinations. You can find more information on the amount and conditions of this grant in [this document](#). We also have some tips for you on how to find a good train connection in our [Green Travel Guide](#).

Scholarships outside of Europe

VU Amsterdam offers 2 types of scholarships for students who are studying outside of Europe. The first is the NL scholarship, for students who will study at our partner universities in Indonesia or South Africa. The amount is a one-time payment of € 2500. You can find more information [here](#).

Next to the NL scholarship, we also offer the GLOBE scholarship, which is not guaranteed and will only be awarded to the 40 most highly ranked students from our selection, who will study outside of Europe or in the United Kingdom (South Africa and Indonesia are excluded). The scholarship consist of a one-time payment of € 1250. You can find more information .

During exchange

Once your exchange has finally started, we hope that you will have an amazing time. However, there could be some challenges on the way that we would like you to be aware of.

Course changes

There might be some last minute changes in courses that require you to be flexible. For instance, it could be that courses are full or that timetables overlap. . In that case you will have to choose new courses and hand in a new request at the examination board. You might not have the approval of the examination board before starting these courses, it is therefore important to carefully consider the requirements of your faculty before making your choice. Erasmus+ students also have to adjust their online learning agreement afterwards, in the 'During Mobility' part.

Culture shock and emotional well-being

Once you have arrived at your location, you will hopefully have an amazing time and quickly make new international friends. However, there might be some challenges due to being outside of your comfort zone and being challenged in (emotional) ways you did not expect. Just know, that you are not the only one dealing with difficult feelings while being far away from home. Try to 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.

Usually, you will feel better after a few weeks and will have fully emerged yourself in the new culture. In the Unpack your Study Abroad Canvas page, you will also find assignments that will help you deal with uncertainties and cultural differences . When you feel overwhelmed or stressed during your exchange we recommend you:

- Set realistic expectations for your exchange
- Learn more about your host country and the culture
- Talk to other exchange students about how you feel, they will understand
- Reach out to counsellors at the host university or at VU Amsterdam
- Make sure that you eat well, exercise regularly and sleep enough
- Also don't hesitate to contact us, the Outgoing Student Exchange Team, if you want to talk to someone via Zoom

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 things 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

We will organize a Final preparations meeting before you go on exchange, where we will also share information about safety during your exchange.

In case of emergency

In case of an emergency first call the national emergency number of your host country. Take note that 112 is the number to contact the emergency services in any EU country and 911 in the Americas. Also don't forget to inform your host university, as well as the Outgoing Exchange Team at VU Amsterdam. You can reach us via +31 20 59 85745 during office hours (Mon-Fri, 10am – 12am) or send an e-mail to outgoing@vu.nl. We are also happy to schedule a Zoom call with you, if you want to talk about what happened.

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.

Early return

If, for any reason, you need/want to leave your exchange destination at an earlier stage, please contact us via outgoing@vu.nl so we can schedule a Zoom appointment with you prior to leaving. This way we can discuss the steps that need to be taking, such as informing your host university, etc. An early departure might lead to study delay and might have consequences on your scholarship amount.

After your return

After you returned from your semester abroad, there are a few things that you will have to do to finalise your exchange.

After return checklist

After your exchange you can download our To do after return checklist in your Mobility Online workflow, to remind you of the things you still need to do. Think of uploading your transcript of records, writing a student experience report or handing in the last documents for your Erasmus+ scholarship. You can also find more information [on our website](#).

Other possibilities to go abroad

Besides going abroad for an exchange semester via VU International Office, there are also other possibilities to go abroad or to gain international experiences abroad or in Amsterdam. Below, you can find some examples, more information can be found [on this website](#).

Summer Schools abroad and Aurora courses

You can also go abroad for a shorter amount of time during the summer or winter months, by following a so-called summer or winter school. Have a look at [our website](#) to see an overview of our summer school exchange partners, as well as single courses offered by our Aurora partner university network.

Buddy programme

Do you want to help and stay in touch with other international students, who are studying at VU Amsterdam? We are always looking for students who want to become a buddy for 3-5 international students, who come to study at VU Amsterdam during the first or second semester. The buddy programme is in cooperation with the Erasmus Student Network VU Amsterdam, you can find more information [on our website](#).

Free mover

If you would like to study at a university that is not a partner university of VU Amsterdam, you can also go abroad independently, as a [free mover](#). In that case you will arrange and manage your study abroad experience yourself, which means that you also have to pay the tuition fee not only at VU Amsterdam, but also at the university abroad. You also have to do research on the quality of education at the university that you would like to go to, to make sure that courses will be approved by the examination board of your faculty. Please be aware that you cannot apply for the Erasmus+, GLOBE or NL scholarship as a free mover.

Internship abroad

If you would like to do an internship abroad, you should contact the internship coordinator at your faculty, as VU International Office does not facilitate any internships. You can find more information about internships and scholarships [here](#).

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 can download this letter in your Mobility Online workflow.
Nomination	Once you have been selected as an exchange student you will be nominated at 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	Also known as Declaration of registration. An official letter confirming your current enrolment at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. You can download this on VU.nl .
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 request this through your VU dashboard, via Results overview > Certified grade list. Make sure to request an English version, including an explanation of our grading system.

TOEFL

Test of English as a Foreign Language
is a standardized test to measure the English language ability of
non-native speakers.

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.