



# Pre-Departure Handbook Academics Abroad 2012-13

PENNSTATE



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UNIVERSITY OFFICE OF GLOBAL  
PROGRAMS

410 Boucke Building | University Park, PA 16802

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# Pre-Departure

## Meeting with Academic Advisor

Your academic adviser is the person who can answer your questions about course selection, substitution, and your degree requirements. Advisers in the Education Abroad Office are unable to answer academic advising questions. As such, you should meet with an academic adviser at Penn State before you go abroad to discuss your academic plans and how study abroad can work in your degree audit. In addition, you should take your adviser's contact information (including mailing address, phone number, fax number, and e-mail address) with you when you go. If you do not have an academic adviser, contact the department of your major and ask someone there to assign you one.

## Transcripts

For confidentiality reasons, Education Abroad does not have the authority to request official Penn State transcripts on behalf of students. If you need an official transcript, the easiest way to request one is on the Web. Go to the Registrar's homepage (<http://registrar.psu.edu/>) and click on "Order Transcripts on the Web." If you have difficulty placing your request online, you can fax your request to the Registrar at 814-865-6359.

## Course Registration

Do not register for classes at Penn State for the semester you plan to be away (or the first semester you plan to be away, if you are going on a year-long program). The Education Abroad Records Manager will register you for a full load of "dummy" credits (ED AB 000) during the semester(s) you will be abroad. These are placeholder credits, which are simply meant to keep you registered as a full-time student at Penn State during your absence. Students going abroad for fall or spring semester will be registered for 15 dummy credits; the dummy credit load for students going abroad for summer semester will vary according to the required load for their specific program.

Actual registration procedures for your classes abroad vary by institution and by program type. If you are participating in a program that has been specially designed for Penn State students (i.e., a program in which you are enrolled in a set menu of courses taken exclusively with other Penn State students), you will be registered for your classes on-site as part of your acceptance to the program and, in most cases, you will not need to do anything further to register. However, if you are participating in a direct-enrollment program (i.e., a program where you take some or all of your classes with local students at a university abroad), or if you are participating in a program in which you may choose your courses from a pre-set list of options for foreign students (e.g., you choose 5 courses from a choice of 15), you will likely be registering for your actual classes after arrival at your host institution, usually as part of your on-site orientation program. The on-site staff at your host institution will provide more information about registration procedures after your arrival. After your program has ended, after your grades are sent to us from abroad, and after all course equivalency procedures are complete, the Records Manager will correct the course names/numbers and the number of credits on your Penn State transcript to reflect the actual courses that you took while you were studying abroad.

## ESACT/KINES Courses

You may not use ESACT or KINES courses to fulfill your GHA (Health and Physical Activity) general education requirement while studying abroad. The Kinesiology department will not accredit for general education credit any ESACT or KINES course taken on an Education Abroad program. If you would like to participate in sports activities overseas, you may want to consider joining a club or intramural team at your host institution, if possible.

## Full-time Status

You must take what your host institution or program considers to be a full-time load for each semester you are abroad. In almost all cases, this will be about the same as a full-time load at Penn State—approximately 15 credits for a spring or fall semester, or 6-9 credits for summer programs. Check your site-specific orientation materials to verify the number of credits you must take on your program. Be aware that dropping below full-time status will jeopardize your financial aid (if applicable) and your student status in your host country.

Students who go on CIEE, IES, or Arcadia programs for the spring or fall semesters are required to take a course load of 15 credits (per the academic policies of CIEE, IES, and Arcadia). For these programs, dropping to 12 credits is considered to be an exceptional circumstance and will require compelling justification and documentation on your part, which must include a detailed written petition from you stating why you must drop to 12 credits and a formal letter of support from your Penn State academic advisor. Permission to drop to 12 credits may only be granted by Dr. Kristi Wormhoudt, Academic Coordinator, in conjunction with the CIEE, IES, or Arcadia on-site director. Questions about this policy should be directed to Dr. Wormhoudt ([kaw7@psu.edu](mailto:kaw7@psu.edu)).

## Deferring Acceptance

You may not defer your acceptance to a different semester. If you are offered a place in a program for which you have applied and you can no longer participate in that particular program/semester, you will need to complete a new application for another semester and another Education Abroad administrative fee will be charged to your student account.

# In Country

## Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is as critically important abroad as it is here at Penn State. Penn State Faculty Senate Policy 49-20 defines academic integrity as “the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner... [and] a commitment not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception.” Please read (and make sure you fully understand the implications of) this policy, which can be found at: <http://www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/>. You are also subject to the academic integrity policies of your host institution if you are caught cheating, plagiarizing, or otherwise being dishonest about your work while abroad.

## Class Attendance

You are expected to attend and participate in all of your classes, labs, recitations, and field trips as necessary and as scheduled at your host institution. In some host cultures, it may be considered rude to skip a class session. Please remember that you are a student first and foremost when *studying* abroad.

## Dropping Courses

If you are participating in a spring or fall semester direct enrollment program (i.e., one where you are allowed to choose any courses you want from the general offerings—or a portion of the general offerings—at your host institution), you may drop courses, but you may not go below the equivalent of 12 Penn State credits. If you are on a program with one or more required courses, you may not drop the required courses, though you may drop other courses that you have chosen to take, as long as you do not go below the equivalent of 12 Penn State credits. This does not apply to CIEE, IES, or Arcadia programs (see the previous section on *Full-time Status*). If you are participating in a summer program, depending upon the program content and the number of courses you are taking, you may not have the option to drop courses. Please check with your on-site coordinator or faculty director and with the Education Abroad Office if you are taking more than one course on a summer program **before** dropping one of your courses.

Classes can be dropped only up to the late drop deadline at your host institution (and you must be sure to check with an academic adviser at your host institution before dropping any classes). Please pay strict attention to the drop and late drop periods at your host institution. While you are abroad you are not on the Penn State schedule for drops and late drops, and your LD credits at your PSU location do not apply to your host institution. You are subject to the withdrawal policies of your host institution; therefore, if you miss the deadline to withdraw from a course, that course will appear on your transcript. Education Abroad does not have the option to ignore a grade on a transcript! The only recourse you will have will be to appeal to the Penn State Faculty Senate upon your return for a retroactive Late Drop, but these cases are taken very seriously and cannot be put forward without the support of your undergraduate dean. Staff members in Education Abroad do not become involved in this appeal process. Our job is simply to report the grades that appear on your final transcript.

## Final Exams

Most institutions abroad have more formalized exam periods than what you may be used to at Penn State. The official exam timetable is usually posted during the month before the exams are held, so you may not know the dates of the exams for your specific courses until quite late in your semester abroad. For this reason, when you purchase your plane ticket, do not plan to leave your host city until the day after the last day of the scheduled exam period. Penn State makes every effort to provide you with program dates well in advance of your departure, although in some cases the dates may not be finalized until after you arrive on-site. In general, you will NOT be allowed to take exams early, and if you do leave your host country before taking your exams, you may fail your courses. In truly unusual or exceptional circumstances, you may request special permission from both your on-site coordinator AND from Dr. Kristi Wormhoudt, Academic Coordinator at Penn State ([kaw7@psu.edu](mailto:kaw7@psu.edu)), to have your exams proctored here at Penn State. However, be aware that only the most exceptional circumstances will be considered. The following situations WILL NOT be considered exceptional: (1) needing to return early to attend a wedding, baby/bridal shower, bar/bat mitzvah or similar celebration; (2) needing to return early to start an internship; (3) needing to return early to start summer classes at Penn State or another institution, if you are abroad during the spring semester.

## Grading Abroad

Most institutions abroad (unlike many American universities) do not “inflate” grades in order to give out a lot of As. Typically, they reserve A grades for the top 5-10% of students—that is, an A is only given for truly exceptional work.

Be sure to keep copies of ALL the assignments you have completed during your program abroad, at least until you have received all your final grades. If you encounter any difficulties with grades later on (e.g., if a professor on-site claims not to have received a paper that you know you turned in), you may need to prove what you have completed and/or provide another copy. Additionally, your academic adviser may need to see the syllabi or assignments from a class you’ve taken to appropriately assess how to substitute the credits for that course into your degree audit.

If you are concerned about your academic progress in one of your classes abroad, or if you feel that you have been graded unfairly on an assignment or an exam, the first thing you should do is to talk to the on-site coordinator while you are still abroad. This is the quickest and easiest way to deal with the issue. The Education Abroad office does not interfere with the academic judgment of your professors overseas. We do not award grades, nor do we “round up” low grades on your behalf. We simply convert the final grades from abroad to Penn State grades, using a predetermined scale (see the site-specific section of your orientation materials for the grade conversion scale for your host institution, if applicable) and then transmit the grades recommended by the host institution to the Records Office here at Penn State. We also do not mediate grade disputes between students and professors abroad. If you have not dealt with your problem on-site, we will assist you from this end by helping you to get in touch with your professor abroad, but YOU will be responsible for pleading your own case.



## Your Grades

It may take three months or more for your grades to be sent from your host institution. Unfortunately, the Education Abroad Office has no control over when host institutions and study abroad program providers send transcripts. Please be patient! Immediately upon receiving your grades, the Records Manager will enter them into the system and forward them to the University Records Office. Do not panic if you receive an initial grade report from the Records Office showing “NG” (no grade) for one or more courses — this simply means we have not received your grades yet or that you have not completed the course equivalency process for some or all of your courses.

## Course Equivalencies

To get Penn State credit for courses taken abroad, you must complete the course equivalency process of getting Penn State course numbers assigned to your host institution’s courses. If you are participating in a study abroad program with a predetermined list of courses designed specifically for Penn State students, you DO NOT need to get your courses accredited because they will already have Penn State numbers and credit values assigned to them. You should begin this process after the drop/add period is over and your course registration is finalized.

### *Historical Course Equivalencies*

All courses will count for credit at Penn State, with the notable exception of ESACT/KINES courses for GHA credit. However, not all courses taken abroad have been assigned a Penn State course number. You will need to consult with your academic/faculty adviser(s) to determine how the accredited courses can be applied to your degree audit to satisfy degree requirements. The equivalency process can take **2-3 months** to complete.

If you visit the [Education Abroad Course Equivalency webpage](#), you can access lists of abroad courses with Penn State equivalencies for each of our programs. Compare the courses you took abroad to the list of previously accredited courses. If a course abroad has been assigned one Penn State course number, the process is complete. If the course abroad has been assigned multiple Penn State course numbers, students must complete the online [Course Equivalency Form](#) and indicate the preferred course number. You do not need to submit another copy of the syllabus. If any of your courses do not already have a Penn State equivalent, you must complete the online Course Equivalency Form and attach a copy of the syllabus, so that the appropriate academic department can assign a Penn State course number for your course.

### *Course Equivalency Policies & Tips*

- ☐ Do **NOT** choose your courses at your host institution based on the course accreditation list on the Education Abroad office’s website! This list is simply a historical listing of all courses that have ever been taken by Penn State students at any particular institution. This list does not necessarily reflect what is currently being offered at any of our partner institutions.
- ☐ You **can** take courses that have not been previously accredited — you will just need to get those courses accredited, using the aforementioned procedures.
- ☐ All courses you take abroad **MUST** be accredited through the course equivalency process—whether or not you have done well in the course! If you do not get a course accredited, it will appear as ED AB-NG (no grade) on your Penn State transcript. The NG will eventually be converted to an F.
- ☐ If you are taking a course with an existing PSU course equivalent, you do not have to go through the course equivalency process again, unless you can convincingly argue that it should be re-accredited by a different department.
- ☐ Start on the course equivalency process **EARLY**. Send your materials as soon as you have registered for a complete schedule of classes. If you wait until the end of your semester abroad, the Records Manager and the relevant faculty members at Penn State will be very busy, and your accreditations will not be anyone’s top priority.
- ☐ If you intend to graduate during the semester you return to Penn State, you must submit all completed forms and syllabi to the Records Manager no later than 3 weeks prior to your expected date of graduation.
- ☐ Credits may change over time! Always check with the host institution to make sure that the credits are the

same, and use the credit conversion tables we provide in your orientation manual to double check the number of PSU credits you will receive for your courses. If you are in doubt about the credit conversions, you can always e-mail your EA adviser, the Records Manager, or the Academic Coordinator.

# Return

## Grade Processing

No satisfactory/unsatisfactory grades allowed! You are required to receive grades for your courses abroad on any Penn State-sponsored program, and these grades from abroad will be translated into US equivalents and then calculated into your Penn State GPA. In accordance with Penn State Faculty Senate Policy 49-60, “courses abroad may not be taken under the SA/UN [satisfactory/unsatisfactory] grading system except under highly unusual circumstances and then only with the advance authorization of Education Abroad.”

Grade conversion scales adjust your host institution’s results to conform to a US grade scale. Historically, these conversion scales have been proven to be fair, taking into consideration the differences between our system and that of your host institution. The Education Abroad Office maintains grade conversion scales for some programs. In the case of IES, CIEE, and Arcadia programs, we report the grades as the third-party providers give them to us (i.e., already converted according to the scale you have been provided in your orientation materials). Please be aware that we do not change these scales for individual students, and we do not consider appeals based on how individual students ranked within particular classes.

## Graduation

If you are a senior, please note that Penn State will probably not receive your grades in time for the commencement ceremony that takes place at the end of your semester abroad, so your graduation may have to be postponed until the next commencement. If fall is your last semester, you cannot usually graduate until May; if spring is your last semester, you typically cannot graduate until August. Be sure to take this into consideration when applying for jobs, graduate school, etc. If you will not be in State College at the time of your official graduation, you will need to arrange for “graduation in absentia” and for having your diploma mailed to you. Remember that you must formally register your intent to graduate for the appropriate semester. For general information about graduation and receiving your diploma, go to: <http://commencement.psu.edu/>. The commencement schedule can be found at: <http://commencement.psu.edu/future.html>.

## Course Registration for Following Semester

Students participating in full-year programs, please know that you will likely have to register based on the number of credits you had before leaving Penn State. If all your classes overseas are full-year classes, we cannot add any new credits to your Penn State transcript until the end of your program. However, if some of your classes run for only the fall semester, if your on-site coordinator will send us a partial transcript, and if you complete the accreditation process early, we can add credits for fall semester classes mid-way through your program.

## Intercultural/International Competence Requirement

According to the Penn State DUS web page on diversity requirements (<http://www.psu.edu/dus/handbook/df.html>), one-semester and year-long study abroad programs can be used to satisfy the Intercultural and International Competence requirement.

## International Studies Major/Minor

For information on the International Studies Major (a multiple, simultaneous, or sequential major) or minor here at Penn State, please contact the French Department in Burrows Building or consult the University Bulletin:

Major: <http://www.psu.edu/bulletins/bluebook/major/inlst.htm>

Minor: <http://www.psu.edu/bulletins/bluebook/major/instd.htm>