



Study Abroad Guide

Dear HLS Student

It's great that you've decided to go abroad – this decision marks the beginning of an incredible journey filled with opportunities for personal and academic growth. Whether you're eager to immerse yourself in a new culture, gain unique academic perspectives or enhance your global network, this guide is designed to equip you with everything you need to know.

Get ready to step out of your comfort zone, broaden your horizons and create unforgettable memories as you embark on this exciting adventure!



Sarah Lehmann & Irina Hauri

International Office
FHNW School of Life Sciences

E international.lifesciences@fhnw.ch

P +41 61 228 50 66

↗ [Website](#)

While you're away

- HLS Ambassador
- Adjustment and Cultural Differences
- Emergency Precautions
- Credits and Grades
- Transcript of Records
- Withdrawal from the Programme
- Life Sciences T-Shirt



Before you go

- Exchange Semester
- Double Degree Programme
- Thesis Projects and Internships
- Learning Agreement
- Tuition Fees
- Financial Aid
- Accommodation
- Travel Plans
- Passport/ID
- Visa
- Vaccinations
- Medication Abroad
- Insurance
- Your Study Abroad Location
- Email/Telephone

After you get back

- Experience Report and SEMP Final Report
- Reverse Culture Shock
- Maintaining Connections

Appendix

- Checklist
- Useful Addresses
- Useful Links

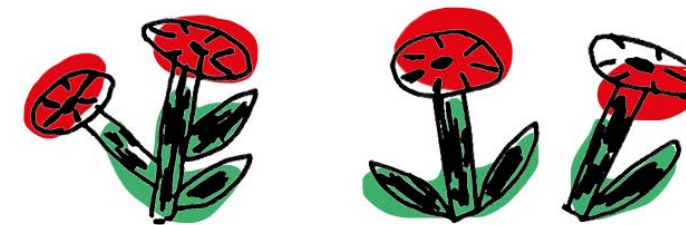
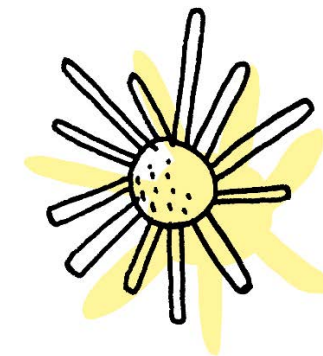
Introduction

This manual contains information for all HLS Bachelor's and Master's students who go abroad during their studies. The information applies to exchange semesters, thesis projects, internships and Double Degree Programmes.

Responsibilities of Students

You are personally responsible for ensuring that the necessary information and documents are submitted in the required form as and when needed. Failure to fulfil these obligations may lead to negative consequences including:

- Exclusion from the application process for an exchange semester.
- Forfeiting the allocated place at a partner university.
- Non-recognition of credits acquired during the semester abroad.
- Repayment of grants (e.g. SEMP funds) received for the purpose of the exchange semester.



Before you go

1



Exchange semester

- Be sure that your host university offers the courses that you need to complete your HLS degree. This requires looking carefully on your host university's website and/or contacting them directly in order to find course descriptions and/or syllabi.
- Work with your head of study programme (Studiengangleitung) to discuss how the courses earned will fit in with your degree programme.
- Inform the International Office about your planned stay abroad (international.lifesciences@fhnw.ch). They will send you the link to the Mobility-Online platform.
- Register on Mobility-Online to apply for your semester abroad.
- Register for your courses, carefully following the instructions of your host university.

Double Degree Programme

Follow the application process for the Double Degree Programme. You can find more information on our Double Degree [↗ Website](#) or on [↗ Moodle](#).

- If your application is successful, the International Office will get in touch with you and send you the link to the Mobility-Online platform.
- Register on Mobility-Online to apply for your semester abroad.
- Consult the Double Degree fact-sheets on our website for your module selection.
- Register for your courses, carefully following the instructions of your host university.

Application to the partner university (only exchange semester and Double Degree Programme)

The International Office nominates the student at the partner university. The partner university sends the nominated student an e-mail inviting them to apply. The application dossier must be submitted to the partner university within the deadline that they set.



I want to go abroad! [↗ Website](#)
Our partner universities: [↗ Website](#)

Thesis Projects and Internships

- **Find a suitable host institution** (university or company): Start by consulting with your lecturers, who may have connections with international institutions. You can also check the overview of international contacts ↗ [Website](#).
- **Confirm your thesis project details:** Once you've identified a potential host institution, work with your supervisors at both the host institution and HLS to confirm your thesis content and supervision arrangements.
- **Inform the International Office** about your planned stay abroad (international.lifesciences@fhnw.ch). They will send you the link to the Mobility-Online platform.
- **Register on Mobility-Online** to apply for your semester abroad.

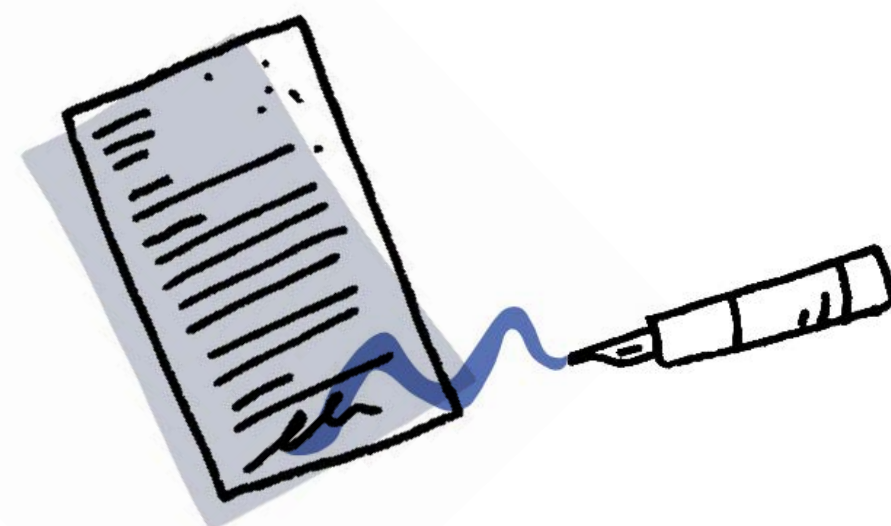
I want to go abroad! ↗ [Website](#)
Our partner universities: ↗ [Website](#)

Learning Agreement

All exchange students must draw up a Learning Agreement (LA) listing the courses to be taken at the partner university (exchange semester) or the content of the project/internship. The LA is drafted in Mobility-Online and must be submitted before you leave for your time abroad. The LA constitutes a contract between the student, the HLS and the partner university. For the final thesis/internship, it is advisable to coordinate the content of the LA with the supervisor at the host university.

Note for Double Degree students:

Since the modules completed at the partner university are not credited at the HLS, it is important that this is correctly reflected in the LA (Number of ECTS at home institution = 0).



Tuition fees

Students studying at a partner university continue to pay tuition fees and remain enrolled at the HLS. Generally, no fees need to be paid at the host university. An exception is the Freemover Programme, in which students study abroad at a non-partner university.

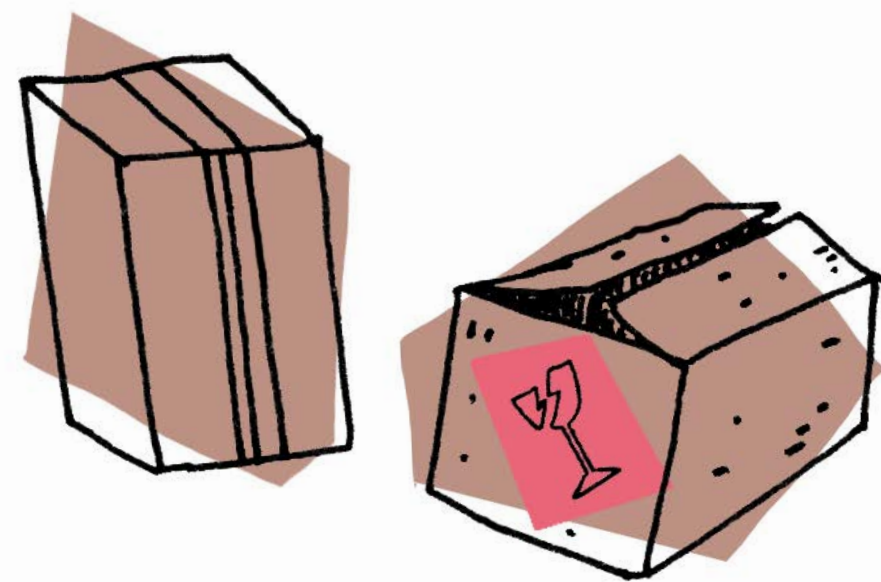


Financial Aid

Various financing options and types of support are available. The International Office will inform you about the most suitable option for your stay abroad. Find out more on our [Website](#).

Accommodation

Finding the right accommodation is a crucial part of your study experience abroad, so it's important to start your search early. Many universities offer assistance with finding accommodation, whether on-campus or partnerships with local housing providers. Check if your host university has halls of residence, as living on-campus can be a convenient and immersive way to integrate into university life and meet other students. If on-campus options are limited or unavailable, explore off-campus housing opportunities, such as shared apartments or homestays. Be sure to consider factors such as proximity to campus, cost, safety and available amenities. Contact your university's housing office or international student services for guidance and support in securing a comfortable and suitable place to live. Remember, early planning and thorough research can help ensure a smooth and enjoyable stay in your new environment.



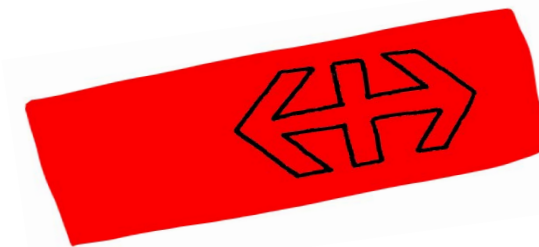
Travel Plans

Find out about travel options to your destination and book the necessary means of transportation to and from your study abroad destination. Whenever possible, opt for sustainable travel options such as trains or buses rather than flights, and consider carbon offsetting for your journey.

Before you decide on your travel arrangements, find out the dates of the academic semester at the host university to see whether you are expected to take part in orientation events, language courses or similar. Also find out when you can move into your accommodation and, if possible, arrive a few days early so that you have time to settle in before classes start.

Many universities offer an orientation programme before the start of the academic year. We strongly recommend that you attend these programmes – they are an excellent opportunity to meet other international students, learn more about the university's services and ask any questions you may have. At many universities, the orientation programme may be mandatory, so make sure you arrive in time to take part.

Keep in mind: Baggage restrictions, duty and customs, electrical appliances, driving abroad.



Passport/ID

Make sure you have a valid passport or national identity card that is valid for at least 6 months after the end of your stay abroad. Remember that some countries require a passport, not just an ID card.



Visa

- You may need an entry visa or other travel documents to study in your host country.
- It is your responsibility to verify the visa requirements of your host country and to obtain the visa.
- Visit the consular and/or embassy website of your host country to find specific visa information.



Photocopy important documents

Photocopy your passports, visas, tickets and other personal documents for yourself and give a copy to someone at home you trust.

Vaccinations

Check notes on diseases and recommendations on vaccinations for your destination country:

↗ [Website](#).

If necessary, obtain vaccinations from your doctor or a vaccination centre.



Medication Abroad

If necessary, complete formalities relating to prescription drugs or drugs containing narcotics with your doctor.



Insurance

Clarify insurance coverage (especially health insurance, accident insurance, liability insurance).

Your Study Abroad Location



Take the time to research local conditions, the political landscape and customs of your host country before you depart and stay informed about current events and developing situations.

- **Political security situation** – Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA): ↗ [Website](#).
- Download the **Travel Admin App**: ↗ [Website](#).
- **Local laws and customs** (e.g. alcohol and drug consumption, dress code). Check the travel guide or contact the embassy/consulate in the destination country (Swiss representations abroad: ↗ [Website](#)).
- Find out about **entry requirements** (ID required, visa requirements, prohibitions/restrictions on importing certain substances/medications): Embassy/consulate of destination country (Foreign Representations in Switzerland: ↗ [Website](#)).



Telephone

Students find that having a cell phone is a convenient way to stay in touch locally. Many cell phones can accommodate a SIM card that you can purchase once you arrive in your host country. You should contact your cell phone service provider to inquire.



Email

Given that the HLS will need to contact you throughout your time abroad, it is important that you continue to check your FHNW email address.



While you're away

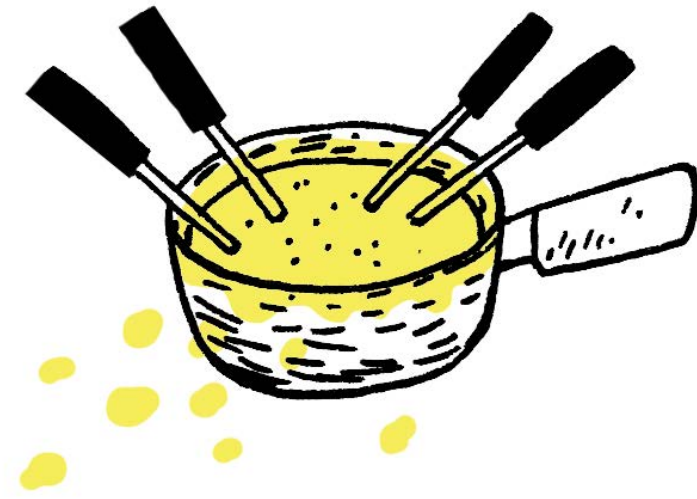
2



Adjustment and Cultural Differences

Embarking on a study journey abroad is an exciting and transformative experience, but it also comes with its challenges, particularly when adjusting to cultural differences. It is important to approach these differences with an open mind and a positive attitude. You may encounter unfamiliar customs, social norms and communication styles. These differences can initially lead to feelings of discomfort or homesickness, often referred to as culture shock.

However, embracing these new experiences can significantly enrich your personal growth and global perspective. To ease the transition, immerse yourself in the local culture – try new foods, participate in community events and make an effort to learn the language. Connect with locals and other international students to build a support network. Remember that it's okay to feel out of your comfort zone; this is a natural part of the adaptation process. Over time, you will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the host culture, making your study abroad experience truly rewarding.

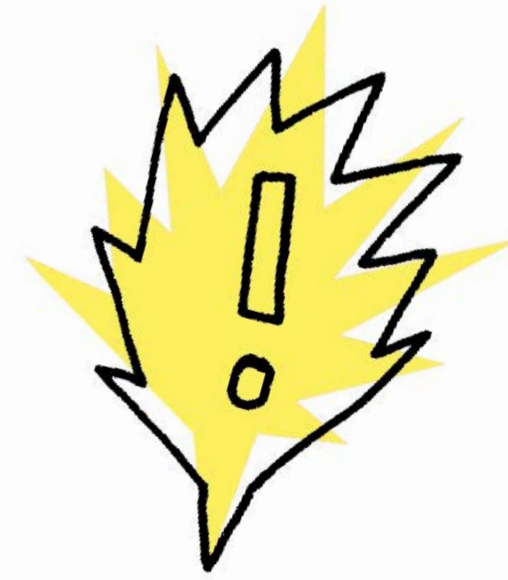


HLS Ambassador

While on exchange, you will be an ambassador for the HLS and should conduct yourself in a responsible manner appropriate to your host institution and country. You must abide by the rules and regulations of the HLS and your partner institution, as well as local laws. Remember that different countries have different laws with respect to traffic, legal age and civil law.

Emergency Precautions

It is important to be prepared for any unexpected situations that may arise during your time abroad. Emergencies can occur at any time, and knowing how to respond effectively can make a significant difference in ensuring your safety and well-being. By familiarizing yourself with these precautions and having an emergency plan in place, you can navigate challenging situations with confidence and poise.



- **Orientation:** Where is the police station/hospital/Swiss embassy/airport?
- Who is my **local contact person**?
- Have an **emergency package** ready: with copies of the most important documents, some cash, contact addresses and telephone numbers, important medications (painkillers, antibiotics), map of the area, etc.
- In case of **allergies/illnesses:** Always carry an info sheet with you, preferably in English or local language.

In the event of an emergency

- **Remain calm:** analyse the situation.
- **Get to safety:** police station, hospital, Swiss embassy/consulate, supervisor on site.
- **Establish contact:** stay in touch with emergency contacts (according to emergency contacts in Mobility-Online).
- In case of **regional emergencies:** obtain information on the security situation: **Swiss embassy/consulate**, FDFA helpline: +41 800 247 365 or Skype: helpline-eda.
- If necessary, contact **insurance company(ies).**

Credits and Grades

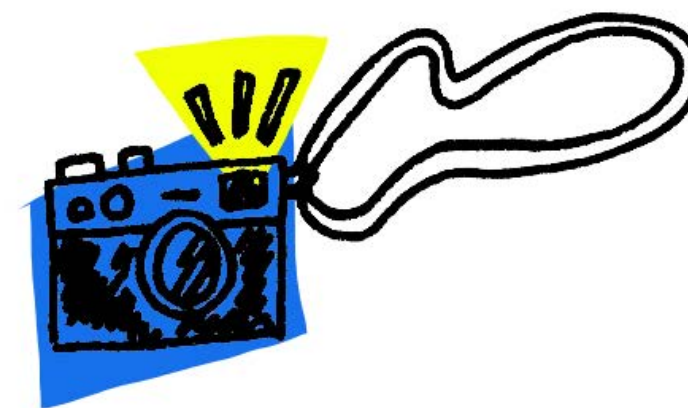
Be sure you understand the local grading system. You must pass your courses abroad in order to receive credits for them at the HLS.

Transcript of Records

While still at your host university, check with the relevant office there to inquire about when your transcript of records (ToR) will be produced. Be aware that some universities can take 2–7 months to produce and send your transcript. Ensure that the completed credits are certified according to the learning agreement and upload the ToR in Mobility-Online.

Withdrawal from the Programme

Leaving a study abroad programme is a big decision. If you feel that you must withdraw from your study abroad programme, please first consult the host university international office and/or programme director. Also speak with the HLS International Office.



Life Sciences T-Shirt

Don't forget to take a picture in your HLS Life Sciences T-shirt and send it to international.lifesciences@fhnw.ch.

After you get back

3



Reverse Culture Shock

As you prepare to return home after your study abroad, it's important to be aware of potential challenges associated with reverse culture shock. You may find yourself navigating changes in social norms, feeling a language barrier in your native tongue and experiencing a sense of detachment from once-familiar customs. Additionally, you might encounter the feeling that your friends and family don't fully understand the transformative experiences you had abroad, which can lead to a sense of isolation. Moreover, you might develop a strong desire to return to the country or community where you were immersed, longing for the connections and lifestyle you experienced there. Recognizing these potential hurdles can help you better prepare for and manage the adjustment period on your return.

Experience Report and SEMP Final Report

All students studying abroad must complete the SEMP Final Report (in Mobility-Online) and the HLS experience report (submitted to the International Office by e-mail) within four weeks of the end of their exchange.



Maintaining Connections

After returning home, keep in touch with the friends and professional contacts you made abroad through social media, emails or calls. Staying connected can offer long-term personal and professional benefits. Join alumni groups or professional networks related to your study abroad experience to maintain and leverage these valuable connections.



Appendix

4



Checklist

- Talk to the HLS International Office.
- Find out about entry requirements and get your passport, visa and residence permit.
- Find out about the healthcare system in the host country and get necessary vaccinations.
- Clarify insurance coverage (health insurance, liability insurance, travel insurance).
- Be financially prepared (save money, plan a budget, ensure access to bank accounts).
- Create emergency contacts and plans.
- Create a list of important addresses and phone numbers in the host country (embassy, consulate, emergency services).
- Research cultural differences and social norms in the host country.
- Learn basic phrases in the host country's language.
- Arrange accommodation (both short-term for arrival and long-term).
- Check with your host university about available orientation events and make plans to attend.
- Make travel arrangements (flight, train, etc.).
- Arrange any necessary subscriptions or contracts (mobile phone, internet, etc.).
- Inform your bank about your stay abroad.
- Inform the HLS student administration office about your absence.
- Make copies/scans of important documents (passport, visa, insurance, etc.).
- Carry out all the steps "before mobility" on Mobility-Online.
- Ensure you have all necessary academic materials and books.
- Pack your HLS Life Sciences T-shirt.



Useful Addresses

International Office

04.O.09

P +41 61 228 50 66

M international.lifesciences@fhnw.ch

Useful Links

I want to go abroad!

↗ [Website](#)

Experience reports from HLS students

↗ [Website](#)

Eidgenössisches Departement für auswärtige Angelegenheiten EDA

↗ [Website](#)



Keep in
touch?



Editor: FHNW School of Life Sciences,
International Office
Design: FHNW Academy of Art and Design,
AnDiCo Lab
Version: November 2024

Photography: (Cover) Adobe Stock –
stock.adobe.com, Pavel Vladychenko.
All other photographs courtesy of HLS exchange
programme participants.

The content of this document is for information
purposes only. We reserve the right to make
changes and adjustments. In case of incomplete
or incorrect information please contact:
international.lifesciences@fhnw.ch
We appreciate and value your feedback.