

Frequently Asked Questions: Music Students Interested in a Transatlantic Exchange

1. Why should I do an international exchange?

An international exchange has many benefits. Functioning in a different living and musical environment could change your musical development in important ways. You could even choose to focus your exchange on certain aspects of your studies in ways that you could not pursue at your home institution. An exchange will give you the opportunity to gain more insight into the international music field and the flexibility that is needed from you as a musician. This will be to your benefit, since the music profession is nowadays becoming more and more international. An exchange is also a good method to develop your network of personal and professional contacts.

HOW TO GO ABOUT IT

2. How do I find the right institution/teacher?

Most institutions for professional music training have an international office and an international relations coordinator or contact person. Here you can discover which institutions abroad your school organizes exchanges with and who teaches there. Most institutions also have websites; you can find links to the websites of more than 850 US and European institutions for professional music training on the websites of the European Association of Conservatoires (AEC: www.aecinfo.org) or the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM: <http://nasm.arts-accredit.org>). You should also discuss your plans with your teacher: not only should he/she be fully informed about your plans to spend some time in another institution, but teachers usually also have international contacts and may be able to help you with choosing the right teacher and institution.

3. What is a bilateral exchange programme?

A bilateral exchange programme is an agreement between two institutes to co-operate on exchanges and possibly on other types of collaborative activities. Many professional music training institutions have bilateral exchange programmes with one or more institutions abroad.

4. What is a multilateral exchange programme?

A multilateral exchange programme involves a group of institutions that have made arrangements for co-operative activities as a network. This means that the members of the network can possibly collaborate with more institutions than in a bilateral exchange programme. Examples of such a multilateral exchange programme have not been found in professional music training, but several such networks exist in the university sector in general, such as the exchange programme of MAUI (Mid-America Universities International) and the Utrecht Network.

5. Can I do an exchange at a college that is not part of the existing network of contacts available at my school?

This depends on the rules within your institution. In many cases, international offices welcome new cooperation possibilities if the institution you have in mind is interesting to your school. In some cases, you are allowed to organise everything yourself, including establishing contacts, admission, and accommodation. However, some institutions will not allow the exchange to take place without an agreement on the details of your exchange regarding finances and recognition of studies between the two institutions. Please take into account that going outside the existing network will take much more preparation time, as the arrangements that have been developed in an existing bilateral/multilateral agreement are not in place.

6. Do I have to do an audition? How?

In almost all cases you have to have an audition. Information about the requirements should be available from the international office/contact person or from the host institution. Usually a CD or videotape is accepted. Sometimes theoretical tests are also required, but sending a transcript of records with modules you have taken so far and the results achieved will normally be sufficient.

7. What language requirements do I have to meet?

Some knowledge of the language of the host country is recommended; in some cases, it is required. You should ask your international office/contact person whether it is necessary and possible to follow a preparatory language course either at your home institution before your departure or at your host institution before beginning your study period abroad. Some institutions (both US and European) ask those who are not native speakers of the language in which lectures take place to take a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and/or a Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT).

8. Can I choose my teacher?

The choice of teacher will depend on the arrangements your institution has made with the partner institution abroad. Usually you can mention a preference for a specific teacher, but this teacher might not have a place in his/her studio. In that case, another teacher might be proposed. Students who want to study exclusively with a specific teacher are advised to make contact with this teacher beforehand; for example, during a summer course or a personal meeting/audition.

9. What about teacher training courses?

Teacher training may vary substantially from country to country. You will have to discuss with your teacher, the international office/contact person, and the host institution whether you can follow courses in this area and if these courses will be recognised as part of your study abroad programme.

The European Association of Conservatoires (AEC) has produced descriptions of national music-teacher-training systems in the various European countries as part of the European project EFMET—European Forum for Music Education and Training (for more information about EFMET, please visit the AEC website at www.aecinfo.org/bologna/teacherdescription). These descriptions provide information on how these systems are constructed; information has been collected on classroom music teachers and instrumental/vocal teachers.

10. Can I participate in ensembles during my study abroad period?

In most institutions you should be able to participate in ensemble activities, such as chamber music groups, orchestras, or big bands. These possibilities could differ from instrument to instrument. Ask the international office/contact person or the host institution about the possibilities and make sure your learning agreement mentions this clearly. It is important to ask for this ahead of time, as sometimes the participation in ensembles requires careful planning beforehand.

11. Will there be performance possibilities?

This will depend on the arrangements that can be offered by the host institution; make sure that you are informed about these beforehand. If you take part in ensembles, usually one or more performances are involved.

12. Should I take courses in addition to my main instrument classes?

This depends on the arrangements between your institution and the host institution and on the learning agreement (see questions 15, 16 and 19 below). It will also depend on your study phase, which might ask for these additional courses. US students will normally need to follow liberal arts courses as part of their programme. If this is so and the European host institution is not able to offer these courses, it could be advisable to do extra work during the summer (front or back load) to make sure you have fulfilled all the requirements before you go. However, many conservatoires in Europe are part of larger higher education institutions or have connections with universities and can therefore provide classes in other fields than music. Even if it is not compulsory, it is advisable to follow courses in addition to your main instrument classes, since many institutes offer very interesting and useful courses.

13. How long can I go and when?

This depends on the arrangements made between your institution and the host institution: the length of the exchange periods can usually vary from a few weeks up to one full academic year. In general, students spend either one semester or a whole year abroad. However, please take into account that academic calendars can be different in the various countries.

14. When and how should I start making preparations?

Keep in mind that preparing an exchange takes a lot of time! Please take a close look at all relevant deadlines. Usually you should start a year (six months at the least) before the actual exchange, but sometimes even sooner if the institution you want to go to has an early deadline. And if you want to do an exchange outside the existing partnership of your school, a year could even be too short!

RECOGNITION

15. Will I receive academic or credit recognition at home for my study period abroad?

The exchange agreement made by your institutions should have a clear provision in relation to academic or credit recognition. An exchange study period should be an integral part of the programme of study at your home institution. Full academic recognition should be given for the study period abroad, as decided upon in the learning agreement between the home and the host institution. Make sure the host institution provides you with documents of proof about the

courses you have followed, the credit points obtained, performances you took part in, what kind of assessments you were asked to do, and so on before returning home. A short evaluation letter from your principal teacher can also help.

16. What is a Learning Agreement?

For most exchanges, an agreement will be drawn up before the exchange takes place, with details on the courses the student will be taking. In the framework of exchanges within Europe, this agreement is an essential part of an exchange arrangement and is called the Learning Agreement: the Learning Agreement is a contract that indicates precisely what courses you will be studying. Students are expected to complete a Learning Agreement well before they arrive: it should be signed by the student, the relevant persons in the home institution, and the relevant person in the host institution. Subsequent modifications to the Learning Agreement are permitted as long as all parties concerned agree on them. At the end of the study period abroad, the host institution will provide the exchange student as well as the sending institution with a transcript reporting the results obtained in the agreed programme of study. The Learning Agreement should contain information about the course (name, number of credit points, the type of assessment) and some general information about the student.

17. What is ECTS?

To facilitate academic and credit recognition, the majority of European higher education institutions have adopted the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). This system provides a common scale for measuring in credits the student workload required to complete course units (for example, one full year of studies generally amounts to sixty credits).

18. What is the American credit hours system?

In the United States, the academic year usually contains thirty-two to thirty-six weeks of tuition, mostly divided into two semesters: fall semester (half/end August – December and spring semester (January-May). Many universities offer a summer semester that is not part of the regular academic year. One US credit in general equals one hour of tuition per week for one semester. An ordinary US full-time undergraduate student acquires around twelve to seventeen credits per semester; a graduate student on average obtains nine to twelve credits. An example of a conversion from US credit points to ECTS can be: 9-10 graduate, 12-15 undergraduate, or 10-12 mixed US credits \approx 30 ECTS credit points.

The grading system in the United States goes from A (excellent) to F (fail). A significant aspect in this system is the allocation of grade points to the grade: A=4 points, B=3, C=2, D=1. These points are used to calculate the so-called Grade Point Average (GPA), which is of great importance for American students in obtaining scholarships and for admission to graduate studies. The calculation is basically the sum of grade points a student has earned, divided by the number of courses taken (for example, a student took 7 courses with 3 A and 4 B grades. In total, the student received $3 \times 4 + 4 \times 3 = 24$ grade points: 24 grade points divided by 7 courses gives a GPA of 3.4). Straightforward GPAs assign the same weight to each course. Weighting, however, can give students additional points for their grades in advanced or honours courses, or for courses that met for more hours each week.

In music, the following norms apply:

In lecture-discussion courses, normally one hour of credit is given for one period of recitation (50 minutes) plus two hours of preparation each week of the term. In laboratory

or ensemble courses, normally one hour of credit is given for two or three 50-minute recitation periods per week.

It is recommended that one credit hour be given for each three hours per week of practice, plus the necessary individual instruction, with a maximum of six credits per term allowed for the major subject in music performance. It is understood that the credit is not earned unless the final examination is satisfactorily passed. At the undergraduate level, all students in professional programmes should be required to have a minimum of one hour (60 minutes) of individual instruction per week, or a comparable equivalent arrangement of individual and/or small group instruction, in the principal performing area.

When institutions offer programmes and courses for abbreviated time periods, or in independent study, they must ensure that students completing such programmes or *courses acquire levels of knowledge, competence, and understanding comparable to* that expected of students completing work in the standard time period. For example, in order to earn one hour of credit during a summer session, students must attend approximately the same number of class hours and make the same amount of preparation as they would in attending a one-hour-per-week course for one term during the regular academic year.

19. What if the curriculum at the host school is different from that at the home institution?

A different curriculum should be the very reason why you want to go on an exchange! You will have to discuss with the responsible person in your institution whether certain courses at the host institute can replace courses you would have to take at the home institution. In this situation, it is vital that there has been sufficient contact about the content of the Learning Agreement beforehand.

20. What about examinations?

In an ideal exchange programme, in which both institutions have sufficient trust in each other's quality and assessment standards, the examination procedure you will follow should be the one adopted by the host institution. This may involve written papers and oral and/or performance examinations. In general, you should not have to pass another examination in your home institution to receive academic recognition for your study abroad period.

21. Is an American bachelor's degree equivalent to the European bachelor's degree?

Because of recent developments in Europe, all countries are moving towards the organization of their higher education system in two cycles (Bachelor's and Master's) by the year 2010. Currently, however, each European country has its own educational system and therefore it is impossible to show the differences between the American and European degrees in one simple comparison. Within Europe, comparisons need to be made on a country-by-country basis. A detailed description of all systems for professional music training can be found at www.aecinfo.org/bologna/gendescription. Further information on the recognition of qualifications in the various countries in the United States and Europe can be found in the document '[The International Recognition of Qualifications in the Field of Music](#)' within the MSMA Project website.

22. What is the difference between undergraduate and graduate?

The term *undergraduate* refers to the first cycle of studies (usually called Bachelor's). The term *graduate* or *postgraduate* refers to second-cycle studies (usually called Master's). A postgraduate student is currently in the second cycle.

FINANCES

23. Do I have to pay tuition fees abroad?

In a well-developed exchange programme, exchange students should not have to pay fees (for tuition, registration, examinations, access to rehearsal rooms/studios and library facilities, etc.) to the host institution. In this system, tuition fees will have to be paid by the student to the home institution only (where appropriate). However, exchange students should take into account that small fees may be charged for certain costs, such as insurance, student unions, the use of photocopiers, recording products, etc. on an equal basis with local students. It is vital to draw up a budget at a very early stage. Keep in mind that it is not always possible to get a work permit abroad.

If you decide to do a study-abroad period outside the framework of an exchange programme, please take into account that substantial tuition fees could apply, especially in relation to institutions in the United States and in some European countries.

24. Why and how should I apply for a grant?

Even if you do not have to pay tuition fees, an exchange will cost much more than studying at your home institution. You will have to pay for travel, visa and permits, insurance, housing, etc. Your international office/contact person can inform you if there are grant possibilities. You can also obtain information from the embassy of the host country or from the Internet. In the document '[Guide to Finances, Recognition Issues, and Other Practical Matters](#)', produced by the EU/USA project, you can find more information about financial issues.

25. Is it possible to keep my national grant/scholarship during the exchange?

In a well-developed exchange programme, you can continue to use your national grant/scholarship, as you stay registered in the home institution. The international office/contact person of your institution can provide more information.

PRACTICAL ISSUES

26. What practical things do I have to think about?

Finding *accommodation* is one of the first steps in your exchange experience. Often the least expensive alternative is to have a room on campus. However, European institutions might not have a campus. You should contact the campus accommodation office of your host institution about this as soon as possible or ask for advice from the international office/contact person of your institution.

- Whether you need a *visa* and a residence permit depends on the country you are from, the country you are travelling to, and the duration of your stay. If you do an exchange from one country to another within the European Union (EU) as an EU citizen, you do not need a visa. However, you may need to apply for a residence permit in the town in which you are staying. If you plan an exchange outside the EU, you will need to arrange a residence permit and visa before you leave. In most countries, a work permit is needed if you wish to do a part-time job. Applying for a work permit can often be a time-consuming (and costly) procedure. Your international office should be able to provide you with more details about visa and permits. Further information about these issues can be found in the document

[‘Guide to Finances, Recognition Issues, and Other Practical Matters’](#) produced by the EU/USA project.

- You have to take care of health, travel, instrument, and liability insurances before departure. Your international office should be able to provide you with more details about these issues.
- Sometimes it can be useful to open a bank account in the host country. In North America, a credit card is essential.

THE UNITED STATES

27. What is the difference between a university and a college in the United States?

Colleges generally only offer four-year undergraduate programmes, whereas universities also offer graduate programmes. There is no relationship between name and quality.

29. What is the difference between state and private colleges and universities in the United States?

State universities are founded and subsidized by state governments to provide low-cost education for state residents. The fees are lower than those at private universities. State universities are usually large. Private universities in the United States vary in size, academic level, and philosophy. They include research universities, women’s universities, religious universities, and experimental universities. There is no relationship between type of support and quality.

Useful links for information about studying in the United States are <http://chronicle.com> and www.studyusa.com.

EUROPE

30. What are the differences between conservatoires, music academies, music colleges, and Musikhochschulen in Europe?

In the various European countries, there are many differences in systems for professional music training. The different use of terminology is confusing, too: conservatoire, conservatory, school of music, music academy, Musikhochschule, music university. If you want to have more information about a system in a particular European country, you could visit the descriptions developed by this project of national systems for professional music training in Europe, which can be found at www.aecinfo.org/bologna/gendescriptions.