

Semester Abroad Guide

Economics, Sozioökonomie, SEEP

If you want to do a semester abroad during your study program, you have essentially two options.

These two options are:

- a. Erasmus/Joint-Study program: Visit one of the partner universities of the WU,
- b. Freemover: Organize (and fund) your own semester abroad

In the following section, you will get an overview of how to approach these two options in turn, and point out what you must consider prior to departure and during your stay, and what is expected from you after returning to the WU. The info overview provides further useful tips and information for studying abroad.

Introduction

If you are keen on finishing your program on time, it makes sense to plan ahead when to go abroad. While deadlines are more flexible when you are a Freemover, you will have to apply two semesters in advance for an exchange at a partner university, hence you can choose the third semester at the earliest. This is often the preferred choice because many students want to use the last semester to write a thesis at their home university. You should also be aware that there is a good chance that the curricula are substantially different depending on the university. For scholarships, it is mostly likely required to earn a certain amount of credits.

With this in mind, you can then decide on a university (or universities) you would like to spend a semester at. This is basically free for you to choose. Keep in mind, however, that some universities have requirements for you to attend or spots for which there is some competition.

If you do not know where to start, you would naturally first consider the educational merit of your stay. Your program coordinators might have information on research focuses of certain universities. This offers the possibility to attend specialized courses that would not otherwise be offered at the WU (and for which credits can be easier to get transferred, but more on that later).



A. Erasmus or Joint Study Program at a partner university

The process of an Erasmus semester or a semester at a partner university outside of Europe can be summarized in four steps. To briefly clarify: Erasmus is only provided for exchanges with partner university within the EU, but there are also scholarships in place for partner universities of the WU that are outside of the EU. Keep in mind that every point mentioned here is related to some degree of bureaucracy. Keeping this in perspective, we strongly advise going through the info material provided on the WU website, in info sessions organized by the university, and in any other material you might receive. This guide aims to give you a rough overview of the process. In many cases, the detailed requirements are outlined on the WU website in more detail than we could hope to achieve here.

Apply for an exchange semester

As mentioned previously, this happens a year before the actual exchange. For your master program, the WU has a range of partner universities from which you will be asked to apply to three preferred institutions. This is in the case that more people than expected apply for an exchange position at a certain university or that you do not fulfil the requirements. A list of partner universities of your program is on the WU website here: [wu.ac.at/studierende/international-studieren](https://www.wu.ac.at/studierende/international-studieren) For the application, be sure to adhere to the deadlines and to provide the necessary documents.

Apply to the receiving university

In the next step, the ZAS (the WU's International Office) will invite you to a mandatory presentation outlining the entire bureaucratic process. The WU will nominate you for an exchange at one of the universities of your choosing. It is fairly certain you will be placed at one of your preferred universities. Additionally, do not forget to fill out the OLS language assessment, if required. Briefly explained, the OLS language assessment tracks improvement in your language capabilities from the start of your exchange to the end.

We would like to stress here that good preparation in these matters will make your life easier during the stay. That is why, two additional points are addressed below.

First, you will need to fill in a form for **pre-recognition of courses (Feststellungsbescheid)**. To complete this form, you must research the courses that the receiving university provided in the past with the hopeful expectation that the same courses will be offered again in the semester of your visit. As you might have guessed, this is not always the case, so be sure that you are prepared for some contingencies. This can be done, for instance, by stating more courses than you intend to enroll in (in case one is canceled) or by using your free elective ECTS. Of course, you can always adjust your semester there, however, the pre-recognition process will give you near-certainty that you get these specific credits transferred. Remember, you will need a certain ECTS amount for your scholarship.

Second, start **searching for accommodation**. Without hyperbole, this might be the most important factor for an enjoyable stay. Try to research beforehand to get the lay of the land in order to avoid booking an accommodation that is expensive, far out or overcrowded. This is, of course, a difficult task but by being alert and by being aware of what suits you, and with a bit of luck, you can spot good deals. Also, since you will probably not go there in person beforehand and since we live in the age of the Internet, try not to get scammed. Generally, student homes require early application and are filled up rather quickly. Private accommodations often become available towards the end of the semester (depending on when the receiving university ends the semester).

Go on the exchange

If everything worked out so far, you will find yourself travelling to the exchange university. If everything went well, you should also have your Erasmus or Joint-Study scholarship at this point. Once there, follow the registration process for your courses, put them into the stamped learning agreement you received beforehand (from WU) and have it stamped and signed by the partner university. Here you should also include the courses you took additionally or that were not offered. Keep in mind that these have to be approved afterwards to get you credits for your home university curriculum, so in doubt, ask what additional material is required to make that happen (e.g. course contents, possibly

stamped and signed). After having a good time in the new destination, do not forget to have your presence confirmed using the designated form (with stamp and signature).

Coming home from the exchange university

Once the semester is finished and you got all your documents safely back, you can start handing them in. For recognition of your credits, you must wait for the transcripts of records which the receiving university will send once it has all the grades of the courses you completed. This can take a while, but afterwards you can hand in the relevant documents at the recognition service at the WU. If everything went well, you should be some ECTS and experiences richer. Do not forget, however, to report those experiences formally to the International Office, since your scholarship is tied to that, as well as to another OLS language assessment.

B. Freemover: Organizing your own exchange

While a semester abroad at a partner university is a great option since you will get financial support and do not need to pay tuition fees, you can, in principle, organize an exchange to any university you want if you apply as a Freemover.

To do so, you must follow the steps listed below:

1. Apply at the exchange university yourself
2. Get in touch with Studienrecht WU (help-desk-lehre@wu.ac.at)
3. Follow the steps outlined by Studienrecht WU, and coordinate between the prospective host university and WU

The main difference when you go abroad as a Freemover is that you have to fund and organize the exchange yourself. Going abroad as a Freemover makes the most sense if there is one particular university you would like to go to for whatever reason, but it happens to not be on the list of partner universities. The first step is then to apply to the designated host university yourself. Although there are no strict deadlines from WU's side, you still need to plan ample time to find out the application deadlines of your host university and to prepare the relevant documents. It might also make sense to get in touch with the head of your program at WU to discuss this option, and ideally get a written letter of support from them. For this meeting, it

helps to prepare a list of courses you could take at the exchange university and outline how they match with the courses you would take at WU. This would also help you with the second step: getting in touch with Studienrecht WU.

Studienrecht WU is the next address to approach. You do not need an acceptance from your prospective exchange university to approach them – it might make sense to start both processes simultaneously. They will provide you with the specific information on what they need from you.

This will likely include the following elements:

1. A confirmation that the host university you picked is a post-secondary education institution in accordance with §78 Universitätsgesetz 2002. You can check that via www.whed.net
2. A list of courses that outlines which WU courses you want to replace with courses at the host university. For this, Studienrecht needs the following information from you, which you can simply copy from the prospective host university's website (including the weblinks):
 - » Proof that the selected courses at the host university are Master's-level courses
 - » A description of the course content and credit load, as well as a description how credits at the partner university can be translated into ECTS, or at least into hours (which you can then translate into ECTS yourself). This description must derive from the website of your prospective host university
3. Ideally, the letter of support provided by your program head (can be a forwarded e-mail)

There are no official forms for these three elements. The procedure for Freemovers is generally less standardized than the procedures for doing an exchange at a partner university. The trickiest part is most likely the translation of credits at your host university into ECTS. You may need to get in touch with your contact at the prospective host university to ask where you can find the relevant information.

Studienrecht WU will check the information once received. In case of approval, Studienrecht WU will send you an e-mail confirming that the courses abroad are valid replacements for the WU courses you are seeking to replace. You must save this e-mail, because it will serve as confirmation for the credit transfer after your stay abroad. If you have this confirmation, it is certain that the courses you selected will be counted as credits toward earning your degree.

It is possible that upon arrival and course selection at the host university, some courses you initially planned to enroll in might not be available. In that case, you must simply contact Studienrecht WU and propose the new course(s) as replacement for the WU course(s).

Credit Transfer

The procedure for the credit transfer is the same for Erasmus students as it is for Freemovers. After your stay abroad, you must personally visit the Study Service Center to deliver the application for credit transfer. Before doing so, you must have an original copy of your transcript from the semester abroad sent directly from the host university to the Study Service Center. You may need this transcript translated and authenticated depending on where you attended your exchange semester. Check this link to see whether this would apply to you: <https://www.wu.ac.at/studium/bewerbung-und-zulassung/legalize/>.

Info Overview

Course choice

The preferable outcome of your exchange is that the courses you attend abroad are recognized for your specific curriculum. This does not mean you cannot attend other courses at your leisure. Nevertheless, keep in mind that most scholarships require you to obtain a certain amount of credits to be completed. A good piece of advice is to think about what your university of choice has to offer and to plan your courses around that. Specialization courses often give you the leeway to earn your ECTS. Regarding mandatory courses, make sure to be informed about when they are offered at your home university. For instance, a mandatory course could be offered in the third and not in the fourth semester. If

you do not attend it abroad in the third semester, you would be not able to finish within four semesters.

Credit transfer

If you obtained your pre-recognition form approval (Erasmus/joint study) or an e-mail from WU Studienrecht confirming a learning agreement (Freemover), you can expect to have these course credits transferred. Do not be afraid to combine courses if you need a larger ECTS count for specialization courses. If you arrive to discover that some courses are not offered, you might have to look for replacements. If upon first glance no replacements seem available, have a look at other faculties. You can reasonably argue that courses from other faculties (paired with a specialization course) are compatible. This is especially true for the social sciences. It is important, however, that the learning contents fit the subject.

Financial Support

A standard Erasmus scholarship ranges from roughly 300-450 € a month, depending on the cost of living in the destination country. Naturally, this does not cover the cost of living, so if you require more financial support, you should research additional scholarships or government subsidies. Remember that as a Freemover, you must pay tuition fees at your host university. Tip: Especially at US universities, there is sometimes space for negotiation regarding tuition fees, at least at graduate level (i.e. Masters' and PhDs). It is always worth asking your contact at the prospective host university whether you are eligible for a merit scholarship, or any other potential scholarships from the university that might reduce your tuition expenses. Furthermore, you may apply for other local scholarships well in advance.

Additional cost

Be aware of three things before you set off on your exchange semester.

First, **make sure you know if you are insured** or if you need additional insurance. Be aware of the additional costs that might cause.

Second, remember that you may need a **mobile plan**. If you are within the EU: Generally, there is

no roaming for EU citizens within the EU; however, most mobile contracts include a fair-use policy, e.g. you will be charged roaming fees if you are permanently abroad for a certain amount of time. Such policies might be circumvented with a well-timed visit home. If your mobile contract is too restrictive in that regard, or you do not plan to visit home, it may be advisable to get a mobile or pre-paid contract.

Third, if you are abroad, some landlords might require you to have a **bank account** within the country. Be sure to confirm those details beforehand (you might be asked to pay your rent cash), since holding a bank account in the host country is most likely only possible if you are already registered there.

All information is for general guidance and is provided with no guarantee of completeness or accuracy.

Questions? Contact us!

Student Representation

VWL | Economics | Sozioökonomie | SEEP

 www.vwsozoekseep.at

 stv-vwsozoekseep@wu.ac.at

 [vwsozoekseep](https://www.facebook.com/vwsozoekseep)