

AHAsoc: Placement guides

United States

Who to contact if interested?

To get a general idea of what to expect, take a look at the University web pages on study abroad in North America. There you will find all the relevant details and some first-hand accounts from students who have studied abroad.

The University's Study Abroad & Exchanges team can be reached at studyabroad@st-andrews.ac.uk.

They can answer your questions, tell you when the relevant meetings are (the general information meeting is usually held in November) and put you in contact with students either currently studying abroad in the U.S. or those who have just returned to St Andrews from their year abroad. They were incredibly helpful for me during the application process so definitely don't be afraid to contact them with even the most mundane questions.

Since there are so many different options and you have to access each university individually the process can seem a bit daunting but it is 100% worth the effort. It's important just to set aside a bit of time to research which university seems the best fit for your personality.

Who is eligible? Academic requirements?

- Most 2nd year undergraduate students are eligible to study abroad, but check with your department to make sure it will fit in with your course, degree requirements etc. Even the most unlikely of subjects tend to offer some kind of study abroad placement, whether it is for a whole year or just a semester.
- They tend to look for grades of 14 or more, but at the least you need to show you would be able to get into Honours here in St Andrews.
- You will need to demonstrate you are capable of living abroad. This is where your extra-curricular activities will come in, as they will help show relevant skills – think of it as any other application or interview, and use your interests and activities to show why you are suitable for the position. This is particularly relevant for applying for the North America Exchange since a wide range of extra-curricular activities are viewed as vital at most American universities since the goal is generally to provide a very well rounded education.

Where can you study?

You can study at wide range of American universities, from any of the University of California's campuses on the West Coast, to Purdue and Missouri in the Mid West, and East Coast colleges such as the University of Pennsylvania and William and Mary. They vary greatly in size, from small W&L in Virginia to UCLA in Beverly Hills, however they are all reasonably prestigious.

- Emory University (N.B. – Emory has a separate application procedure, and the year abroad is taken as a year out either between 2nd and 3rd year or after graduation).
- University of Missouri
- University of Pennsylvania
- Purdue University
- University of Richmond
- University of Virginia
- Washington College
- Washington and Lee University
- College of William and Mary
- University of California
 - This includes Berkeley, Davis, Irvine, LA, Merced, Riverside, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz

What can you study?

Anything! Check with your school, but students of any subject will find courses to fit their interests and requirements on the other side of the Atlantic. It's likely that there will be a wider/different choice available at a U.S. institution, and it is possible to take relevant courses outside your subject, e.g. an IR student could take relevant History modules if approved by their Study Abroad coordinator. It is strongly recommended by the universities that you take advantage of their diverse range of courses.

Application procedure? Deadlines? References? Interviews?

- The first information meeting usually takes place in November – look out for the email with the details during first semester.
- Research universities thoroughly – you need to know you'll fit in there, and will also need to be able to explain why you want to go a certain university (this will likely come up in the interview). Get in touch with students who have done it before - they will be more than happy to help! The American universities available to St Andrews students vary hugely in size and culture so it's important to decide what your ideal place is and apply for the appropriate ones.
- Download the application form from the website (which you will have been told about at the meeting).
- Along with this you need 2 academic references (usually tutors who know you well).
- You need permission from your school to study abroad. Some schools may organise this themselves (such as the IR department) while in others you will have to speak to the Head of School yourself and get a letter of permission.
- If you've been successful at the application stage, you will find out before Christmas. Interviews usually take place shortly after exams in January. The panel is usually made up of an academic representative, a study abroad representative and an extra-curricular rep: each will ask

questions relevant to their area. Make sure to prepare well – why do you want to go to this particular university? Why do you want to go abroad at all? It might seem nerve-wracking, but it's your chance to let them know how much you really want this! They seem to prefer it if you express your enthusiasm for specific universities rather than the experience in general. You also need to prove that you will be a good ambassador/representative for the University of St Andrews.

Fees

- Don't worry – you don't have to pay fees to the U.S. institution you will be studying at!
- Because of the nature of the exchange programme, you will continue paying your fees to St Andrews, and the U.S. student will continue to pay fees to their home university. This is a huge bonus since American universities tend to be very well endowed and thus the resources available are spectacular – make sure you take advantage!
- Check with your fee-paying body before you leave. In Scotland for example, SAAS will only pay half your fees to St Andrews if you choose to study abroad in the U.S., and you will be liable to make up the rest.

Funding? Any aid?

- The exchange to Emory University consists of the Robert T. Jones Memorial Scholarship, which will cover board, airfares and includes a personal allowance. Only British students can apply to study on exchange at Emory.
- The place at the University of Pennsylvania comes with the Robert Lincoln McNeil scholarship from the St Andrews Society of Philadelphia, which covers most expenses. Students applying for this exchange must have grown up in the Scottish culture.

Accommodation? What can one expect?

- Accommodation will vary from university to university – check the websites for room descriptions, plans and virtual tours.
- Apply directly to your chosen university for accommodation.
- You could be living in anything from university-owned apartments, dorm-style halls with shared bathrooms, to international housing. Ask the students who have been before what they would recommend.
- There is also the possibility of having to share a room. Having a roommate, sometimes through all 4 years, is very common in the U.S., so you may have to request a single room specifically if this is what you prefer. However I would recommend sharing if you have the option since it is generally the norm. As a result you will have more of a true college experience and it is very helpful at the beginning when you are trying to meet a lot of new people.

Visas? Necessary? What kind, where to obtain one?

- It is EXTREMELY IMPORTANT to get the appropriate visa arranged before you leave.
- To study abroad at an American university, you will need a J-1 student visa.
- To make an appointment for a visa interview at the U.S. embassy you will need your DS-2019 form; if need be get in touch with the Study Abroad department at the U.S. university to make sure you receive it on time.
- Make sure to complete the forms carefully and give yourself plenty of time to attend your visa appointment and wait for your visa to be processed – you will have to leave your passport at the embassy, which they post back to you on completion, so don't leave it until right before you have to board the plane, as it can take at least 4 weeks to process. Also the embassy can be extremely busy at times so even getting an appointment can take weeks. To avoid any stress during the summer before going away make sure you apply for an appointment right at the start.
- At your interview you will need to prove you have enough money to support yourself for the year – so if necessary take this into account when applying to study abroad. The universities vary greatly in terms of accommodation costs etc. so it is important to take this into consideration.

All the relevant information and instructions are found on the U.S. embassy website.

Practical things – phone, bank accounts, travel & health insurance.

- You'll want to keep in touch with all your new friends State-side, so it's a good idea to buy a cheap, pay-as-you-go phone (mine cost less than \$20). Most contract phones are for at least 12 months, so are not much use for someone only around for one academic year.
- It's definitely a good idea to open up a U.S. bank account. Using ATMs at banks other than the one you have an account with costs a dollar or two at a time, so check which bank is most common on your campus – the university might recommend a certain bank, or may even have a set up where your student card can double as bank card. A word of warning: student accounts in the U.S. don't have student overdrafts!
- Although all this may seem daunting remember you will not be the only foreign student arriving at your university so often you can find others who also need to set up bank accounts/get a phone and you can sort it all together. Moreover many of the universities are very helpful and will provide orientation advisors and transport that will take you to the appropriate places in the first week or so.
- St. Andrews requires you to take out travel insurance before you leave at the end of 2nd year. The university travel service can recommend one, but it might be a good idea to shop around.

- You will need to make sure you have health insurance while you are in the U.S. To fulfil your visa obligations you need to be properly covered by appropriate health insurance – and also to keep you safe and healthy! Some universities will require you take out their own on-campus health insurance, and this can be as much as few thousand dollars for the year.

Academic Life/Social Life

- Academic life in the states tends to be quite different despite St Andrews being quite an American-styled university.
- In general students work longer hours but the work is not necessarily harder. Almost all of the universities continuously assess the students therefore you are supposed to participate a lot in class and be present however it means that the exam period is far less stressful. There are midterm exams half way through each semester and then a second midterm for each subject at the end.
- Weekdays are generally seen as study time and then the weekend is when people have their fun, which is quite different to British unis.
- In terms of your social life my advice is to really throw yourself into it all and say yes to everything (within reason). American college culture is so different that it's really fun getting involved and for the most part people are hugely friendly in the States so you will have no problem meeting new people and having a great time! Another tip is to travel as much as you can because it's such a great opportunity being in the States and there are so many great places to go. One of my regrets from my time in the US is not writing a blog so if you want an easy way of keeping up with everyone back home and a great way to remember all that you do there, I would definitely recommend this.