



Good advice to students at Åbo Akademi who are going on exchange

Updated on April 27th, 2023 / Harriet Klåvus



1. Before departure

Information

Read very carefully all the **information** that you receive from the host university as soon as you receive it to ensure that you do not miss any deadlines. The information includes instructions on how to complete their application, how to apply for housing, when you should arrive, if they will organize a study orientation, and how/if you should register for courses by a certain deadline etc.

It is common that you need to create your application online, and that you also need to create a password to be able to submit certain information. Some larger universities do not send out information, so please check the host university's website regularly.

Read your email (@abo.fi) more frequently. Us at International Affairs and your host university will contact you there.

Follow all the **instructions**. They are given to make life easier for both you and those responsible at the host university. If you are unsure about anything, contact International Affairs or the host university. All official information provided by International Affairs is given during information meetings, individual meetings and email. Facebook groups are intended as contact points for you and other students also going on exchange.

Find out some **facts** about your host country and university. Inform yourself and talk to students who have been there before. In the **feedback forms** available in SoleMove, or in the files in the International Office, students have written about their experiences, which could be useful. You can also read the travel information provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at um.fi/entering-finland-and-travelling-abroad.

Get to know some **facts about ÅAU and Finland**. You may present your university and your home country during your exchange. Brochures about Åbo Akademi and Finland / the study cities Åbo and Vasa can be found at International Affairs and can also be mailed to you. In addition, ÅAU presentations can be found here: abofi.sharepoint.com/sites/intra-communications-and-marketing, click on "General ÅAU presentations, powerpoint".

Accommodation

Apply for **accommodation** before you depart for your exchange or understand how you should apply to get accommodation when you arrive. Information on how you can apply for housing is often given together with the instructions on how to apply for exchange at your host university. It is common for all information about housing to be available on the university's website and then it is your **own responsibility** to check how and when you should apply for housing.

The housing standards are usually completely different from the ones we are used to in Finland. Be prepared that rents for student housing abroad may be higher than in Finland and that the standard may be lower. In some cases, the rent must be paid in full in advance. Remember that it can be difficult to terminate a signed fixed-term lease. Traditions vary between countries and e.g., in Spain you usually look for housing only once you have arrived there and in Latin America you are often a resident of a local family. It is common to share a room with others.

You are welcome to **rent out your home** in Turku to an exchange student who will come to Åbo Akademi during the time you are abroad. You can write a short ad in English and send to the Facebook group "Incoming exchange students at Åbo Akademi 2023-2024 - Åbo" at www.facebook.com/groups/243159928082684.

Visas and residence permits

An entry visa is not required for students going to EU countries or the Nordic countries. However, you must apply for a **residence permit** when you have arrived in the host country (does not apply to the Nordic countries or countries to which you have a visa). This is usually done at the local police station, and you must show e.g., passport, certificate that you are studying at the local university, Erasmus scholarship certificate and certificate of insurance. Instructions on how to apply for a residence permit are usually included in the information you receive from the host university.

To countries outside the EU, i.e., in Asia, Africa, Australia, South America and North America, you apply for visas and residence permits from each country's diplomatic representation (embassy or consulate). You are responsible for **applying for a visa**. Admission letters are required and sometimes additional official documents, e.g., medical certificate may be required.

Remember to check that your **passport** is valid for the entire stay abroad. Most countries outside the EU require the passport to be valid for another six months after you leave the country. Also, check that your **driving license** is valid for the country you are going to, if you plan to drive a car abroad.

Moving abroad

According to the law, you must always **report a move** when you permanently move or when you temporarily move for more than three months. A move notification can be submitted one month in advance, at the earliest. However, it should be received by the Digital and Population Data Services Agency (DVV) one week after the date of moving, at the latest. Information about the **move notification** is available on the agency's web pages and it can also be submitted here: dvv.fi/en/moving. This joint web service for both DVV and the postal service is the easiest and fastest way to submit the move notification.

Your home municipality does not change with the move notification. If you do not want your mail to be sent to your foreign address, but you want to move the mail to, e.g., your parents' address, you need to make two notifications. I.e., another notification on Posti's web page, here: www.posti.fi/en/private/letters-and-mail/delivery-and-change-of-address.

Inform **Kela** (the Social Insurance Institution) that you are studying abroad by filling in the "OT 15e" form electronically here: www.kela.fi/forms. The scholarships that are intended for student exchange do not affect the annual income limit for the study grant.

In order to maintain Finnish social security coverage during the exchange, a notification should be made to Kela if you spend more than 6 months on exchange, here: www.kela.fi/from-finland-to-another-country-students-and-researchers.

If you study in Denmark, you need a Danish CPR number.

Health insurance and health care

You must have a **comprehensive travel insurance** in effect throughout your entire exchange period. Compare prices, terms and conditions with different insurance companies. Remember to check which insurances you already have in force. You can also get insurance via www.sipinsurance.eu, offered by Marsh.

With the **European Health Insurance Card**, you can get health care in another EU or EEA country and in Switzerland and the United Kingdom. For example, you have the right to emergency care (at a health centre) in the event of illness or accident, and the care is provided by the country of residence's healthcare system. The care costs as much as it costs for the inhabitants of the country in question. However, hospital stays and transport by ambulance can be quite expensive. The European Health Insurance Card does not cover transport home in the event of illness, and therefore does not replace travel insurance. In Finland, the European Health Insurance Card is granted by Kela. Information about the card is available at www.kela.fi/european-health-insurance-card.



The host university should provide you with information about local health care. You can also read the information "*Medical treatment in international situations*", which is available on Kela's web page at www.kela.fi/medical-treatment-in-international-situations.

Check if you need any type of **vaccination**. In some places a **health examination and certificate** are required - make an appointment with a doctor well in advance of your exchange. You can get the certificate based on a doctor's visit at the Finnish Student Health Service. If you regularly take any form of **medicine**, make sure you have enough of it for the duration of your exchange. If you are taking prescription medicine, remember to take the prescriptions with you. If you have an electronic prescription, you can get a signed English version (summary) from the pharmacy. Some countries may have strict rules regarding import of medicines into the country. Also check with customs, the airlines and/or the country's embassy if it is a matter of transporting larger quantities of medicine. The same applies to the import of medicine to Finland. Also note that medications are called different names in different countries.

About vaccinations, see also www.rokote.fi/.

The Finnish Student Health Service has information at www.yths.fi/en/services/a-prevention-of-infectious-diseases/travel-health-advice/.

About the import of medicine to Finland, and what medicines you can take with you abroad: www.fimea.fi/web/en/for_public/travellers_medicines.

Excellent summaries can be found on the following website:

www.eu-healthcare.fi/

www.eu-healthcare.fi/student-medical-care-abroad/

www.eu-healthcare.fi/health-services-abroad/country-specific-information-about-health-services/

Things to do before departure

The **scholarship** that you will receive via ÅAU does not need to be applied for separately. It will be paid into your account before your departure after you have approved the scholarship terms "**Confirmation of receipt of exchange**" in SoleGRANT. This must be done at least one month before departure so that the scholarship can be paid into your account before you leave. If you are going on an exchange in the spring, you can approve the terms in late autumn.

Please note that you will receive **80% of the scholarship** before departure and the remaining 20% when you return home, provided that you have achieved a minimum of 20 credits, you have had the courses credited at Åbo Akademi, and the course evaluation has been done, etc.

You can also apply for other scholarships, e.g., Hanken scholarships for economics students, Studiefonden, Victoria Foundation etc. See also syl.fi/en/ under "Materials" and Luckan's info at fyrk.fi (in Swedish).

Enroll as present for the semester or academic year at ÅAU also for the time you are on exchange, as the exchange studies are part of your degree. Annual enrollment must be made **no later than 1.9.2023** (autumn term) and **12.1.2024** (spring term). More information here: www.abo.fi/en/study/already-in/annual-enrollment/.

Your abo.fi email address will remain active during the exchange period.

A **digital photo** of yourself can also be good to have at hand when on exchange.

Download your **certificate** stating that you are an exchange student and the amount of scholarship you will receive in SoleMove under “Enclosures”. You may need to show the certificate at certain times during your exchange. Take a **copy of your passport** or save a scanned version in your email or cloud service.

Plan your **finances**. You may need cash at the beginning of your stay. Payment by cash vs card differs a lot between countries. Plan **banking matters**, (including credit cards and how to pay bills) before your departure. Within SEPA (Single Euro Payments Area) you can transfer money between accounts without additional fees.

Check which kind of electrical socket is used in your host country. With a **travel adapter**, you can use your electrical appliances in countries with different sockets.

If you fly and have a lot of **luggage**, weigh your luggage in advance to avoid extra charges. You can send extra luggage by air freight, which may be cheaper than transporting it by yourself.

2. When you have arrived in your host country

Arriving at the host university

Follow the **instructions** you received from the host university about where to go on arrival and for registration at the university.

Participate in the **study orientation** for foreign students if one is arranged.

Register as soon as possible for the **courses** that you wish to study, according to the instructions you receive from the host university. At most universities, courses from subjects or faculties other than the one you are to study at can only be chosen with a special permission.

Please note that some universities may require you to register for the courses even before you have arrived at the university, so read all study-related information that you get from the host university very carefully, or check what information is available on their websites.

Keeping in contact with ÅAU

Update your **address, telephone number and e-mail address**, as well as your emergency contact in Peppi. There are two address fields in Peppi, so feel free to keep one address that is in Finland as well.

In the event of complicated cases or **misunderstandings** at the host university that you think you are unable to sort out yourself, call or e-mail us at International Affairs and we will help as best we can.

If you **cancel your stay** or come home earlier than planned, immediately notify International Affairs and be prepared to repay part of the scholarship. If you stay for a shorter period than 2 months, you must repay the entire scholarship amount within Erasmus+. If you cancel your exchange studies for health reasons, a medical certificate must be submitted to International Affairs.

Students who are on an exchange can also **study online courses** at ÅAU or the Open University. Note that these study credits do not count as studies abroad and do not count within the 30 credits that you are expected to study abroad during the exchange.

Studying at a different university

Have patience with different systems for studies, housing, social life, etc. It is unnecessary to compare everything with Finland and what you are used to. Respecting the country's laws, religion, customs and ways will make it easier. Be prepared for extensive bureaucracy.

Respect the teachers' and other university **staff's reception times**. Outside the Nordic countries, it is still common to address professors with titles and special politeness.

Do not worry if you experience **homesickness**, or if lose patience with the host university or -country and your roommates at some stage. This usually occurs in the first few weeks, after the first period of happiness has subsided. This is normal and usually passes.

Sometimes, when living in a new environment, you can come across diseases (e.g., allergies) that you do not otherwise experience. Please seek care in a timely manner. Exchange students often suffer from **persistent colds**.

Keep track of which courses you included in your original study plan / Learning agreement. If you need to make **changes to the study plan** that has been approved in advance, contact your academic coordinator at ÅA e.g., by e-mail **within one month after** the student exchange has begun. Describe the content of the new courses. It is extremely important that you have agreed with your academic coordinator at ÅA if you make changes to the study plan. If the courses have not been approved in advance, it is not warranted that you will receive them credited at ÅA. Save your correspondence, you may need it when you request for a credit transfer and for the studies to be counted within your degree at ÅA.

Study hard! The normal study rate corresponds to **30 credits per semester** (= full-time studies), and you should study at least 20 credits / semester, otherwise you will need to **repay your scholarship**. If you notice at the beginning of the exchange that you have difficulty coping with your studies, it is a good idea to consider interrupting the exchange and coming home. If you become seriously ill for a long time and this affects your studies, you should obtain a medical certificate and send it to International Affairs. Other force majeure causes, e.g., pandemics or prolonged strikes at universities can also affect academic success.

If you wish to have **language courses** credited, please contact the Language Centre at Åbo Akademi. Preferably, this should be agreed upon before departure.

Make sure you get a **Transcript of Records** within a reasonable time (5 weeks) after the end of the exchange. It will be sent either to you and / or to International Affairs. Save course descriptions, essays etc. You may need to show them during discussions about the credit transfer at ÅÅ.

Those of you who go on exchange have been given a special opportunity and funding to improve your studies. Thus, especially if you go to bilateral partner universities outside Europe, you should remember to be a good **ambassador for Åbo Akademi University**.

3. Safety instructions

When you go on an exchange, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs recommends that you make a **travel notification** (especially if you are going to a region with increased risk level), see instructions here: matkustusilmoitus.fi/public.html?command=browse&lang=en. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides travel announcements (in Swedish/Finnish) that can also be useful to consider for your host country: um.fi/resemeddelanden-a-o.

You should know who the **administrative contact person** is at both the host university and at ÅÅ (Harriet, Katie or Astrid).

Read your e-mails regularly during your stay abroad.

Submit your **contact information** during the exchange to Åbo Akademi via e-form, survey.abo.fi/lomakkeet/7931/lomake.html, so we can reach you quickly if something happens.

Åbo Akademi University is not responsible for travel or personal safety for those who go on exchange. You should purchase a **comprehensive travel insurance** for the exchange period. It is expensive and difficult to arrange transport home in the event of illness or death if you do not have private travel insurance.

Take the necessary **vaccinations**.

Stay up to date on the conditions in the area you are staying in during the exchange.

Follow the advice and regulations given by the host university and local authorities. Respect local customs and religions. Observe local standards regarding behaviour and dress.

Be responsible and reduce the risk of ending up in dangerous situations.

In case of crisis and in need of help: If necessary, contact local police, fire brigade or ambulance. If you cannot make yourself understood, try to find someone who can act as an interpreter.

In case of considerable crisis and in need of help: Inform your location to the nearest Finnish embassy, your relatives and your administrative coordinator at ÅA.

Check **entry- and customs regulations** directly with the authorities of the destination country, e.g., at the country's embassy in Finland or in the nearest country where there is an embassy.

Do not accept **food, drink or anything** else from strangers. Do not leave your drink unattended. Be attentive to offers of help from strangers.

Take copies of passports, credit cards, tickets and other important documents and keep them separate from the originals. Scan them and send them to your own e-mail or something equivalent (e.g., a cloud service). Save the phone number of your bank's blocking service.

Always be careful **when withdrawing money from ATMs**, preferably have a friend with you. Do not carry large sums of cash, nor expensive jewellery or watches.

Avoid being alone, especially on dark roads and in dark parks. Be especially vigilant in **large crowds**, i.e., at airports, in cafés, trains, buses and on the metro.

In case of accidents and other emergencies, it is a good idea to contact the **embassy**. We also recommend that you report your arrival in the country at the nearest Finnish / Nordic embassy or consulate.

Be prepared for **pocket and bag thefts** both when walking and when traveling by public transport and taxi. Do not try to resist or fight back if you are being robbed – usually it does not pay off.

There is every reason to pay close attention to **food hygiene** and avoid e.g., salads from street food vendors, mayonnaise, strawberries, ice cream and ice cubes. The risks increase if the weather is hot and humid. Check if the tap water is drinkable.

Avoid contact with stray or wild animals as they can carry **rabies** and other diseases.

Dengue fever is a disease spread by mosquitoes. Mosquito repellent and protective clothing

are recommended. Yellow fever and malaria also occur in some areas of South America. Other **infectious diseases** that occur in different places are hepatitis A and B and meningitis.

Take all safety precautions that you have already learned from **Covid-19**.

Remember that crime is punishable **by local law**.

Save your **nearest contact person's contact information** with the prefix ICE (In Case of Emergency) both on the phone, on a note in your wallet and in your e-mail.

SOS International helps Nordic travellers: www.sos.eu/en/. 24h assistance can be reached at **+358 (0) 9 25 27 11 00**. E-mail helsinki@sos.eu.

4. After returning home

Experiencing a **homecoming shock** is very common. You have experienced a lot, and here at home everything is the same. However, after a while you adapt to life at home again.

For the **courses you have completed abroad**, you must receive credits at ÅA. You are responsible for applying for the studies **to be credited** at Åbo Akademi. Submit a copy of your foreign transcript of records with a written request of the credit transfer form at the subject and / or faculty office as soon as possible after the completion of the exchange, preferably within five weeks after completion. The form and more information is available at abofi.sharepoint.com/sites/intra-en-study/SitePages/Credit-transfer.aspx?web=1.

You can also attach **course descriptions** to facilitate the credit transfer of the studies. The credit form is submitted to your academic coordinator / faculty office. Remember that there are many students who have studied abroad, the teachers are short on time and want to be able to look at your achievements in peace. Do not expect language courses to be approved if you have not had an agreement before the exchange with the Language Centre at ÅA. Courses that you have only participated in, but have not taken exams or submitted assignments in, cannot be credited. In case of problems with the credit transfer of courses, contact International Affairs.

Please note that you will receive the remaining 20% of the scholarship after you have done the following:

Erasmus + students:

1. "Erasmus Certificate of attendance" must be submitted in SoleMove. The end date must be the same as your last day of study at the host university. It is available at www.abo.fi/en/study/study-abroad/vid-hemkomst/.
2. Fill in ÅA's evaluation form in SoleMove. See instructions here: www.abo.fi/en/study/study-abroad/vid-hemkomst/.
3. Upload a PDF of your Transcript of Records from Peppi in SoleMove, where the credited courses appear.
4. Fill in the exchange report via "Erasmus+ individual participant report request" sent by e-mail from the EU.

Other students:

1. Fill in ÅA's evaluation form in SoleMove. See instructions here: www.abo.fi/en/study/study-abroad/vid-hemkomst/.
2. Upload a PDF of your Transcript of Records from Peppi in SoleMove, where the credited courses appear.

Fill in the **evaluation form** in SoleMove carefully. It is extremely important and provides information to future exchange students.

Sign up as a **tutor** for our incoming exchange students! This way, you can continue your international path even after you have returned home. More information here: www.abo.fi/en/study/study-abroad/vid-hemkomst/.

We also hope that you volunteer to **inform** ÅA students who want to go abroad, both at unofficial events and the information sessions that International Affairs arranges several times a year. Your expert knowledge is much appreciated among outgoing students who go to your former host country. It can also be fun for you to talk about that period in your life.

You can also continue to be a member of the **Facebook group "ÅA students on exchange"**, and inform others there about experiences in the country you have lived in.

Good luck!

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