

Concordia International Pre-Departure Guide

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
I. Pre-Departure	
A. Academic matters	
General Information	5
Admission Letter	5
MELS Bursary	6
Registration at Concordia	6
Registration at the Host Institution	7
Pre-Departure Withdrawal from the Program	7
B. Things to do before you leave	
Passport and Visa	8
International Student Identification Card	8
Money and Banking Abroad	8
Important Documentation	9
Health and Wellness	9
Insurance	10
Housing	11
Flight Arrangements	11
Transportation	11
Registration with Customs Canada	11
Packing Wisely	11

II. Away from Home

A. Academic matters away from home

Course Registration at the Host Institution	12
Course Withdrawal after Arrival	12

B. Things to do while abroad

Keeping in Touch	12
Registering with the Embassy	13
Enjoy Your Stay and be Responsible	13
Managing Stress	13
Clearing Debts	13
Receipts on Purchases	13
Exit Fees	13

III. Home Sweet Home: Things to do upon you return

General Information	14
Grades, Credits, and Transcripts	14
Graduation	14
Health Insurance	15
Re-Entry Adaptation	15

IV. Useful Links 16

INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on your acceptance to the International Student Exchange Program!

Now that you have secured a place in the study abroad program, you will need to take care of a few things in order to make your international experience a successful one. The purpose of this guide is to help students get through the challenging task of preparing for studying overseas. The information found here covers the academic and practical aspects of pre-departure preparations, your time abroad, and your return to Canada. This guide is a great traveling companion, and students are encouraged to refer to it both before departure and while abroad, for important tips. An electronic copy of this guide can also be found online at <http://international.concordia.ca>.

Students are strongly encouraged to begin preparations for their departure well in advance of their departure date, and the summer is the perfect time to do so. It is highly recommended that students attend one of the various pre-departure workshops provided by Concordia International prior to their departure.

IMPORTANT NOTE: *The information provided in this guide should by no means a complete checklist of things to do prior to departure. It is the responsibility of the student to familiarize themselves with the particularities of the country of destination, the host institution, and academic requirements.*

Produced for Concordia International by Julia Klenin and Olivier Fortin, 2007.

I. PRE-DEPARTURE

A. Academic matters

General Information

- **You are responsible for ensuring that you meet all requirements for participation in the international exchange program and for submitting the necessary documents to the Concordia International office.**
- All communication with potential host universities, including the submission of your exchange application, should be done through your Concordia International Liaison Officer (ILO).
- Each faculty requires that their students complete a specified number of courses in order to be eligible for the student exchange program.
- Grades obtained during the semester(s) spent abroad will not be listed on your Concordia transcript. However, host universities do provide an official transcript to Concordia University upon completion of the exchange, which is entered as a separate document in the student's academic files at Concordia.
- Grades received while on exchange do not count towards a student's GPA. However, students will receive credit **ONLY** for those courses approved by their faculty that that they have passed.
- You should be prepared to accept differences in teaching philosophies, academic assessment, attitude of professors, and other matters that may affect your studies.
- Upon arrival at your host institution, you should consult with the host program coordinator and others for assistance with any academic or cultural adjustment problems.

Admission Letter

- Once your complete file has been forwarded by Concordia International to the host institution, it can take several months before you receive an official confirmation letter.
- The final decision on your application will be made by the Host University and not Concordia International.
- The admission letter is generally sent to Concordia International (CI) rather than directly to the student. If you do receive the admission letter directly, we ask that you bring it to your ILO at Concordia International.

- Upon receipt of your acceptance letter from the host institution, you are responsible for meeting all terms and conditions set by the host program or institution, and for providing all required forms and signatures by the indicated deadlines.
- Before you can leave for exchange, you must sign an International Student Exchange Agreement Form at the Concordia International office.
- Keep copies of all correspondence between Concordia and the host institution concerning your exchange application, as well as copies of your Visa applications, accommodation applications, acceptance letters, etc.

MELS Bursary

- The ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) offers a substantial mobility bursary for Québec residents who are also Canadian Citizens or Landed Immigrants (persons who have lived in Canada for at least two years).
- To be eligible for the MELS Bursary you must meet the minimum GPA requirement (check with your faculty), have completed at least 24 credits at Concordia before leaving on exchange, and have at least 12 credits left in your program to complete while abroad.
- The application form for the MELS Bursary should be completed prior to your departure. The bursary will only be granted upon receipt of official proof of exchange in the form of an admission letter from the host institution. **You are responsible for ensuring that the Concordia International office has a copy of your admission letter for the MELS Bursary Committee.**
- The MELS Bursary payments commence at the end of your first month of exchange; therefore, you should make arrangements to have extra money with you during that period (usually 1 – 2 months).
- Keep in mind that the amount offered by the MELS Bursary is not substantial enough to be counted as your primary or only source of income.
- Payment of the MELS bursary will not always fall on the same date every month. Please refer to your confirmation e-mail from the Financial Aid and Awards Office for the exact payment schedule.

Registration at Concordia University

- The Concordia Registrar's Office will register each exchange student for an STOQ (Studies Outside Quebec) course. This means that Concordia University recognizes that you have gained special department permission to study outside of the province for credit towards your academic program.

- You will be charged tuition for 15 credits under the STOQ status while on exchange, even before you register for your classes at the host university.
- The STOQ course is equivalent to 15 undergraduate credits or 9 graduate credits taken at Concordia, which allows you to qualify for full-time enrolment benefits, such as loans.
- It is very important that you set up payment plans before you leave on exchange in order to avoid problems such as holds or delays once you are away. Fees must be paid in full by the payment deadline at Concordia University for the semester(s) spent abroad.
- Undergraduate students who are registered for only 12 Concordia credits at the host institution will be refunded for 3 credits, once their exchange credits have been transferred. Students will not receive refunds for failed courses.
- Students are advised to register for classes at Concordia, as if they were staying home. Anything can happen before the time you leave, and it is important to have something to fall back on in case your plans to study abroad fall through. Once it is confirmed that you are going on exchange, you are responsible for dropping those back-up classes before the appropriate deadline.

Registration at the Host Institution

- You should be flexible in your course selection. Host universities cannot guarantee that you will get your preliminary course selection. For various reasons, certain courses may not be available by the time official registration takes place at the host institution.
- Some host institutions allow you to register yourself on their online registration system, some will register you on your behalf, and others require that you ask your teacher at the host institution to register you during the first week of school.
- It is your responsibility to ensure that the courses taken at the host university comply with your faculty's regulations concerning acceptability and duplication of courses taken previously at Concordia University or at any other institution.
- When making final decision about your courses, you need to communicate with your Concordia department and/or faculty. It is important to do this even if you are not making any changes to your courses.
- If you change your course selection, you need to get these new choices re-approved by both your faculty advisor and your program advisor, even if you are abroad.

- You are required to confirm your registration by signing a CI Confirmation of Participation form and the Study Agreement, which will be given to you by your International Liaison Officer.

Pre-Departure Withdrawal from the Program

If for any reason you should have to withdraw from the international exchange program after a placement has been made, please notify Concordia International as soon as possible. Your prompt verbal or written notification will enable Concordia International to make all necessary adjustments.

B. Things to do before you leave

Passport and Visa

- Make sure to obtain your passport and/ or student visa as soon as possible. Your passport must be valid for 6 months beyond the end of program. For more information on the Canadian Passport, visit www.ppt.gc.ca .
- Contact the embassy of your host country for information concerning your student visa requirements. For example, some countries may require that you have a medical examination or a criminal record check completed before they can issue you a visa. Also, keep in mind that requirements may differ for visa applications for Canadian vs. other international/ visiting students.
- Browse the website of Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade for any information regarding travel and living abroad: www.voyage.gc.ca . You will find useful information on travel warnings and updates, country profiles, and visa requirements.
- Find out whether dual citizenship may be an issue for you.

International Student Identification Card (ISIC)

The ISIC card, designed for student travelers, is valid overseas and will allow you to receive discounts on airfare, transportation tickets and passes, museum and concert admissions, etc. Concordia students can get an ISIC at no charge. For information on the application process, and to get a copy of the application form please go to www.travelcuts.com , or visit Travel CUTS/ Voyage Campus at 1455 Boulevard de Maisonneuve West, Local H222.

Money and Banking Abroad

- While you may be able to use your Canadian bankcard at some foreign banks, it may be a good idea to set up a local bank account and use the new bankcard to avoid significant service charges. Obtain as much information as possible from your bank regarding banking operations in the country of your destination (i.e. transferring accounts, transferring funds, accessing your account, etc.), and make necessary arrangements before your departure.
- Complete and sign a Power of Attorney form to allow someone (i.e. a family member or a friend – someone you fully trust) to take care of your banking matters during your absence. This will make your financial dealings easier while you are away.
- Plan on having access to extra finances for the first two months of your stay, in case of emergencies. This is critical as bursaries (i.e. MELS) may not go through on time, and you will have to use your own resources to cover initial expenses.
- Exchange a small sum of money into the foreign currency of your destination prior to departure. This money will cover any expenses you may have to incur, such as lodgings, food, and transportation, until you can get to a bank.

Important Documents

- Authorization Letter to Release Personal Information: Certain situations (with your health insurance company, student loan issuer, Concordia University, etc.) may require your immediate attention here in Canada during your absence. This may be problematic due to differences in time zones, challenges of long distance correspondence, etc. Therefore, you should designate someone (i.e. a family member) to be responsible for taking care of such matters, by signing an authorization letter/ form to release information to that person.
- Complete and sign a Power of Attorney form to a family member or friend – someone you fully trust.
- Will: Anything can happen; hence it is important to protect yourself and your loved ones from legal hassles by ensuring your Will is in good order.
- Make copies of important documents, such as your admission letter, passport, visa, insurance papers, prescriptions, medical and dental records, etc. Keep one set of copies in Canada with your next of kin and another set with you while abroad. Keep copies of your passport and visa separate from the originals.

Health and Wellness

- Medical exams: Ensure you have taken the necessary medical, dental, and eye examinations prior to departure.
- Vaccinations: Concordia Health Services clinic provides medical exams and vaccinations to students traveling to other countries. Make sure to get all the necessary immunizations required by your host country, as well as those destinations you are planning to visit during the study abroad term.
- Prescriptions and medications: If you regularly take certain medications (including birth control) or have injections, make sure to bring enough to last the duration of your stay. Prescription drugs are allowed in carry-on luggage, in the original container/ packaging, and clearly labeled. Bring a copy of your original prescription, as well as a letter from your doctor describing what your prescribed medication is and why you are traveling with high quantities of it. This will help with clearing customs.
- Contact your host institution to find out if there is an on-campus medical facility for students that can help you with getting your prescription re-filled, or if they can refer you to a local pharmacist prior to your departure in order to make suitable arrangements.
- Bring your medical ID alert card/ bracelet with you.
- Pack a First Aid Kit. You may want to bring the following items: sterile gauze, adhesive tape and/or bandages in several sizes, acetaminophen and ibuprofen, your prescription medications, antiseptic wipes, antibiotic ointment (i.e. Polysporin), sharp scissors, safety pins, and a thermometer.

Insurance

- Health insurance: Find out if Concordia provides health insurance for its students studying abroad. Also, check with your host university how you can obtain health insurance. Please note that in some European countries healthcare is automatically covered after a three-month period. Also note that Quebec residents may be eligible to transfer health insurance to the following countries: Denmark, Finland, France, Luxemburg, Norway, Portugal, and Sweden. Make sure to check whether health insurance transfers apply to you, and fill out all the necessary documentation to complete transfer.
- Travel insurance: Arrange for travel insurance if needed. Consider travel cancellation insurance.

- Property insurance: Insure valuable items you are taking with you abroad, such as camera, laptop, etc.
- Liability Insurance: It is suggested that you purchase liability insurance for your time abroad in order to cover you in incidents where you may be sued. Check with your host institution if liability insurance is mandatory for your exchange program.

Housing

Please note that providing housing for exchange students is NOT the responsibility of Concordia International.

Each student is responsible for making the necessary arrangements for his or her accommodation abroad. Make sure to do it well before your departure. You may opt for either student housing or independent housing. Check with your host university whether you can arrange student housing through the institution. When seeking independent housing, be aware that it can be extremely difficult and risky to make accommodation arrangements long distance. Try to ensure that your housing arrangements can be cancelled in case of unforeseen circumstances.

Flight Arrangements

Make certain to reserve your ticket ahead to take advantage of discounts. You may also want to use your ISIC to get reduced prices on airfare. Consider flight changes and cancellation insurance. If purchasing an open return ticket, consider all the pros and cons, and make sure you will be able to book your return flight anytime you want. You should wait to receive your official admission letter from the Host University before reserving your flight.

Transportation

Check with your host university or the Student Union to see whether they provide transportation from airport to their lodgings to visiting students. If yes, ensure to arrange for pick-up beforehand.

Registration with Customs Canada

Any expensive items you wish to take with you abroad (i.e. laptop, camera, etc.) should be registered with Canadian Customs. Find out how by visiting www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/.

Packing Wisely

Take as little as possible with you. Check beforehand your airlines' restrictions on luggage weight and size. Consider bringing along a few useful things, such as:

- First Aid Kit (see details above)
- Sewing kit
- Bilingual dictionary
- Phrase book
- Electric outlet adapter (check if you can use it for battery re-chargers for camera, laptop, etc.)
- Travel guide
- Concordia International Pre-Departure Guide
- DFAIT Guide "Bon Voyage, But..."

II. AWAY FROM HOME

A. Academic matters away from home

Course Registration at the Host Institution

- Even though you are asked to make preliminary course selections, the host institution cannot guarantee that you will be able to register for those courses. You must remain flexible in your course selection as course selection can only be finalized upon registration at the host university.
- If you change your course selection, you need to get these new choices re-approved by both your faculty advisor and your program advisor.
- Keep copies of all registration documents.

Withdrawal from the Program after Arrival

If you withdraw from the program while you are away, the procedures are the same as if withdrawing from regular courses at Concordia; however, the host institution's deadlines apply. The consequences are identical: if the deadline has passed, you may not receive a tuition refund.

B. Things to do while abroad

Keeping in Touch

Upon your arrival at your destination, be sure to notify your family as well as Concordia International of your new address and contact information. Make sure to check your emails regularly.

Registration with the Embassy

Persons residing abroad for over three months should register with the local Canadian Embassy or Consulate. For the list of Canadian government offices abroad, please see “Bon Voyage, But...” or visit www.voyage.gc.ca.

Enjoy Your Stay, but Be Responsible

Make the most of your international experience by being a responsible citizen. Take into consideration cultural differences and avoid behavior that could be offensive to the culture of your host country: consider appropriate clothing, gestures, vocabulary, etc. Keep in mind that your host country’s laws will apply to you during your stay and that you will likely have to assume the country’s consequences in case of non-compliance.

Managing Stress

Living in a foreign country and experiencing a new culture can be both exciting and emotionally difficult. To make the adjustment process a little less stressful, research your host country as much as you can, learn the laws and customs, and try to keep an open mind during your stay. It is also a good idea to make contacts and form relationships with local citizens, as well as to immerse yourself in the culture by participating in various cultural activities. Learn to accept and appreciate your host culture: it is essential if you are to enjoy and make the most of your unique experiences abroad.

Clearing Debts

Before your return to Canada, make sure to settle all open accounts and bills.

Receipts on Purchases

Save receipts for all major purchases you make while abroad, as you will have to declare all new items upon your return to Canada.

Exit or Departure Fees

Some countries require so-called exit fees paid by visitors upon their departure. Make sure you know whether your host country requires visitors to pay exit fees, what they are, and plan for this expense accordingly (that is, make sure you have this sum in the currency of your host country when you get to the airport to leave for Canada).

III. HOME SWEET HOME

Things to do upon your return

General Information

Upon your return, you need to submit a minimum one-page report to Concordia International describing your experience and the quality of academic and student services received at the host institution.

Grades, Credits, and Transcripts

- Although your host institution should automatically send your Official Transcript to Concordia, it may not always be the case. Therefore, it is recommended that you request a copy (or two copies) of your transcript mailed to your home address for a small fee. Once received, please deliver the transcript(s) to Concordia, in the original sealed envelope.
- Concordia University is not able to process the transfer of credits from your host institution to your home transcript until an Official Copy of your grades is received.
- A period of 3 to 6 months should be expected before transcripts are issued and grades are received at Concordia.

Graduation

- There are two graduation periods at Concordia: the fall, for which the application deadline is generally mid-July; and the spring, for which the application deadline is generally mid-January.
- Keep in mind that if you are abroad during the last term of your program at Concordia and will complete your credit requirements while on exchange, you will likely not be eligible to graduate immediately upon return, due to the processing time for transcripts. For example, if you are returning from exchange in the winter semester, you would not be able to graduate in the spring and would have to wait to attend the fall convocation.
- It is possible however, to request a proof of completion from the Registrar's Office at Concordia that is recognized as an official substitute by both academic institutions and employers.

Health Insurance

Make sure you inform your health insurance provider of your return from exchange as soon as possible, in order to avoid not having coverage for several months after your return to Canada.

Re-entry Adaptation

It is important to realize that you will go through an adjustment period upon your return to Canada, and may even experience re-entry shock, usually expressed as a feeling of angst, due to the change in surroundings or the natural changes that you experienced while away. Speak with your International Liaison Officer or Concordia Counseling and Development about the steps you can take to make your transition back home easier.

IV. USEFUL LINKS

ATM Locator

<http://visa.via.infonow.net/locator/global/>

Canada Revenue Agency

www.ccra-adrc.gc.ca

Canada Direct

www.infocanadadirect.com

Cultural Profiles Project (Citizenship and Immigration Canada)

www.cp-pc.ca

Currency Converter

www.xe.com

Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

www.voyage.gc.ca/

Health Canada

www.hc-sc.gc.ca

International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers

www.iamat.org

Internet Guide to Hostelling

www.hostels.com

Lonely Planet Travel Guides

www.lonelyplanet.com

MedicAlert

www.medicalert.com

Passport Canada

www.ppt.gc.ca

Travel CUTS

www.travelcuts.com

Travel Resource for Women

www.journeywoman.com

Western Union Money Transfers

www.westernunion.com

World Health Organization

www.who.int

PERSONAL CHECKLIST

















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