

Revised Sept 2013

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
AMERICAN & CANADIAN STUDIES

YEAR ABROAD PROGRAMME

2013-14

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Welcome to the Department of American and Canadian Studies' Year Abroad homepage. This site is dedicated to providing up-to-date information about our department's year abroad programmes in the United States and Canada. This site is part of a series of resources formulated to guide students through their preparations for and experiences during and after their year in America or Canada. The site functions in conjunction with official literature from participating universities and formal/informal information sessions held throughout the year by ACS.

Settling on a host institution for the year abroad is a complex process. Concerns such as cost, location, courses offered and student life are major factors in the decision-making process. These pages are designed to provide as much information as possible to make this decision slightly less complicated. Please note, however, that the information contained here can change rapidly. Please double check with the Year Abroad Tutor to make sure it is accurate.

Please note that the work you do during your year abroad does count towards your degree. You will enroll on and take some modules and complete an independent study. Further details of these requirements follow. Let us say immediately, however, that successfully completing and passing the modules and the independent study is crucial. Any failures create progression

problems which can impede the progress of your studies in your final year – the most important in all of your studies. Failing your year abroad will jeopardize your degree.

Schedule of the Application Process

Mid/late October	Initial Orientation meeting for second year students: with ACS staff, final year students and US/Canada exchange students.
November	Students make ranked choices using form provided by ACS. If one location is over-subscribed then decisions will be made on basis of academic merit (year 1 marks in core ACS courses).
December	ACS makes initial allocations then passes them to the International Office at UoB who will make final call on allocation of places.
January Jan/February/March	International Office confirm allocation of places to ACS students Applications arrive in International Office during this period Students are informed by email from IO; collect, complete and return their application by deadline given by IO, seeking assistance from both IO and ACS Year Abroad Tutor where needed. A MANDATORY International Office orientation will occur before the Easter vacation.
April/May/June	Students notified of acceptance at N American university and receive formal acceptance packs at various dates during this period. After acceptance, students should begin visa application process immediately.
April/May/June/July May or June	Students register online for courses at N American university – after getting approval for choices from the ACS Year Abroad tutor Final mandatory pre-departure meeting with ACS staff
June into early July	Students going to USA: interviews for visa at US Embassy Students going to Canada: obtain visa application from Canadian High Commission
August/September	Arrive at your new university begin classes

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CHOOSING

CAMPUS CHOICE

The American and Canadian Studies Department currently operates exchange programs with a number of US and Canadian universities. In 2010-2011, ACS students were studying at 15 different universities in North America. The following list provides a description of each host university, including size, location and a brief portrait of student life. This list also contains links to the website for each host institution. In most cases, these websites serve as the best potential source of information and we strongly encourage students to take the time to browse through them. Students are not guaranteed a place at any particular university. **The number of places available to ACS students at each campus will be confirmed by the International Office at the University of Birmingham in late October of each year. ACS has no control over the number of places that are available at each institution.**

UNITED STATES*

University of Wyoming-Laramie: The main university in the state of Wyoming, which has the smallest state population while being the third largest geographically. Laramie, Wyoming, a town of

approximately 25,000 residents is located 45 miles west of Cheyenne at an elevation of 7,200 feet. www.wyoming.edu

University of Iowa: The University of Iowa is a major national research university located on a 1,900-acre campus in Iowa City in southeast Iowa, on the Iowa River near the intersection of U.S. Interstate Highways 80 and 380. Iowa is composed of 11 colleges, the largest of which is the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, enrolling most of Iowa's undergraduates. www.uiowa.edu

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee: This research and teaching at the UWM ranges wide and far, extending to 148 different degree programs that serve nearly 26,000 students. Receiving an education in the state's largest metropolitan area gives students access to the hundreds of companies-many of which the university works with regularly-that call southeastern Wisconsin home. www.uwm.edu

University of Virginia: Founded by Thomas Jefferson in 1819, The University of Virginia, based in Charlottesville, Virginia, was named #2 among public universities, according to the 2005 *U.S. News & World Report*. Since *U.S. News* began ranking public colleges and universities in 1998, U.Va. has never been lower than No. 2. www.virginia.edu

University of Mississippi: Total enrollment on The University of Mississippi's three campuses and The University of Mississippi Medical Center is almost 16,500. Sixty-seven percent of undergraduates are from Mississippi, and 18 percent of all students are minorities. International students come from 66 nations. The main campus is in Oxford, Mississippi. The university was founded in 1848. www.olemiss.edu

University of Alabama: Located in Tuscaloosa, the University of Alabama is a major, comprehensive, student-centered research university [founded in 1831](#) as Alabama's first public college. The University of Alabama is ranked among the top 50 public universities in the nation for the sixth consecutive year in *U.S. News and World Report's* annual college rankings, fall 2006. www.ua.edu

Berry College: Located in Mount Berry, Georgia, Berry College is an independent, coeducational college with fully accredited arts, sciences and professional programs plus specialized graduate programs in education and business administration. The college is recognized as one of the outstanding comprehensive colleges in the South. www.berry.edu

Birmingham-Southern College: Birmingham-Southern College is a four-year, private liberal arts institution founded in 1856. It is located in Birmingham, Alabama on 192 wooded acres three miles west of downtown Birmingham. www.bsc.edu

University of Cincinnati: Founded in 1819 and located in Cincinnati, Ohio, this 20,000-student university offers a wide range of undergraduate courses. www.uc.edu

University of Minnesota-Duluth: Situated in the city of Duluth and part of the well-regarded, large regional U of Minnesota which has links with other university and cultural institutions in the Twin Cities, UMD has 11,664 students, of whom about 9,500 are undergraduates. UMD's campus consists of more than 50 buildings on 244 acres overlooking Lake Superior, all built since 1948. In US terms, UMD is a mid-sized campus university. <http://www.d.umn.edu/>

University of Connecticut: Founded in 1881, this large state university is located in Storrs, Connecticut. www.uconn.edu

University of Kansas <http://www.kansas.edu/>

Rutgers University <http://www.rutgers.edu/>

University of Pittsburgh <http://www.pitt.edu>

New Mexico State University <http://www.nmsu.edu>

North Texas University <http://www.unt.edu/>

Loyola University- New Orleans <http://www.loyno.edu/>

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee <http://www4.uwm.edu/>

Bellarmino University <http://www.bellarmino.edu/>

University of Illinois-Chicago <http://www.uic.edu/uic/>

Illinois Institute of Technology <http://www.iit.edu/>

CANADA*

McGill University: is an English-speaking university situated in downtown Montreal, a functionally bilingual multicultural city of 3.4 million people. The total student population at McGill is about 30,000. With an all-round excellent academic reputation, McGill's strengths include History, English, Canadian Studies, American Studies, ethnic studies. www.mcgill.ca; www.mcgill.ca/StuServ/iss/int1stud.htm (information for International Students)

****University of Toronto (U of T):** an impressive campus which mixes nineteenth-century college buildings with modern architectural styles, U of T is in downtown Toronto, Canada's largest city. Undergraduate student enrolment on the downtown campus is about 20,000. U of T has the fourth largest library in North America and academic strengths include English, History, Cinema and Communication Studies, International Relations, US & Canadian Studies. www.utoronto.ca; www.library.utoronto.ca/isc (International Student Centre)

The University of Ottawa: Known as "Canada's University ©," the University of Ottawa was founded in 1848 and is Canada's largest bilingual university with large numbers of international students. It offers a wide range of courses suitable to ACS students that can be taken in either French or English (exchange students are not required to be able to speak French). The university is centrally located in Ottawa, only a fifteen-minute walk from Parliament Hill, Canada's centre of government, and is connected to Ottawa's excellent bus system. Ottawa as Canada's national capital offers a wide range of activities to its citizens. Some of these include boating, cycling, roller blading, skiing, and skating, the latter on the world's longest outdoor skating rink, the Rideau Canal. It is a centre for major concerts at the National Arts Centre and is home of the Ottawa Senators, a team in the National Hockey League. Ottawa is across the Ottawa River from the province of Quebec and is only two hours by bus or train from Montreal and four hours by bus or train from Toronto. Its airport offers direct flights to the U.K. and various cities in the U.S. <http://www.uottawa.ca/welcome.html>

Dalhousie University: Founded in 1818, Dalhousie University has a strong academic reputation. The university offers a wide variety of courses to its diverse body of students, including many drawn from abroad. Its attractive campus is located in the city of Halifax, for centuries a major British naval port and the capital of the province of Nova Scotia. The British-built citadel still dominates the Halifax skyline. Today, Halifax has become a cultural centre for all of Atlantic Canada and is well known for its live entertainment, bars, and low cost of living. Its main airport offers direct flights to the U.K., to Montreal and Toronto, and to cities in the United States. <http://www.dal.ca/>

Simon Fraser University: Located on top of a mountain in Burnaby, British Columbia, a suburb of Vancouver, SFU opened in 1965, it was known in the 1960s as Canada's most "far out" university because of its radical politics and protests. It is now a large Canadian university offering a wide variety of courses that connect to both the United States and Canada. www.sfu.ca

University of British Columbia: (UBC) is located in Vancouver, Canada's third largest city, which is surrounded on three sides by the ocean and overlooked by mountains. UBC's large modern campus is 30 minutes from downtown Vancouver on its own parkland, complete with forest trails, and is 10 minutes from the beach. Undergraduate enrolment is 29,000. Academic strengths include English, History, Women's Studies, Native Studies, Anthropology, Asian Studies. www.ubc.ca. www.international.ubc.ca (information for International Students).

Trent University: Located in Peterborough, Ontario, a small city an hour away from Toronto, Trent is a small university that conducts all of its undergraduate classes as small seminars. It also has a strong Canadian Studies program. www.trenu.ca

University of New Brunswick (UNB)

Located on two campuses in New Brunswick – Saint John (the biggest city in the province) and Fredericton (the provincial capital), UNB was founded in 1785. Students will usually be based at one of the two campuses. A small university with an intimate and friendly feel, UNB is well-known for its nurturing of writers, its historic locations, and the quality of its undergraduate teaching. Find out more at:

<http://www.unb.ca/dynamicuniversity/index.html> [general UNB site]

<http://www.unbf.ca/prospective/> [Fredericton]

<http://www.unbsj.ca/prospective/> [Saint John]

University of Waterloo <http://uwaterloo.ca/>

University of Guelph <http://www.uoguelph.ca/>

Western University <http://www.uwo.ca/>

University of Saskatchewan <http://www.usask.ca/>

* any university partner may not be available in a particular year

COSTS

UPDATED SEPTEMBER 2013

VERY APPROXIMATE COSTS 2011/12 - not including travel costs to and from N America

	U.S.	Canada
Housing	\$450 - \$750 pcm off campus, from \$350 on campus	Depends on location
Food/Meal Plan	\$30- \$60 week; meal plan from \$250 per quarter	Groceries similar cost to UK. Eating out is half the price or less.
Books	\$300 - \$800	\$Cdn 400-800
Health	Varies from university to university- Mississippi health care is \$400 for the academic year	\$Cdn700 for year (varies from province to province but you will need to pay for health insurance)
Transport	Very variable	Variable

Overall, typical costs for U.S. campuses were between \$12000 and \$16000 for the academic year 2011-2012 and between \$10,000 and \$14,000 (Cdn.) in Canada.

Students applying to universities in the U.S. have to show that they have the approximate amounts in the following table to cover their expenses during their stay. These figures are not ACTUAL costs and may have increased but expect that you will need to show that at a minimum there is \$20,000 U.S. in a family account.

The figure for the remainder of the U.S. universities will be confirmed by the International Office.

All amounts are subject to change. It is advised that you allow for a 7% margin of increase in these figures when making your financial arrangements.

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HOUSING

The type and cost of accommodation will be a major factor influencing your choice of university.

Accommodation options vary from university to university. You may prefer to live off-campus in private, rented accommodation with American or Canadian students.

Some on-campus housing is available at some universities but is usually not guaranteed. University housing options cover a wide range:

- Single bedroom in dormitory-style building; catered
- Shared room in dormitory-style building; catered or self-catered
- Single bedroom in a flat; catered or self-catered

Some universities offer specialty houses, such as an International house or an Alternative Lifestyles house. Check with your host university to see what housing options are available. Pay close attention to housing application procedures and deadlines. University websites are extremely valuable for up to date information regarding housing options and requirements.

University accommodation has its advantages and its disadvantages. It can be cheaper, and on some campuses it's much more convenient to be housed on site. But as in Britain, most first-year students live in university accommodations. Although as an exchange student you would most likely have the option of living in dormitories reserved for older students, you may be placed with younger students (ages 17-19). Some students discover from living with first years that the year between first and third year is a crucial one in terms of maturity. If you feel this may be the case, then take proper steps to ensure you are not placed in first-year accommodations. Most universities should be willing to house you with similar age students. At UBC housing is in self-catered flats. Opt for those located centrally on campus, i.e. Gage or Fairview.

In addition, some university housing schemes require residents to participate in a meal plan. While catered halls in the US or Canada generally cater to greater variety than British university catering facilities by offering vegetarian and vegan options, their high price for value may seem a bit restrictive. Check with your housing officers about meal options and ensure that you get the best value for your accommodation money. If you feel following a strict meal schedule may be too constrained or living with first-year students might be too frustrating, looking outside the university for accommodations is always an option.

Check with Birmingham students currently in North America to see if they can pass their accommodation on to you. Bear in mind transportation costs and possible difficulties such as suitable public transportation, distance and travel time when researching living options. That said, many of our students have successfully and affordably lived off-campus and have benefited greatly both culturally and socially from sharing private rented accommodation with Canadian or American students.

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EMPLOYMENT

Some Birmingham students obtain part-time employment while abroad. Generally, under the guidelines for student visas, British students in the US or Canada can work up to twenty hours per academic week and up to forty hours on school holidays. But bear in mind that you will need a US social security number. The application process for this has become lengthy, and could delay the start of employment by several weeks. You can only work on-campus, but on-campus opportunities are readily available at most of the exchange sites. Most universities have an on-campus job recruitment centre or a bulletin board with job postings. Working is a good opportunity to earn extra cash and to meet other students. **It is illegal to work off-campus unless you are an American or Canadian citizen. Doing so risks deportation.**

APPLYING

APPLICATION FORMS

Course Choice

You will need to register for four courses per semester. In term one three of these four courses should be the equivalent of an upper division course (in other words, a third or fourth year module) and must in some way pertain to 'North American studies' (more detail provided below). At many universities course codes that are in the 300s or 400s indicate such classes. One of the four classes can be at a lower level and outside of the realm of North America. Such a choice could include, for example, a prerequisite course to allow you to take a more senior module.

In term two you should be again taking four modules but one of these four must be an independent study module. The same rules in terms of modules described in the previous paragraph apply.

The following is a fictional example of a proper selection of courses:

Nith River State University

Term One

Course 321 The Writings of Jack Kerouac, Course 440 American-Canadian Relations, Course 389 A History of Baseball, Course 200 Chinese-Japanese Relations

Term Two

Course 340 The Writings of Margaret Atwood, Course 406 A History of Saskatchewan, Course 180 Introduction to Art History, Course 499- Independent Study

Students must take four courses per semester [4 in semester 1; 3 plus independent study in semester 2]:

Further important points about course choices:

- most courses **must** pertain to the culture and civilization of the Americas (United States, Canada, Latin America or the Caribbean). Comparative subjects (e.g. Modern Photography, exploring artists in England, France and the U.S.) are acceptable, provided that a substantial part of the course concerns the Americas. The LEA and the University of Birmingham must be assured that study abroad is an essential and integral element of the degree course;
- if you are a JH ACS/English or JH ACS/History student, then half of your chosen courses must pertain to the non-ACS half of your degree. These should still be upper level courses; and you must still pass them to proceed. **It is your responsibility to check with your parent dept. whether or not they have any special requirements for you to follow or complete during your year abroad.**
- courses **must** be taken for a grade and for credits, and not just for Pass/Fail (except for IS in the last semester or winter and spring quarters);
- courses **must** be advanced level (Upper Division or Graduate), (300 level in Canada) unless there are prerequisites which involve technical expertise (e.g. essential knowledge in music or anthropology in order

to take courses in Native American Studies or the American Musical). In this case, Lower Division courses (200 level or exceptionally 100 level in Canada) are acceptable, if permission is sought in advance:

- **independent study** – all students (SH and JH) must take IS in the second term/semester [or 2nd and 3rd quarters]. You should register for this so that it appears on your transcript – it may have a different name at your host institution. You must take it for credits and you need to pass it (the grade will not be counted as part of your year 3 mark, but you **MUST** do and pass IS to complete year 3 and progress to year 4). We need it to be on your transcript so that we have proof that you did it. A letter/email from your supervisor is further evidence. Ask for help at the International Office of your host campus if you have problems. In **November** you should start looking for a supervisor – this is your responsibility. The document ‘Basic Guidance for Independent Study’ available as a download at: <http://www.uscanada.bham.ac.uk/exchange.htm> is a helpful item.
- one course per quarter/semester may be taken on non-American topics provided permission is obtained in advance. Normally this course should be at least a 2nd year module or above unless the student can make an explicit case to the year abroad tutor as to why a first-year module should be taken.

You are encouraged to take courses which are seldom taught in the UK: North American subject matter in the following disciplines and fields are examples: art history, material culture, archaeology, anthropology, minority studies, environmental studies, architectural history, folklore, music and performance studies.

It is YOUR responsibility to ENSURE that you have registered for sufficient credits and for upper level courses in ACS-approved subject areas. You should always get approval for your final course choices for each semester or quarter from the ACS year abroad tutor via e-mail. Failure to register for sufficient amounts of credits, failure to register for, undertake and pass Independent Study and failing courses will all have SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES for your degree studies.

YOU MUST PASS YOUR YEAR ABROAD CLASSES AND INDEPENDENT STUDY IN ORDER TO GET YOUR DEGREE. You must maintain a GPA of at least 2.67 at US universities, and a minimum of a C/D average in Canada in order to be awarded 120 credits for the year.

Please note that the work you do during your year abroad does count towards your degree. You will enrol on and take some modules and complete an independent study. Successfully completing and passing the modules and the independent study is crucial. Any failures create progression problems which can impede the progress of your studies in your final year, and indeed, even jeopardize your final degree.

University	Semester or Quarter System	Courses and Credits total per semester or quarter required by UoB (nb in second semester [or 2 nd & 3 rd quarters] you must register for and be supervised for independent study)
New Mexico State	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
U of Minnesota-Duluth	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
U of Alabama	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
Rutgers	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
Pittsburgh	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
Bellarmino	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
U of Illinois-Chicago	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
Illinois Institute of Technology	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
U of Cincinnati	2 semesters	4 courses per semester

SFU	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
Kansas	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
New Brunswick	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
Trent	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
U of Toronto	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
Saskatchewan	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
Western	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
Waterloo	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
Guelph	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
Dalhousie	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
Pitzer	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
Iowa	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
Wyoming	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
Berry	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
North Texas	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
Birmingham Southern	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
Wisconsin-Milwaukee	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
Loyola University-New Orleans	2 semesters	4 courses per semester

University	Semester or Quarter System	Courses and Credits total per semester or quarter required by UoB (nb in second semester [or 2nd & 3rd quarters] you must register for and be supervised for independent study)
Pitzer College, California	2 terms (Fall and Spring)	4 courses per term: 4 credits=16 units
U of Wyoming	2 semesters (Fall & Spring)	4 courses per semester
U of Iowa	2 semesters	4 courses; 12 credits=12-15 semester hours per semester
U of Wisconsin-Milwaukee	2 semesters	4 courses per semester (12 credits)
U of Mississippi	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
U of Virginia	2 semesters	4 courses per semester (12 credits)
U of Minnesota-Duluth	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
U of Alabama	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
U of Connecticut	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
U of Illinois @ Urbana-Champaign	2 semesters (Fall and Spring)	4 courses= 12 credit hours per semester
Berry College	2 semesters (Fall and Spring)	4 courses per semester
Birmingham Southern College	3 terms (Fall, Interim and Spring)	4 courses per term
U of Cincinnati	3 quarters (Autumn, Winter, Spring)	first quarter: 4 courses [4 x 4 credits = 16; or, 3 x 4 credits + 1 x 3 credits = 15] second quarter: 4 courses [ditto] third quarter: 3 courses plus independent study
U of Toronto	2 semesters	4 courses per semester = 4 credits per year
McGill	2 semesters	4 courses =12 credits per semester
U of Ottawa	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
Dalhousie University	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
UBC	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
SFU	2 semesters	4 courses per semester

Trent	2 semesters	4 courses per semester
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University Schedules

Classes at Canadian universities begin the first Tuesday after the Labour Day holiday which occurs on the first Monday in September. Classes at some U.S. universities begin in mid to late August while others start in early September after the Labor Day holiday. Exam sessions occur in December and classes resume in January. Classes at Canadian universities end in early April and the remainder of April is for exams. Some U.S. universities follow a similar pattern while others have classes that extend into May followed by exams.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

This is part of some application forms although the length-requirement varies considerable from university to university. While it is not crucial, it is nevertheless a useful way of organizing and clarifying your future academic plans and demonstrating to your potential host that you are a motivated and enthusiastic student. You should emphasise your academic goals and how these relate to university choice and your career ambitions. Focus on how the courses, specialisms and departments of your chosen campus fit with your desired study path. If there are areas outside American or Canadian Studies at a particular campus that you are especially interested in, you might mention these as well, e.g. an extra-curricular activity such as student journalism or a sport you wish to continue to pursue.

The style is important: express yourself briefly, clearly, and assertively. There is a tendency for British students to understate their achievements. If possible, type, or at least write legibly with a black pen so it can be photocopied. The Year Abroad Tutor will be glad to discuss the statement with you.

OTHER APPLICATION MATERIALS

You MAY also need:

- a letter of recommendation from ACS (e.g. from personal or academic tutor)
- photocopies of your A Level certificates.
- a **transcript** of courses with examination results taken in the first year, and courses being taken in the second year (obtainable from ACS)

FINANCIAL ISSUES

If you are applying to universities in the U.S., you will probably need to provide documentation with your application that demonstrates that you can cover the estimated costs of living and studying there. Your application materials will specify the amount if this is the case, and will most likely suggest forms of documentation which will provide evidence, but keep reading for some suggestions.

For locations which do not require this at the point of application, proof of financial support does not need to be submitted until you are applying for your US or Canadian Visa. US or Canadian citizens will not need to provide this documentation.

Before a campus may send the form (I-20 or DS-2019) allowing you to apply to the Embassy of the United States for a visa (F-1 or J-1), it must be certain that you have adequate means to support yourself for the nine months of academic study. For this reason, it is ESSENTIAL that you supply FULL and SPECIFIC information.

You must provide documented evidence of having access to at least the amount specified for the "estimated living expenses" for your campus. Every source of financial support must be proven with an official document which specifies a figure.

Potential Sources of Financial Support:

LEA Grants: If you are in receipt of a grant from your local authority, it is payable for study abroad. Some LEAs will give grants to supplement your living expenses on the grounds that costs are higher abroad. You should check with your Authority, since each one seems to have a different list of expensive places. Similarly, some will pay all or part of your airfare to and from your exchange university, and for a trip home over the winter vacation. You should obtain a letter from the LEA stating the amount of any grant that it is prepared to pay.

Parental/sponsor contribution: If parent(s) or sponsor(s) are funding you in whole or in part, they need to provide evidence of this - for example, in the form of a bank statement showing the amount available for your support. This may require some juggling of monies: the point is to have document(s) showing that the total amount available adds up to the estimated living costs as provided by the campuses of your choice.

Student Loan: All students should be eligible for a loan. Although you will apply for the loan in the September of your year abroad, you should include a form letter from the University's Finance Office setting out the amount and term of the loan with your financial documentation.

Personal Funds: Provide evidence of any savings or income that you intend to use to support yourself.

Tuition

NB: As an exchange student, you do not pay tuition fees to your exchange institution but rather 15% of your normal tuition to the University of Birmingham.

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PRE DEPARTURE TASKS

VISAS – ARE *YOUR* RESPONSIBILITY!

ALL STUDENTS: You are advised not to buy your plane ticket before you obtain your student visa. At the very least, do not buy non-refundable travel tickets before obtaining your student visa.

It is also possible that you may not receive your visa (and have your passport returned) until mid-late summer, therefore you are **strongly advised not to plan any overseas travel for the summer of 2011 in advance of receiving your student visa for your study year abroad.**

ACS Staff cannot accept responsibility for the accuracy of the following information regarding visas and the process of visa application since US regulations change almost annually. It is the responsibility of students to check carefully through the information sent by their host institution (and on their host institution's International Office web pages) and on the US Embassy website, OR on the Canadian High Commission website to ensure that they book a visa interview well in advance of departure, and that they obtain all necessary documentation required for their visa applications and visa application interview. Please note that both the US and the Canadian government charge a fee for the visa.

APPLYING FOR US VISA

All these details are available on the US embassy website www.usembassy.org.uk

APPLYING FOR A CANADIAN VISA ('Study Permit')

You need to apply for a 'study permit.' As of September 2013 the fee was Can\$125 (approximately £80).

This can be done through the post or electronically. Check out the current information on the Canadian High Commission in London's website: it is clear and helpful and you can download the application kit (various forms and instructions) and a useful checklist for the study permit.

http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/united_kingdom-royaume_uni/visas/study-etude.aspx

The High Commission quotes 7 weeks as the average time that it takes to process your application.

ENSURE THAT YOUR APPLICATION IS COMPLETE BEFORE YOU SUBMIT IT TO THE HIGH COMMISSION IN LONDON. Incomplete applications are subject to delays.

Helpful hints:-

- **MCGILL STUDENTS ONLY:** you need to apply for and obtain a Certificat d'acceptation du Quebec AND a Canada study permit. The letter of acceptance from McGill will include information and application form for the Quebec visa: do it as soon as you receive the forms and make sure that you have completed it in full (get someone sensible to check it over) before you send it off. A properly completed application will ensure that they process it quickly. In the past it has been necessary to obtain the Certificat before the Canadian study permit.
- **ALL STUDENTS GOING TO CANADA** As a UK citizen you do NOT usually need to have a medical exam, nor do you require a temporary resident visa.
- You DO need your letter of acceptance from the Canadian university before you can send off your completed application for a study permit,
- and 'proof that you have enough money to live near school' (nb as an exchange student the 'pay school fees' part is irrelevant). Bank statements, letter from parent/guardian who pays you maintenance, student loan company letter and LEA grant letters where applicable should be adequate, but the instructions for the 'study permit' should be read carefully. START gathering these materials before you receive your acceptance letter.
- Ms Conway can supply you with a letter stating that you are returning to complete your studies here in Birmingham -- but you need to go and ask her for it (don't leave this until the last minute and remember that she is extremely busy in the first two weeks of June).
- When you arrive in Canada, the immigration officers at the airport will usually take you aside to an office, and will want to see your visa letter and proof of acceptance to study at a Canadian university, so keep these documents to hand. It is also advisable to have your proof of financial support letters to hand as well. Immigration will stamp your passport -- this is your study permit. Smile, be polite and don't get stropy even if you're jetlagged!

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HEALTH INSURANCE

US CAMPUSES

All students going to US campuses will be required to purchase health insurance from their host institution. The cost varies according to the campus but is usually \$800 to \$1000. Go to individual university websites to research the details of these policies and what they cover. Remember they will not cover you in transit or 'hospitalization', so you will also need a years travel insurance, purchased before you leave the UK.

CANADA

As an international student you may be required to purchase health insurance. Cost varies from province to province from approximately Cdn \$500 to \$900. It will cover you for full healthcare in your 'home' province and entitles you to some form of medical care in other parts of Canada. In British Columbia insurance purchased from provincial government is mandatory. Students going there should read the advice on the medical service plan carefully since you may require additional insurance for the first three months of your residence. (Go to: www.international.ubc.ca)

It may be possible to pay in advance of your arrival but if you do so you will have to obtain a foreign draft in Cdn\$ (add about £20 to cost). Check with the International Student Exchange Office at your host campus by consulting their web pages for International Students.

At McGill students are billed by the university very early in the semester. The bill can be paid at a bank or at the Finance Office. You can get a refund if you obtain work on campus. You will need a letter confirming your employment which you should take to the International Office. They will give you forms to fill in and your refund (by cheque) has to be collected from the Finance Office

Pay at the earliest opportunity. Late payment may incur a hefty fee and you are not covered for medical treatment until you have paid.

TRAVEL

When making travel arrangements, bear in mind that if you are expecting to find accommodation on arrival you should arrive at least 10 days, preferably 2 weeks, before the start of term to give yourself time to find somewhere to live. If your LEA is paying part or all of your airfare, check before you purchase your ticket to see if there are restrictions on the type of fare they will cover. An open return will give you the most flexibility, but usually costs more than non-refundable discounted fares.

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MONEY

Remember that the first few weeks away will be the most expensive (accommodation costs, health insurance, books, travel cards etc). A UK credit card (Visa or Mastercard) will be very helpful but you will need to make arrangements for the payment of bills mailed to your UK address. Travellers' cheques are a safe way of ensuring initial cashflow.

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PRE-DEPARTURE MEETING

Will be held in May or June. This meeting will cover both practical queries and academic expectations for the year abroad, including independent study and dissertation preparation.

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TASKS WHEN ABROAD

CHECK-IN

Make yourself known to the campus International Office as a priority. Staffed by friendly, knowledgeable individuals they offer an invaluable source of support, information and advice. In some cases (e.g. U of T) they are the folk who enable you to register for courses.

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EMAIL ACS

Send us your email and snail address as soon as possible. Failure to do this will mean we will use the email address supplied to you by the University of Birmingham (your bham address).

COURSE REGISTRATION

Make sure you've registered for courses.

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BANKING

Most British students in the US or Canada open a checking account. Depending on the bank, this type of account generally comes with a check (cheque) book and an ATM card. Most retailers will not accept checks without a driver's license, but the ATM card can be used as a debit (Switch/Delta) card. US banks charge high and frequent transaction fees. For example, most banks charge monthly fees. Should you make any transactions within that month, the bank will often charge an additional transaction fee. Withdrawing money from a cash point owned by another bank will often result in a charge from your bank and from the bank that owns the cash point. Finally, overdrafts do not exist in the US. Overdrawing your account, even by cents, can result in heavy financial penalties. It is important to check out all your options before settling on a bank. Be up front about transaction fees and interest rates and do not be afraid to ask for the least expensive account.

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INDEPENDENT STUDY

US – All single honours and joint honours students must register for two quarters or one semester of Independent Study. The formal process begins at the end of the Fall quarter/semester when you register for the next set of courses, but you should begin to sound out likely supervisors before this. **Independent study will be graded on a pass/fail basis only.** For more details on what is required, and why, go to the ACS website - 2nd & 3rd year courses: Basic Guide for Independent Study is at the end of the course list.
<http://www.uscanada.bham.ac.uk/exchange.htm>

CANADA: You must register for one semester of Independent Study (Sem 2) NB You may have to do this at the beginning of the year rather than mid-way. By mid-November you should be sounding out possible supervisors. (see above).

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DISSERTATION PREPARATION

You will need to produce a short synopsis of your intended dissertation topic by the middle of January. This must then be emailed to the year abroad tutor or to the ACS General Office staff (as advised). A draft title of the dissertation, in addition to the written work produced during independent study, must be supplied to the same address by April. For further details see Guidelines to Independent Study and Dissertation Guidelines, to be found on the ACS website under 2nd and 3rd years courses.

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WELFARE

The international office at your host university is there to help you should problems arise. Please contact the ACS Department immediately if you need help at: yearabroadtutor@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

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COURSE CHOICES FOR YEAR 4

Margaret Conway will contact you about your course choices after Easter. Information on each module is accessible via the ACS webpages. If you have specific questions email the appropriate course tutor. Please adhere to the deadlines outlined by Ms Conway. [BACK](#)

Please note that the work you do during your year abroad does count towards your degree: for both JH and SH students on four year programmes it is worth 12.5% of your final degree. You will enroll on and take some modules and an independent study. Further details of these requirements follow. Let us say immediately, however, that successfully completing and passing the modules and the independent study is crucial. Any failures create progression problems which can impede the progress of your studies in your final year – the most important in all of your studies.

CONVERSION SCALES

In line with all British Universities and with the approval of the external examiners, we apply a scale to convert the grade awarded in each of the modules you studied to a percentage.

US CONVERSION SCALE

80	
79	
78	
77	
76	
75	
74	A
73	
72	
71	
70	
69	
68	A-
67	
66	
65	
64	
63	
62	B+
61	
60	
59	
58	
57	
56	B
54	
53	
52	
51	
50	B-
49	
48	
47	
46	
45	
44	C+
43	
42	C
41	
40	C-

39 and below: FAIL. I.e, a grade D+ or lower

CANADIAN GRADE CONVERSION

80	
79	
78	
77	A
76	
75	
74	
73	
72	A-
71	
70	
69	
68	
67	B+
66	
65	
64	
63	
62	B
61	
60	
59	
58	
57	B-
56	
54	
53	
52	
51	C+
50	
49	
48	
47	C
46	
45	
44	C-
43	
42	D+
41	D
40	D-

39 and below: FAIL. I.e, a grade E+ or lower

Having applied this scale and taking account of module weightings (some modules are credited more heavily than others) we arrive at one percentage mark for the year. Remember that the IS mark is a pass/fail mark and is not included in this percentage mark. This is because the work will count towards your dissertation mark in your final year.

IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT RESITS FOR YEAR 3 AND MITIGATIONS

PLEASE TRY HARD NOT TO FAIL OUT ON ANY MODULES!! If you fail a module in the first semester or quarter, please inform the Year Abroad Tutor asap! If you experience any health or serious problems affecting your academic performance, please contact the ACS Welfare Tutor and Year Abroad Tutor at the earliest opportunity, and collect evidence so that we can support your case for mitigations if necessary.

Here is the detail on resits (which has been formally approved by the University of Birmingham):-

Information about grades, pass/fails etc is collected from students electronically by the ACS Administrative staff in liaison with the ACS tutor in as timely fashion as possible during December/January and again in April/May/June of the Study Year Abroad, so that the need for any resits can be determined and resit work set during the final weeks of term 3.

The ACS Exams Officer is responsible for ensuring that resits are set, marked and returned to the appropriate Exam Boards.

In order to pass the year abroad students must gain a minimum mark of C- in US or D- in the Canadian systems (which are equivalent to a UoB mark of 40) in every module and complete and pass their Independent Study (the grade for this will not be entered into the calculations for the year abroad mark since the IS represents the foundation of the final year dissertation). In the event of a student failing a module or modules, failing to enrol for the required amount of modules/credits, or failing to enrol in Independent Study, or failing their Independent Study, or any combination of the above, the provision for resits is as follows:

- Resits for courses and independent study will take the form of an essay, to be marked at a maximum of 40.
- The length of the essay will vary according to the number of credits to be made up, at the rate of 2,500 words per 10 credits.
- Resits will usually be set in late June and deadlines will fall in late Aug/early Sept exam resit period.
- The student's final mark will be calculated from the converted mark for courses passed while abroad (minus IS) (see conversion charts), plus any 40% resit marks.

Mitigations and Welfare Issues

If a student has submitted evidence for mitigations by the advertised deadlines and the June mitigations board approve the mitigations, then any failed or missing courses will be retaken over the summer, as detailed above, but treated as 'sit's and thus marked using the full range of grades.

Welfare issues involving students on year abroad will be directed to the Welfare tutor for ACS and mitigations submitted to them by the student concerned according to the University time-tables

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Despite a common language, the US, Canada and Britain have different social customs, cultures and perceptions. You will get culture shock sooner or later and realize that you are in a foreign country that you really don't understand. This experience can be frustrating, disconcerting and fascinating. Here are a few hints about the many differences you will encounter:

Calendar: For the most part, the United States, Britain and Canada celebrate the same annual holidays. However, certain national holidays may frustrate a British student wondering why classes are cancelled, the bank is closed and no mail is delivered. Here is a brief list of some US and Canadian holidays to watch out for:

United States:

January:

- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

February:

- Presidents Day

April:

- Good Friday

May:

- Memorial Day

July:

- Independence Day

September:

- Labor Day
- Rosh Hashanah
- Yom Kippur

October:

- Halloween

November:

- U.S. Thanksgiving

Canada:

MARCH/APRIL:

- GOOD FRIDAY AND EASTER Monday

WHAT IS THIS HOLIDAY? I'VE NEVER HEARD OF IT

- National Day of Mourning

May:

- Victoria Day

June:

- St Jean Baptiste Day (Quebec)

July:

- Canada Day

August:

- Civic Holiday

September:

- Labour Day

October:

- Thanksgiving

November:

- Remembrance Day

Language: Exploring the English Language overseas is a useful icebreaker for any traveller. Although US television exports to the UK are perhaps breaching the language barrier among students through popular catch phrases, the language differences remain glaringly evident. However, discovering these differences and finding your own speech pattern changing as you adjust to your surroundings can be fun.

University Academic and Social Life:

WE SHOULD MENTION THAT IT IS MORE FORMAL IN NORTH AMERICA-- IT IS NOT CUSTOMARY TO CALL A PROFESSOR BY HIS OR HER FIRST NAME UNLESS INVITED TO DO SO.

* Academics: Academics in the US and Canada differ from British university systems in several ways. First, US and Canadian degrees are generally four years in length. During those four years, students take classes within one discipline (a major) and meet general university or school requirements (e.g., math or language requirements). Some universities also require students to declare a minor, meaning that students must take a certain amount of courses in a second discipline that may or may not be related to the major.

Second, North American and British courses are structured differently. Longer length of degrees and wider distribution requirements mean that US and Canadian university classes must meet a different set of academic requirements than those of their British counterparts. For example, introductory level courses in the US and Canada must fit the needs of both the first-year student taking the course as a major requirement and the fourth-year student taking the course as a university distribution requirement. Clearly, these two students have different objectives, academic backgrounds and needs. Therefore, the class will most likely be structured around weekly lectures (probably two or three times a week) and will cover a wide range of information. Assessment will be based on evidence of general knowledge comprehension (i.e., facts and figures related to material) as well as ability to analyse course material in papers (essays) and exams. On the other hand, upper level courses are generally smaller in size and seminar-based. As most upper-level courses are reserved for students within the course's discipline, these classes are designed to provide a more intensive focus on course material deemed relevant to study within that discipline. The work-load for upper-level courses therefore tends to be more dense with lengthier reading and writing assignments than lower-level lecture courses.

These different class structures often lead to rumours about the fabled "easy course" or "easy A" or however else the campus lingo of the day might describe a class with an undemanding course load. In the weeks before registration period, US and Canadian students will meticulously interview friends, course mates and anyone else they happen to meet about the classes they have taken, searching for reports on paper length requirements and assignments, exams schedules and professors' grading scales. During that period, rumours of easy courses fly among students. Generally, if a course requires two exams and an essay, it is considered one of those "easy course." Be careful, though: a small work-load doesn't guarantee an "easy A." Because they cover such a wide field of information, these courses often require a great deal of preparation. Furthermore, with only two exams and an essay, students have little opportunity to prove their abilities. Overall, students returning to Birmingham caution those beginning studies in the US or Canada to be wary of supposedly easy courses.

Third, academic requirements are extremely stringent in the US and Canada. Attendance is generally required and monitored. Participation in class discussions is usually included in assessment. Most upper-level classes are structured around set assignments (e.g., for literature courses, one novel per week) and are assessed with frequent papers (essays) and presentations. Some classes require a brief response paper each week, others anywhere from three to six lengthier pieces throughout semester. Due dates for assessed work are generally non-negotiable, excepting for health or family emergencies, and most universities require some form of documentary evidence for extensions or absences.

Finally, former year abroad students often comment, generally positively, on the different styles of teaching and administration in US and Canadian institutions. Professors (lecturers) in the US and Canada generally are approachable and expect their students to make the effort to make themselves known. The friendly relationship between students and staff proves particularly beneficial during registration periods, as professors may sometimes make exceptions for students who speak with them personally about joining or auditing a class. Also, getting to know your professor may make large lectures seem a bit less impersonal.

British and American universities often use different vocabularies. It is difficult to provide a comprehensive listing of titles or administrative positions because of a wide variety within US and Canadian universities themselves. However, there are a few fundamental differences that British students might find helpful in making the year-abroad journey less confusing. For example, students in the US often refer to "university" as "school," as in, "What school do you go to?" Also, higher education in the US and Canada is divided between universities and colleges. Universities are generally large (20,000-30,000 students), public institutions divided into colleges (College of Business, College of Arts and Sciences, etc.) Colleges, on the other hand, are typically smaller (anywhere from 500 to 7,000 students), private, and based in liberal arts curricula. They have equally stringent entrance and assessment standards and comparable graduate qualifications. Within the higher education system

itself, “lecturers” are “professors,” “postgraduates” are “graduates” and the academic years are divided among “first-years,” or “freshmen” among some not-so-PC universities, “sophomores,” “juniors” and “seniors.”

* Social Life at US and Canadian Universities: Although each university has its own social customs and student body make-up that distinguish it from others, there are some continuities that may differ from the social life you are used to at Birmingham. Generally, social life at American and Canadian universities is divided among student organisations, social clubs, sports teams and other extra-curricular activities. Membership in any of these is generally open to the entire student body and opportunities to join are posted throughout the university. Membership to sports teams is generally limited through try-outs. Although these try-outs are typically open to the entire university, competition is extremely high at large universities, particularly for US Division I teams. However, almost all universities offer a wide range of club and intramural teams for students who want to play a sport without signing a contract.

Non-university related social life really depends on the university -- UCLA and the University of British Columbia clearly offer different social dynamics as a result of their respective urban and coastal-parkland settings. Generally, US, Canadian and British students participate in the same after-school activities: going to the cinema, eating out, partying. However, there are particular social customs and even legal restrictions that may affect your social habits. As you probably know, the legal drinking age throughout the US is 21. While this is upheld to varying degrees across the country, most university towns are strict enforcers of the drinking age law. Most bars and liquor distributors require proof of age before an individual can purchase alcohol. Generally, the only forms of identification acceptable are a valid photo driver’s license or a passport. Again, this law is upheld to varying degrees – some bars may require two forms of photo identification at the door while others will kindly overlook your babyish looks and take your word that you are 21. However, bear in mind penalties for under-age drinking can be harsh and that police often targets “university bars.” Fines can be in excess of \$1,000 and arrests are not unheard of. Rumours about bars that don’t “ID” are rampant on university campuses. If you are under 21, you have to weigh the consequences and make your own judgment about whether a fine, a possible night in local jail or a mark on your passport is worth a few beers.

Good news for students going to Canada: you may continue your student socialising behaviour unimpeded by the law. The Canadian drinking limit is 18 in Quebec and Alberta and 19 in the rest of the country.

If the US drinking laws seem too oppressive, perhaps the knowledge that social life does not tend to revolve around the pub will brighten the prospect of studying abroad. Most US and Canadian students base their social life around campus based activities, whether it be all-campus parties, Greek [fraternity or sorority] events or university sporting matches. Student organisations often raise money through all-campus parties held on the campus in a university building. These events tend to be inexpensive, a \$3-5.00 cover charge for all you can drink. Sporting events, particularly at larger universities, are also a major attraction for students. The cost and availability of tickets to these events depends on the university – tickets for a UCLA basketball game will be more expensive and harder to get a hold of than tickets to a Santa Barbara game, for example.

The Greek System: Immortalised in films like *Animal House* and *Revenge of the Nerds*, the Greek System is a predominant, *but by no means dominant*, part of the US and Canadian university dynamic. The Greek System is comprised of male (fraternity) and female (sorority) social organisations with Greek letter titles (Delta Delta Delta or Kappa Kappa Gamma, for example). Generally, fraternities and sororities are nationally organised, financially independent from the university and supported through the annual dues of its members. As private societies, it may seem strange that Greek organisations can play a large role in university social life. Basically, while only a small percentage of students will join a Greek organisation as a member, Greek functions are generally open to the entire university. Attitudes toward Greek organisations vary among students and administrators in the US and Canada and each university maintains its own policy to reflect the wishes of the student body. As most university students in the US and Canada have discovered, if Greek-life is something that does not interest you, it need not be a part of your university experience.

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