

TransAtlantic Science Student Exchange Program (TASSEP)

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Purpose and Goals

As scientific activities, both in private industry as well as university and government laboratories, become increasingly international in scope, it is essential that science students become familiar with foreign cultures, languages, and economic systems. One of the most effective vehicles for addressing this problem is through exchange programs in which students spend a year abroad, living much like the students at the foreign university. The goal of the present program is to facilitate these opportunities for science students. Science students face unique problems because of the large number of required courses in the standard four or five year curriculum, and because of the vertical structure of the science curriculum.

The TASSEP exchange program for science students is a vehicle that permits students to study their chosen discipline at a foreign university. The agreement insures that students receive full credit for courses taken at the foreign university. Students pay tuition and fees at their home institution and thereby receive student status at the foreign university. The exchange program is based on 1:1 reciprocity in which one foreign student replaces a student from the home institution. Each institution retains control of student selection as well as the number of students that participate in the program. The program is limited to students enrolled in the participating universities.

The TASSEP Organization

TASSEP is a consortium of member universities from the European Union, Canada and the United States. The lead universities are the University of Aarhus, the University of North Carolina, and Waterloo University in Canada. The key feature in TASSEP is strong academic advising by science faculty, who work in close cooperation with their study abroad offices. This ensures that students are properly advised about course selection and eases the problems of receiving credit for courses taken abroad. The goal is to permit students to take most of their normal junior level courses abroad and still be able to graduate on time. New members can be

added to TASSEP by mutual consent of the three lead universities in consultation with all of the member universities.

Program Costs

TASSEP is an exchange program and so is the cheapest way for students to study abroad. Students simply pay tuition in their home institution and can enroll in the foreign university with no additional costs. Transatlantic transportation and all living costs are borne by the students. In the US, the study abroad office may impose an administrative fee. The program is cheap for American and Canadian students because TASSEP does not need to pay special professors to instruct the students as is often the case in many study abroad programs. The program is cheap for European students because they are not required to pay the high tuition fees.

Language Requirements

It is expected that a student attending a non-English speaking university, will have had at least 2 college years of training in that language. Additional work or experience is desirable. Exceptions to the above stated minimum requirements can be made in consultation with the foreign university advisor. Most of the non-English speaking universities offer intensive language programs during a 3-4 week prior to the beginning of the academic year. The sending institution is responsible for certifying the adequacy of the language preparation. European students are not required to take the TOEFL exam since the sending institution certifies that their English skills are sufficient for study abroad.

Courses and Grades (ECTS System)

Each student's course enrollment is decided by prior agreement between the student, his or her advisor, and the foreign university representative or coordinator. This agreement, signed by the three parties, then serves as a guarantee that satisfactory completion of the course work will count toward fulfillment of the home institution graduation requirements. Whether the home institution lists the grades in their transcripts, or uses them in determining the grade point average is up to the home university. Communication between the two universities is essential to ensure that the science and non-science courses will be available to the student. Not all European universities offer both science and non-science courses. However, European students can enroll in non-science courses in US or Canadian universities if their home department approves of this.

The credit transfer system is governed by the European Credit Transfer System or ECTS. Is based on three ingredients. Each participating institution provides a list of courses with a detailed course content and work load in the form of course credits. Additional information includes a typical four year course program for science majors in the specified field of study. Secondly, the ECTS system is based on a nominal and generally agreed upon full course load at each university, which has been assigned to be 60 credits. This permits each university to assign an ECTS credit rating to its courses. Finally, the ECTS uses a common application form and provides a transcript of student grades with a well defined ECTS grades for each course taken.

Most US and Canadian universities are based on a full yearly load of 30 credit hours for undergraduate courses. Thus, 1 US/CA credit=2 ECTS credits. Most courses meeting 3 hours per week thus have 6 ECTS credits. However, graduate students generally take just 3 courses per term, rather than the normal 4 or 5 courses for undergraduates. A full load for them is thus 18 hours per year. In general, these graduate level courses require considerably more work than the normal undergraduate courses. Such courses should count for 9-10 ECTS credits. Since in the course catalog of most universities, little distinction is made between graduate and undergraduate courses, European students planning their course load need to inquire about the nature of the course before deciding how many courses they can take. European universities also differ in the structure of their courses, but the 60 ECTS credits per year is standard.

TASSEP History

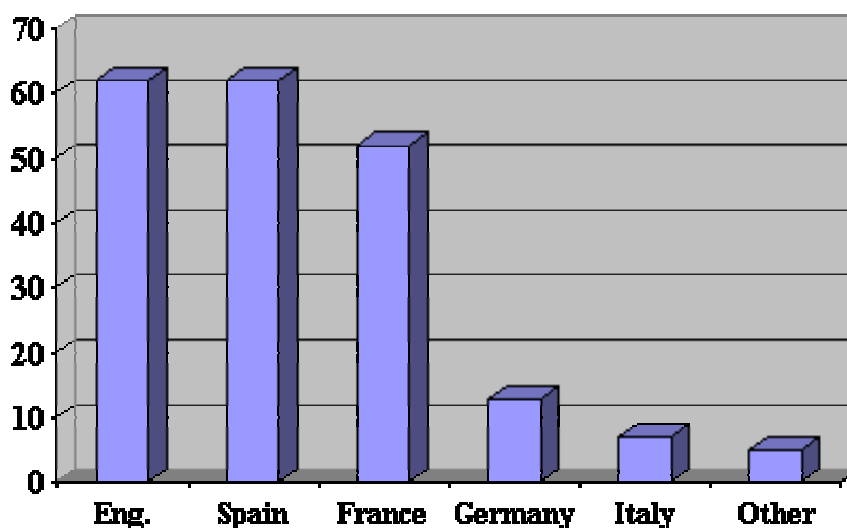
The TransAtlantic Science Student Exchange Program was conceived largely through the efforts of Prof. Nigel Rogers of the University of Lancaster, Enland and various study abroad departments at U.S. Universities. The purpose was to expand the European science student exchange programs to the United States. These efforts bore fruit with the funding of a grant from the U.S. Department of Education in 1993 to a consortium of U.S. Universities, led by the project director, Prof. Tomas Baer of the University of North Carolina. A major effort during the first year of this grant was the recruitment of faculty advisors, who had an interest in study abroad. Meetings with European and American chemistry faculty and directors of the study abroad offices led to the formal agreement, which culminated in the signing of the memorandum of understanding.

The first students were sent abroad in the 1994-5 academic year. Twenty U.S. students from UNC, the University of Texas-Austin, Texas A&M, Franklin and Marshall, and Michigan State University attended European universities in Lancaster (England), Liege, Grenoble, San Sebastian, Bilbao, Jena, Glasgow (Strathclyde), and Dublin. In exchange about twenty EU students studied for the year at the various participating U.S. Universities.

The initial list of U.S. Universities included, Texas-Austin, North Carolina - Chapel Hill, Texas A&M, Colorado, Purdue, Michigan State, and Franklin and Marshall College. The initial European Universities included Strathclyde, Lancaster, Trinity College - Dublin, Liege, Amsterdam, Aarhus, Jena, Pavia (Italy), Aveiro (Portugal), Pais Vasco (Spain), and Ioannina (Greece). Within two years, the Universities of Wisconsin, Illinois, Washington, and Oregon were added to the list, and Colorado withdrew. On the European side, Toulouse, The Complutense in Madrid, The Technical university in Berlin, and the ETH in Zurich were also added. Finally, in 1993, the following Canadian universities were added to the program: New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Montreal, McGill (Montreal), Toronto, Waterloo, and Calgary.

A summary of the student mobility from the American Point of view is shown on the graph:

US TASSEP Students Studying in Europe between 1994 to 2001



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