



SURVIVING & THRIVING: DIFFERENT EDUCATION SYSTEMS

As you embark to your new home and welcome new cultural traditions and norms, you will also notice a difference in the education system. It's important to understand how courses will be structured and evaluated, as well as the expectations that your new professors will have. The sooner you understand how it all works, the better you can adjust to the differences—reach out to your peer advisors or alumni of your program for more insight.



Different than U.S. Classes

- Big lectures & small seminars are often the class format
- Different grading scale
- There might be less class time
- Most exams are written
- Class grade is often based on a single or few assessment(s)
- The professors and overall feel of the University is sometimes more formal
- Students sometimes take school more seriously abroad than in the U.S.
- Students often dress nicer for class than they do here in California
- Students may not bring laptops to class often
- Notes written on the board are often not “asides”, but crucial even if not on syllabus

Less Support from Professors

- Office hours are usually by appointment only
- Visit the Department office ASAP if you need any support or have questions

Exams

- In many countries, the professors don't follow the syllabus as closely as in the U.S
- In most cases, there is very little specificity on the syllabus
 - e.g. It is unlikely you will be told which chapters of your textbooks to read each week
- Ask what format the exam/paper should be submitted in
- Professors probably won't review the exam in class
- Often there is no class the week before an exam
- The essay questions are sometimes provided in the syllabus
- Most exams are essay format
- Any citation method is usually ok—however, double check by asking your professors
- Re-writes or retakes are usually available (*make sure you ask about this at the BEGINNING of school*)
- Sometimes you are assigned a serial number for your exams
- Big concerns about cheating
- Remember: Professors generally are very willing to work with you and support you. They want you to succeed! The earlier you speak up about challenges you are facing, the more likely it is that they will be able to help you.

Grading System

- In most countries, it is nearly impossible to achieve the highest mark (*100 percent*)
- Learn the grading system & be prepared to receive marks that are lower than you are used to. Try to focus on the value of the experience.
- USAC and IP will grade you on a curve in many cases (*they take the host country's grading system into account when compiling your transcript*)
- Some programs don't award letter grades
- Ask alumni of your program for more information

How to Succeed

- Go to class—even though it's sometimes not required, it is necessary to do well
- Read, read, read
- Make friends with local students—follow their lead and model their study habits
- Don't just study with your American friends—form a study group with the local students if possible
- Let your professors know that you're an exchange student
- Pace yourself and don't procrastinate—last minute cramming isn't possible, especially on other education systems
- Demonstrate patience in groups—there is a different cultural dynamic at play
- Communicate early with your resident director and/or professors if you're having a problem
- Plagiarism is taken very seriously in most countries—you cannot even use your own prior work

Notes

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