

EDU GUIDE

Why you should consider doing an exchange semester abroad

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The concept of exchange semesters has long been popular in the education sector. In an exchange programme, students have the opportunity to explore another country for a short duration, ranging from seven days to a month. However, in an exchange semester, they can study abroad for a more extended period, typically three to six months.

Various exchange programmes and semesters are available to Bangladeshi students, including Erasmus +, Erasmus Mundus, and other university-specific exchanges. At BRAC University, we have something called the OSUN – Open Society University Network – exchange programme. OSUN is a global university network that facilitates the exchange of staff, faculty, students, and officials, allowing them to share their learning experiences with each other. As part of OSUN’s mobility initiative, I was fortunate to embark on an exchange semester at the Central European University in Vienna.

Exchange semesters offer opportunities to explore many new things. My exchange semester helped me grow the mindset that I should continue my studies further. The professors abroad are also amazing; they motivate students to continue learning. During my exchange semester, I learned vital points of global distributive justice, fair trade policy, and so on. I got advanced communication lessons from my faculty members, like how to be more responsive in class, practice empathy, and listen carefully to others.

Throughout the exchange semester, the universities try to give you a diverse experience of learning a lot in a short time. They also arrange consultation hours for you so that you can cope with new modules of learning. Moreover, you will also get to meet people from different parts of the world during your stay abroad and interact with several distinguished professors.

The education system abroad is exceptional; you might even find yourself learning about environmental policy from an environment minister who doubles as your faculty member. Additionally, there are intercultural festivals and excursions where you have the chance to represent your country. Presentations abroad are also much longer, ranging from 30 minutes to hours. This provides an excellent opportunity to hone your presentation skills.

Besides, exchange semesters can serve as a gateway to higher education opportunities too. You can ask for recommendation letters from your foreign faculty members, which can be beneficial for your applications. During the exchange semester, the university offers many education fairs where you can get information for your higher studies. I got the chance to participate in an education fair where I got to know about other European universities and their offerings for master’s and PhD-seeking students. One of the European universities at the fair even offered me a good



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scholarship for pursuing my master’s degree over there.

You can also explore and visit foreign companies relevant to your field of study, gaining valuable insights. For instance, as a Business student, I visited European banks to gain practical knowledge of their banking and finance systems.

For those interested in participating in exchange semesters, you most likely will have to write an essay explaining why you wish to participate. Universities look for three points in an essay – what you’re looking to learn, trying to achieve, and the community impact you can have once you’re done with the exchange semester.

Before applying to any exchange semester, look into the university you are planning to apply to. Find one or two faculty members who motivated you through their lectures or research work. You may find their lectures on YouTube and their research work in different international journals. If you can mention these things in your essay, it will serve as an advantage for you.

Some exchange semesters are paid, while others are fully funded, depending on your capabilities and preferences. You need to convince the universities as to why you need funding.

Having said all that, do not wait to apply to these exchange semesters. Keep an eye on your university’s notice board for exchange programme or semester announcements. You may also browse sites like Opportunities Circle or foreign university websites directly. Foreign Embassies in Bangladesh are also valid sources for finding exchange opportunities.

About the author

- Q Labby Ahsan is a final-year student at BRAC Business School, BRAC University. He is majoring in Marketing and is expected to graduate by Spring 2025. He recently completed an exchange semester in Vienna at the Central European University.
- Q Currently, Labby holds the position of Outreach Manager at Keeron – an upskilling platform – and serves as the President of Newspaper Olympiad – an initiative aimed at promoting the habit of reading newspapers among the youth. His overarching goal is to create skill development opportunities for young individuals in the future and build a community where he can actively contribute to creating social impacts.
- Q In his leisure time, Labby enjoys cycling and writing fiction books. He has so far authored two books and translated two more from English literature.

