

**Erasmus Mundus Programme**

**Project UNIQUE**

University Quality Exchange

**Basic UNIQUE Guide**

**Mexico/Europe**

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FH JOANNEUM

# Introduction

The Basic UNIQUE Guide was developed to enable exchange students to find the information they need in order to successfully plan, prepare for and perform their studies at a European university.

The Basic UNIQUE Guide services as a checklist which should be followed when planning a semester abroad. It gives all the essential information which needs to be consulted for a semester/a year at a European university.

This Basic UNIQUE Guide is especially designed for students of the InstitutoTecnologico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM) in Mexico. The main reason why there is an individual guide for this university can be traced back to the fact that there is a general higher education framework provided by the Mexican government but still there is a lot of space for individual rules for each higher education institution. Therefore, regulations in each university are somehow different.

When following this Basic UNIQUE Guide for ITESM/Mexico, then the main prerequisites to spend a semester at a European university are met.

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| **Which is the most suitable university for me?** | |
| Types of Universities in Europe | Generally, it can be said that there are two different types of universities in Europe:   * Classical University * University of Applied Sciences   A lot of degree courses are offered by both, Applied Science Universities and Universities. So where should I study - at an Applied Science University or a University? There is no easy answer to this, it is most likely a decision.  **A degree course at the University of Applied Science…**  …is very **practice and application-relevant**, in many degree courses projects are undertaken by students with real companies so that the knowledge gained can be used straight away.  University of Applied Sciences degree courses have a fixed length. (Bachelor-degree 6 semesters, Master's degree three or four semesters). This simply relates a tighter structure and students have a fixed timetable. At a University of Applied Sciences not only the course length but also the number of places available is fixed. This means that there are no overcrowded lecture theatres.  **Characteristics** for a University of Applied Sciences are:   * working in small groups on practice relevant topics, * clear timeframe, clear structure, * a high percentage of lecturers straight from the industry, * innovative didactics and intensive student support, * fixed internship and semester abroad, * teaching of specialist knowledge AND sound social and methodological competence, * good environment to study in - equipment and infrastructure at New Applied Science Universities are very good, * more but shorter examinations.   **A degree course at a University …**  …is much heavier on theory and for those seeking to pursue a scientific career a good choice.    University degree courses do not have a fixed length - this means you can set your study speed yourself, which means that it normally also takes longer to graduate.  As University degree courses are usually not limited in the number of places available, it is possible that lecture theatres are overcrowded and there are not enough places in teaching modules which slows down the course of study.  **Characteristics** for a classical University are:   * students have to organise themselves to large extent * wide range of teaching courses in which students have to compile a timetable for themselves * teaching takes place in the form of large scale lectures and in-depth work comes in the form of seminars/exercises in smaller groups * sound theoretical training, less application-oriented knowledge * less exams but longer exams   As mentioned before none of the types of universities is better than the other. Only the focus is a different one. University of Applied Sciences is simply more practical oriented than classical Universities. |
| Selection of the Right University | When aiming at spending a semester abroad it is recommended that you first get in contact with your **local international office** as many universities do have international partner universities where exchange is easier and where already experience has been made by other students. Here experience sharing is definitely a good option and might help to get inside information. Further, another advantage when selecting a university within the network of your university is that there are either **very low or no study fees** which need to be paid by you.  Before selecting one definite university it is important to check back with the European university and also your home university if places are available for your home university because most of the time there is only a limited number of places available per partner universities.  For example: ITESM sends 3 students to FH JOANNEUM in Austria – in return – FH JOANNEUM sends 3 students to ITESM in Mexico.  If you decide that the universities which are within your university´s network are not suitable for you then there are **several rankings** which can help to support you in the selection of the right university. Please keep in mind that when selecting a university outside the network of your university study fees need to be paid by you.  The following rankings can support you in your decision-taking:   * **Times Higher Education World University Rankings**   http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/   * **Academic Ranking of World Universities, Shanghai Ranking**   http://www.shanghairanking.com/   * **QS World University Rankings**   http://www.topuniversities.com/   * **Webometrics Ranking of World Universities**   http://www.webometrics.info/  If your selected university cannot be found among the rankings, this is not always a bad sign. Try to get in touch with local students or graduates in order to get more information about the university. Many smaller universities do not participate in such rankings but still they are of good quality.  **Here’s a list of other things you may want to consider:**  **Language:** Are you going to be studying a language in a particular country? If not, will you be comfortable in a country where English isn’t the native language? It’s not impossible, and if you’re determined to go to a non-English speaking country, and are confident in your ability to communicate and find your way, by all means go for it.  [**Time Table**](http://www.studyabroad.com/programtype.aspx)**:** Summer, Semester, or Year? See below.  **Weather:** This one’s pretty easy. What type of climate do you want to live in? If your idea of being abroad is on a beach under palm trees, then Moscow probably isn’t for you.  **Living Situation:** Do you want to live with a host family or in a dorm? There are positives and negatives to both.  Studying abroad and living in a dorm  In a dorm, you are more likely to interact with people your own age, who are going through the same adjustments you’re going through, and who can relate with you on a greater level. In most dorms, there’s no curfew, and living in a dorm requires you to be much more independent.  Studying abroad and living with a host family  If you’re studying a language, living with a host family will vastly increase the amount of interactive situations in which you’ll speak that   language. There’s also a greater possibility that you’ll experience more local culture first-hand.  **Local Life:** Do you want to study abroad in a big city or small town? What is the campus like? Are there any famous landmarks, sights or tourist attractions close by that you'd like to visit? How's the night life? What is there to do when you’re not in class?  Travel: How close will you be to an airport? Are there low cost airlines flying out of those airports? Do you want to visit nearby countries/cities in your free time? If so, are you close to countries/cities you want to visit? How long will it take you to travel to different locations?  **Food:** Do you like the food common to that country? Can you get by on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches? While this shouldn’t be the deciding factor, you should go somewhere where you can appreciate local cuisine as it’s definitely a big part of the overall immersion experience.  Talk to people from your school or just people that you know that have been there before and ask their opinion. They’ll probably be very happy to share their experience.  The most important thing is to go with your gut feeling. If there’s a place that you’ve wanted to go since you were nine years old, then go. Do the research needed to be sure you know what you’re getting into so you can be as prepared and confident as possible when making your decision. |
| Further Quality Indicators | Rankings give a good overview of the general quality of a study programme but there is more than rankings. The following indicators further support you with measuring the quality of the chosen study programme/university:   * **Student-staff-ratio** (number of students per member of academic staff) – the lower the number the better as assistance given by the lecturers * **BA graduation rate** (percentage of new entrants that successfully completed their bachelor programme) * **MA graduation rate** (percentage of new entrants that successfully completed their master programme) * **Overall learning experiences** (assessment of the quality of the overall learning experience) * **Quality of courses & teaching** (assessment of the quality of teaching provision) * **Contact with teachers** (assessment of the feedback given by teachers) * **Facilities such as libraries, laboratories, IT provision** (assessment of the quality of library services, of laboratories and of IT services for students)   The information concerning these indicators can mostly be found on the webpages of each university. If no information can be found then it is always a good option to get in contact with either the student administration or the international office. |

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| Credits needed for Bachelor Programmes | **Mexico**  In Mexico **one hour of learning** is equivalent to 0**,0625 credits**. In order to receive a Bachelor degree a student needs to gain a total of 300 credits.  Expressed in hours the **300 credits** are equivalent with **4800 hours of studying**.  In order to finalize a Bachelor programme it takes three years to complete it.  The credit system involves teaching, learning and evaluation for the course and pedagogy includes classroom teaching, research projects, assignments, tutorials, seminars etc. | **EUROPE**  In Europe credits which are given for course hours attended and conducted are called ECTS points. These ECTS points make teaching and learning in higher education more transparent in Europe and facilitates the recognition of all studies, no matter in which country in Europe you decide to spend your semester abroad.  In a very simple way ECTS points reflect the entire workload of a student in a course. One **ECTS point equals between 25 and 30 hours** (depending on the EHEA member state). The student workload in ECTS includes hours spent in class and self-study.  A full-time student would need to complete 60 ECTS per academic year, which represents an average of 1650 hours of study (calculated with 27,5 hours per ETCS). According to the ECTS, study programs in Europe are worth the following number of credits:   * Bachelor degrees (first cycle) are worth 180 ECTS (3 years) – equivalent of an average of 4950 hours to complete a Bachelor degree programme.   Attention needs to be paid to the issue of part-time programmes – some Bachelor programmes are offered as part-time programmes which means that courses only take place in the evening and mainly Fridays and Saturdays. |
|  | Generally, it can be said that a Bachelor programme in **Mexico and Europe has the same length** when it comes to the study time, namely **three years**. Still attention needs to be paid when it comes to the workload. The workload for a Bachelor programme in **Mexico involves 4800 hours** and **in Europe** a student within an average Bachelor programme needs to complete an average of **4950 hours within three years**.  Therefore, it can be said that the workload which needs to be invested in order to receive a Bachelor degree is nearly the same. This fact facilitates it for Mexican students when going abroad.  Recommendation in terms of selecting the right year and the corresponding courses within the Bachelor programme:   * A **Mexican Bachelor student within the first year** of study needs to select courses of the **first year within a European Bachelor study programme.** * A **Mexican Bachelor student within the second year** of study needs to select courses of the **second year of a Bachelor programme in Europe.** * A **Mexican Bachelor student within the third year** of study needs to select courses of the **third year of a Bachelor Programme in Europe.** | |
| Credits needed for a Master Programme | A Master programme includes 75 credits which need to be gained in order to finalize it successfully.  These 75 credits reflect a total workload of 1200 hours which need to be invested by a student in order to receive a Master degree programme.  The duration of a Master degree programme is usually two years. | Master's programs are worth between 60 - 120 ECTS (1 to 2 years) (one ECTS = average of 27,5 hours)  **Regular master programmes cover 120 ECTS which reflect 3300 hours of working for the programme**.  Master programmes are offered to all kinds of areas, still sometimes prerequisites need to be fulfilled in order to be accepted for a specific Master programme.  E.g. It is not possible to do a Bachelor in business and then do a Master in engineering as the basic knowledge which is needed is missing.  Attention needs to be paid to the issue of part-time programmes – some Master programmes are offered as part-time programmes which means that courses only take place in the evening and mainly Fridays and Saturdays. |
|  | Recommendation in terms of selecting the right year and the corresponding courses within the Master programme:  It is recommended to Mexico students to **select Master courses in Europe from the first year** when being in the **first year** and **first year courses in Europe** when being in the **second year** in Mexico. | |

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| How many Credits do I get for a course? | Institutions which apply ECTS points publish their course catalogues on the web, including detailed descriptions of study programmes, units of learning, university regulations and student services. Therefore, it is recommended to consult the webpages.  Usually courses offered in Europe do have between 1 and 6 ECTS points always depending on the work/effort that needs to be invested.  In Mexico one hour of studying reflects 0.0625 credits. Therefore one credit is equivalent with 16 hours of studying which means that 1 credit is worth an average of 0,58 ECTS. This is a rule of thumb that can be applied for both Bachelor and Master programmes.  Further, a **Mexican Bachelor degree programme student** needs to invest 1600 hours per study year which is equivalent to **58,18 ECTS in Europe**. This simply means that when going to Europe, courses with an amount of at least 58,18 ECTS need to be attended (calculated with 27,4 hour per ECTS) when staying for a whole year.  Moreover, a **Mexican Master degree programme student** also needs to invest 600 hours per study year which means again that during a year in Europe **21,82 ECTS** need to be acquired.  For the whole Master degree programme (2 years) 43,64 ECTS need to be acquired. |
| Duration of Terms | Generally, it can be said that there **a two terms** within all universities in Europe. There is a winter and a summer semester which all students need to conduct.  The **winter term** starts in the beginning of October and usually until the end of January latest until the second week of February of the following year. Within this winter term, there is also a Christmas break included which lasts usually three weeks starting in the middle of December until the first week of January.  Usually there is a break between the two terms until the end of February.  The **summer term** then normally starts in the beginning of March and lasts until the end of June. In the middle of the term there are usually Easter holidays which lasts for around 2,5 weeks. Easter holidays usually start between the end of March and the middle of May. |

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| **Which things do I need to consider when going abroad after being accepted by the hosting university?** | |
| **Booking Study Abroad Flights** | In terms of priority, **booking your flight** and **getting your visa** (info see below) should be at the top of the list.  Simply, before booking decide on the arrival and departure dates. Here it is often very good to check back with the local international office to save some money and stress. Then you can decide on the dates, check with a flight search engine machine the cheapest and quickest flight. If you do so you might save some money.  Before you go book your flight, take these things into consideration. It will save you a lot of time, money and headaches in the long run.  **Check luggage costs:** Most airlines will let you check two suitcases with no charge on an international flight. However, for some people may have to check a third bag and that can be costly (around 150 Euros). There isn’t really a way around this – just be aware of what the costs are and compare airlines as there’s a chance some might charge you even for a second bag.  **Make sure the airline you choose allows you to amend your travel dates.** The start date of the semester is usually set in stone, so there’s no question when you’ll need to be there. The end of the semester is a different story. When you first book your flight, coordinate your return flight with the last day of exams. Exam periods can last up to two weeks at most universities, so unfortunately, you may not know your finals schedule until mid-semester at the earliest.  You can also consider not booking a return flight until once you’ve started your semester and can get a feel for what the rest of your schedule will be like. Still, keep in mind that you need to look out for flights as soon as you know your return date as flights might become more expensive the longer you wait.  As you begin researching your study abroad flights and planning your travel itinerary, here are some resources that might support you:  STA Travel: They specialize in student travel, flights, trains, buses, hotels, rail passes, etc. It’s also where you can pick up your International Student Identity Card (ISIC). Take a look at the “Exclusive Tickets” section under flights. They are specially designed for students and have tons of flexibility in terms of fares, travel dates and refunds.  Kayak.com: It searches a large number of sites, there are minimal flashy banners popping out at you, and it’s usually very flexible. Kayak.com is also great for booking your weekend travels/vacations while you’re abroad.  And of course, there’s the old reliable Expedia.com. |
| **Visa Issues** | Visa issues always approach Mexican students when intending to spend some time for their studies in Europe.  It is essential that you first ask your international relation office about how to acquire the right visa at which embassy as they usually already have experience with this issue.  Generally, when spending a semester or more in Europe **Mexican students need to apply for a visa**.  Mexican students definitely need to get a visa in order to spend some time in Europe.  There are two different types of visas, depending on the European country you aim to stay at.   * **Student Schengen Visa**   Schengen visa is the document issued by the appropriate authorities to the interested party for visiting/travelling in and within the Schengen Area. The Schengen Area is comprised of 26 countries that have agreed to allow free movement of their citizens within this area as a single country. Of the 26 countries bound by the Schengen agreement, 22 are part of the EU and the other 4 are part of the EFTA.  International students must apply for Schengen student visa. The visa is generally valid for 90 day but as it happens with most of the students that wish to complete a whole academic year or even more, students must also apply for the residency permit that allows you to reside in the designated country for a period of one whole year.  Please keep in mind that the embassy of the country to which you are travelling to needs around three months to issue your visa.  If you need more information on the topic of visas please see:  http://www.schengenvisainfo.com/student-schengen-visa/   * **Non-Schengen/UK Visa**   The UK student visitor visa is valid if you are:   * you’re doing a short course of study in the UK * you’re from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland * you meet the other eligibility requirements   It is valid for 6 months for any short course including English language courses and 11 months for an extended visa for English language courses only.  The costs for the visas are:   * £83 for a 6 month standard visa * £150 for an 11 month extended visa   You can apply for a visa up to 3 months before your date of travel to the UK and will get information about the decision 3 weeks later in order to be able to plan your trip.  For further information please see: https://www.gov.uk/study-visit-visa |
| Student Services such as Housing | There is also a so called **student association** with each European university which should be consulted when going abroad.  Both the student association and the international office of the selected university can support you when it comes to finding adequate housing, social activities and possible financial support.  These topics should definitely be addressed to the two contact points.  Further, it is also essential to talk to students who had already been at your selected universities in order to share some of the experiences made.  Still, below some of the most relevant websites when it comes to housing in Europe can be found:   * http://www.erasmate.com/housing * http://www.housinganywhere.com/ * http://www.accommodationforstudents.com/ |
| Student Identification and Discount Card | In most other parts of the world, students are encouraged to “learn by doing” with huge discounts on everything from museums and galleries, to landmarks and historic sites. With the student identification and discount card it is possible to see many things for free and that is why you should definitely apply for one.  **The International Student Identification Card (ISIC):** The most well-known student travel card  The [ISIC](http://www.isic.org/) is the only internationally accepted proof of full-time student status. It is endorsed by organizations such as UNESCO, the European Council on Culture and the Andean Community of Nations. The card is recognized by universities, academic institutions, student organizations, national governments and ministries of education around the world.  The ISIC is extremely popular and is used by more than 4.5 million full-time students in 120 countries every year. It gives students access to tens of thousands of student services and benefits worldwide.  Tedious facts and figures aside, you’re probably still wondering why you should get one. Basically, as a study abroad student, you will get discounts and services on flights and public transportation as well as discounts related to museums, shopping and entertainment. It may also save you money when booking trains, buses, shuttle services etc. as you travel throughout your study abroad trip.  The card only costs €30 and if you use it wisely, it will pay for itself very quickly. |
| Obtaining Medical Insurance while Studying Abroad | Most study abroad programs will require you to participate in a student health insurance program or in a health benefit plan while you’re abroad. First, check to see if your current plan or the plan you are under covers you abroad, and second, if it covers you beyond the basic trip to the ER. If not, here are a few options to keep you safe:  1. Look into whether or not your home college or university offers a student health insurance plan. This is pretty common among schools with well-established and organized study abroad offices.  2. Your ISIC student card provides basic sickness and accident coverage including emergency evacuation insurance, repatriation and accidental death or loss/use of limb(s) coverage. A letter outlining the policy is included with the card. If you haven’t realized by now, you should really get one of these cards.  3. You can always apply independently for an individual insurance plan through providers that work specifically with either study abroad students or international travelers. Reputable names include [Cultural Insurance Services International](http://www.culturalinsurance.com/students/), [World Nomads Insurance](http://www.worldnomads.com/), [ASA Inc.](http://www.asaincor.com/insurance/student/), and [International Student Protection](http://www.intlstudentprotection.com/insurance_plans/US_students_studying_abroad.php). |
| Currency | Simply, it can be said that there are a couple of currencies within Europe, still the most widely used is the euro.  The euro has radically simplified travelling among several European countries.  Fortunately, the euro, denoted by the symbol € (or EUR), has simplified matters in 19 countries to date: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Holland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Portugal, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain.  Made up of 100 cents (as are Hong Kong or Australian dollars, for example), a euro coin shows the value on its “common side”, and an image chosen by the country that issued it on its “national side”. Euros are minted in two-euro, one-euro, fifty-cent, twenty-cent, ten-cent, five-cent, two-cent and one-cent coins, and banknotes in €500, €200, €100, €50, €20, €10 and €5 denominations. All the coins and banknotes in the euro system can be used throughout the Eurozone.  Further, please find below a list of the European countries still using their own currencies, with the symbol for each one:    Calculating all the exchange rates can be daunting, but a few simple guidelines will help you minimize paying heavy service charges or being perplexed by what appear to be fantastic exchange rates.  The best exchange rates for European currencies will be found in Europe, however if you can purchase a small amount of local currency before your departure, you will have an easier time upon arrival, being able immediately to buy that first cup of espresso or taking a taxi or train into town.  When you find a cash machine / ATM (Automated Teller Machine) / ABM (Automated Bank Machine), take advantage to retrieve money directly from your bank account, as this often results in the best exchange rates and lower transaction charges. |
| Incoming and Buddy Programmes | At many European Universities international exchange is offered to students. Therefore, a high number of incoming and outgoing students sum up. In order to deal with the incoming and also outgoing students there is a **department for international relations** which deals with the incoming and outgoing students and also organizes special programmes for incomings and outgoings.  The **Buddy Programme** which is offered by most of the universities in Europe is an opportunity to promote cultural exchange and international understanding. The idea is to match internationals with local students at the beginning of the semester, and encourage them to meet, laugh, talk, listen, and participate in whatever clubs, teams or activities they wish. By doing this, an important information resource is created for both parties.  Local students are encouraged to help the international students with the questions before their arrival and during their stay in Europe. It can make a big difference to an international student to be greeted in a new city by a friendly face! Of course, you can decide for yourself how much time to spend with your Buddy...  International offices to their best to find and match a buddy with an exchange student. Since many of the local students are interested in practicing a foreign language, they try to match according to the language the incoming speaks. The amount of interaction and support is completely dependent on the interests of the incoming and the Buddy. |
| **Scholarships and Financial Assistance for Students** | Generally, it can be said that when going to Europe for studying there are several opportunities to receive a grant. There are many scholarships which are offered by the European Union to foreign students but there are also many national funds which support international students when coming to Europe.  There are special scholarships for students in exchange prorgammes by universities and by governments. Many universities receive grants to offer scholarships to international students which are quite generous to meet almost all expenditure for the semester or year.  Starting with the European wide scholarships and the financial assistance that is offered, one of the most popular is definitely, the Erasmus Mundus Scholarship for Master students that aim for a joint masters degree within two different European universities. For further information please see: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus\_mundus/funding/scholarships\_students\_academics\_en.php  The link describes all possible scholarship possibilities and they also vary between the different universities.  Moreover, the European Commission also provides a **fantastic online portal** which is called scholarship portal (http://www.scholarshipportal.eu/).  Here you have the possibility to enter the desired country for a semester abroad, then your country of origin and also you need to indicate if you are within the master or bachelor programme. After you have inserted all the needed information, the portal gives you detailed information about possible scholarships  For example if you would like to go to Austria then there is a scholarship which is called Ernst March. Further details can be found on the scholarship portal of the EU.  Also on this portal many national scholarship possibilities can be found on www.grants.at for example Austria but still also for national scholarships you can use the EU scholarship portal. |
| **Internship Opportunities** | International internships are popular with graduates and under-graduates as they give students an experience of life n a foreign country that can be invaluable in later life.  European Union universities have different norms in different nations. However, all the universities are very optimistic and supportive of the internship opportunities for students, the national language plays an important criteria to be selected in any company in that country. The internships opportunities vary in nature and structure which can be from no financial support to handsome financial assistance of up to € 1000,- or more per month.  If you are aiming to do an internship in Europe, then it is best to talk to your international offices at home. Most of the international offices do have contacts to international operating companies which facilitates you in searching the right company.  Generally, there are many platforms where internships can be found. The following ones are going to support you in your search:   * http://erasmusintern.org/ * http://www.globalplacement.com/ * http://www.gooverseas.com/internships-abroad/europe * http://www.praxisnetwork.eu |

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| **Travel within Europe for Cultural Exposure** | Travel in Europe for students has special provisions. Although norms of travel discounts are different for different nations, they are very supportive for students. If you are able to get a Schengen Visa (explained above) travelling within these countries is not a problem at all as there is free mobility within these countries. If you have Schengen visa and you would like to the UK you need to require an additional visa (also see above).  Generally, travelling around Europe is very easy and also security is not an issue.  For travelling around Europe it is best to take the plane or the train.  For travelling by plane please use the following links for airlines:   * http://www.lufthansa.com/us/en/Homepage * http://www.ryanair.com/# * http://www.easyjet.com/en * http://www.staralliance.com/en/   Further, there are also many platforms which support in organizing travelling in Europe.   * http://www.statravel.com * http://www.expedia.com   For rail services please check the website of each of the national railway services. |