

Making the Most of Your Summer to Prepare for University Abroad

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With year-end exams coming to a close, and warm weather clearly in the air, summer is almost here! If you're considering university abroad in the next few years, you can take advantage of summer opportunities to deepen your knowledge or pursue compelling hobbies, enhance your CV, and "divertirti" all at the same time! Here are some answers to Frequently Asked Questions that will jump-start your thinking about the upcoming sunny season:

- **I've been studying all year. Why should I consider attending a summer course?**

If you aspire to university abroad, hopefully you've already made a few preparations for summer and are considering your options. Deepening your knowledge or working on academic projects through any type of summer activity is always valuable. From experience, it's been proven that international students who attend summer courses on university campuses—particularly those which are taught by college faculty—may land a competitive advantage in future applications. If you attend an Italian *liceo*, strong summer grades earned in a new academic system will demonstrate your English language skills and academic ability, and will prove to future Admissions officers that you can handle university-level work in a foreign country—or even better, at *their* university! Besides, summer courses also provide fun, low-commitment ways to test out different majors/courses or career areas, make new friends, and get acquainted with a particular city or international culture before being tied down to a three- or four-year degree program. Please note: any faculty-written letters of recommendation *must* be secured in hand before the summer's end, or risk getting lost in the autumn shuffle afterwards!

- **Are there any types of students for which summer activities could be more crucial?**

Students who are gifted with artistic talents or athletic abilities are wise to plan very early for artistic/performance undergraduate degrees or talent-based funding. Music and dance conservatories, institutes for the visual or media arts, and university sports scholarships all require advanced preparation, for which summer offers special opportunities.

For music & dance: Performing arts camps abound in the USA, UK and Canada, with the most reputable ones providing individualized training in artistic technique, exposure to different musical periods or dance styles, and participation in group rehearsals, solo/ensemble performances, and master classes with special guest artists. Such summer camps are excellent venues for acquiring a realistic sense of the competition in artistic fields, as well as understanding professional standards for training and artistic expression. Practically speaking, performing arts camps provide concrete opportunities to work on audition skills and performance anxiety, and test whether you have the right personality for a sustained career in the performing arts.

For visual arts: To apply for your desired major/course at an art institute of higher education, you will probably need to submit an artistic portfolio, which may contain sketchbook pieces, as well as a written, artistic statement. Many schools of art in English-speaking countries offer summer courses for high school students to help prepare portfolios with professional, artistic feedback. You can also explore the vast breadth of areas within visual arts and digital media to confirm your interests. Once again, if you prioritize courses at your favorite art school, you may receive direct contact with faculty and insights into how that institution approaches a studio art-related career.

For sports: Particularly for American sports scholarships, international student athletes are encouraged to prioritize athletic camps that are associated with their ideal universities and teams/coaches. These camps range in duration from a couple days to several weeks, and may or may not include housing. Look for sports camps on the homepage of each university's Athletic Department! The key factor is to get direct exposure to the university team's coach or assistant coach, as players may be evaluated early for upcoming team slots, to be filled over the next several years. Student athletes should demonstrate individual athletic technique, as well as team collaboration and spirit, leadership skills, and a strong work ethic. Eventually, you'll need to submit a separate application process for an athletic scholarship, in addition to the "regular" university admissions materials.

- **What can I do to gain work experience, especially if I'm under 18?**

If you're an expatriate returning home for the summer—especially in the US, UK and Canada, where teenagers can work at age 16—consider finding a compensated job or a non-paid internship that requires some responsibility and gives insight into a career field. Most American and Canadian universities do value high school work-related experiences, and British universities reserve a separate section for student employment on the UCAS application. If Italy is your summer destination (where labor laws are more stringent), try to organize a week of observation at a less formal workplace, maybe "shadowing" a friend of the family who is an entrepreneur or manages a small business.

Volunteer work to help your local community can also be gratifying. You may be surprised—just a few days' experience can provide a meaningful starting point to think about your future work and career, even if it shows you which options to strike from the list!

If your school year has been super busy, and you now find yourself without any concrete summer plans, don't panic! Pursuing your favorite hobby with focus, or looking for fresh insights during a family vacation can also be fantastic uses of your summertime. After all, experience has shown that the most winning college essays come from simply sharing what you love to do with passion, vigor and clarity.