

## HOW TO GET US HIGH SCHOOL CREDIT WHILE TRAVELING

Do you want to be a foreign exchange student but fear having to stay in high school five years to complete all the work? Or are you a family with a chance to travel for several months – or longer – and want to ensure your student is accumulating credit towards graduation?

First of all, congratulations. For a teen to have a chance to explore new cultures is a major gift to his or her future. The benefits earned in these months abroad will be far more valuable than any time lost in a traditional classroom. But still, it's nice to have some part-time or full-time options to ensure students graduate in four years. Here are different ways to approach getting credit while traveling.

One, you can homeschool, about which much has been written, beginning with the classic used by millions, [The Well-Trained Mind](#). Be forewarned: it takes a lot of work for homeschooling to be a great experience and to avoid the challenges of butting heads daily with parents now in the additional role of teachers. (As one parent put it, "I love the idea of homeschool if only I didn't have to school him at home.") Some homeschool work can be transferred to traditional public or private schools, but it's best to check with your future school at the outset to avoid disappointments later.

Two, you can make specific prior arrangements with your "home" school, whether public or private. Get this in advance and in writing so there are no surprises on your return. The major disadvantages are that traditional public schools do not have the means of giving adequate credit for languages and subjects learned overseas, and private schools often lack the resources to interpret work done outside their sphere. For example, if you spend a year in high school in Brazil and earn a C in Portuguese class along with all the native speakers, when you return home you will typically either get a C posted to your transcript, or you may be offered an exam to earn credit but not a grade on your transcript (called "credit by exam"). If you get credit at all. And if you take a course that does not have a counterpart in the public school district, like Scandinavian literature, there is generally no means of offering credit on the home transcript. It takes a lot of careful advance planning to ensure that the solid academic work you accomplish overseas is deservedly reflected on the school transcript, with grades that accurately reflect subject mastery.

The final and cleanest option for college applications may be to graduate early from high school using a combination of dual credit classes and summer school, then apply to colleges with your overseas transcript attached to your high school transcript. That puts colleges in the position of evaluating your overseas work rather than the school district, with typically more limited resources to give you full credit for your work.

### **Here's how we help our traveling students.**

We take an inventory of your travel plans, interests, and aspirations for college and career, and construct an individualized plan of learning that allows students to accumulate credit towards graduation while taking advantage of your new environs. Some courses are taken locally, and some online, depending on student interest. All courses are carefully vetted to ensure they meet our standards for academic rigor and student engagement. All student plans are constructed in accordance

with the graduation requirements in the student's home state, and on a schedule that suits their travel needs, on a year-round schedule. Because of our accreditation with the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, this credit transfers to all public and private schools in the country.

Does this work? Absolutely. Last year, one of our seniors graduated halfway through senior year after she was accepted to Temple University's campus in Tokyo to double-major in International Business and Japanese, after a high-school career filled with family travel overseas and extended absences for athletic competitions. And because of the 45 units of college credit she had accumulated along the way, she was admitted as a sophomore. "Blended" learning, combining the best of technology and educational resources to create a program of individualized instruction for each student, is the way we will all be taught in the future.

By subject, this is what our students may work on when they travel:

**English:** Do you only need to meet graduation requirements, which may be as little as four years of English, or are you planning to apply to a four-year college, which typically requires composition, rhetoric, and American and world literature? English while traveling can take the form of a traditional English I/II/III/IV course offered by a good content provider. It may also be a dual-credit college English 101 Composition course which can take the place of high-school freshman or sophomore English (while accumulating college credit; another bonus is that a one-semester college course is worth a whole year of high school credit). Be sure to take the college's English placement test before you leave the country. Alternatively, liberal arts majors may enjoy a course in Creative Writing or Journalism to take advantage of new experiences (and provide a treasured document of the year). Or it can be a course we craft with the student to learn about a country's literature in depth. How better to learn Russian literature than spending a year in Moscow reading and writing about Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Solzhenitsyn?

**Math:** Few students are prepared for math in high school, and most parents don't want to waste valuable time overseas struggling with math. We use a math program based on artificial intelligence, which identifies what topics a student has already mastered and places them in a level commensurate with their abilities, without repeating any topic they already know, and without throwing them in the deep end of the math pool. The program teaches math in several different ways, adapting to how the student learns best to create a very individualized program of math instruction, supplemented by one-on-one time with our math teachers. Students may work on any subject from pre-algebra through AP Calculus and college math. Computer science, game design, and coding classes are also possibilities.

**Social Studies:** What better time to learn World History, Geography, or Multicultural Studies than while traveling the world? Or learn about the US Constitution while in a country governed by a different set of laws? Engaging online courses can bring the subject alive when students have the chance to interview local residents or visit nearby sights and museums for homework assignments. A long list of massive open online courses – MOOCs – across all subjects can be found at [ClassCentral.com](http://ClassCentral.com); to earn credit, find those that offer certification of proficiency tests at the end of the course. A 40-hour course is worth one quarter of high-school credit; 75 hours for one semester.

**Science:** For students spending time near the ocean, this may be a great time to learn marine science, life in the ocean, or oceanography. Spending a year in the Amazon? What an amazing experience to learn about the flora and fauna of the Amazon in a specially-constructed course focusing on that abundant region. Are you high up in the Andes, or in the Southern Hemisphere? Learn about the different skies in an astronomy course. Even biology, chemistry, and physics can now be done online with the use of very imaginative “virtual” labs in which students replace a hip or excise a brain tumor, which of course is a different experience than the sights and smells of dissecting a frog.

**Art/Music/Humanities:** Spending the year near the Louvre in Paris or the Vienna Staatsoper? This may be the year to take art appreciation, music appreciation, world religions, digital photography, philosophy, and other introductions to subjects that take advantage of rich local resources. Or how about a specially-crafted course in architecture to better understand the history and development of buildings you see in your travels?

**Electives:** Far from being “light” courses, electives are a chance to plumb new interests in courses that may not be offered at home, so look for subjects that might not be available when you return. Entrepreneurship or International Business allow a future entrepreneur to learn how business is conducted in other countries. Biotechnology, forensic science, law, theater and film production, archaeology, renewable technologies – all are great introductions not only to potential careers, but also offer a chance to learn into how the same crafts are approached in other countries.

**Language:** To hit the ground running when you arrive, learn as much of the language as possible beforehand with free apps like [Duolingo](#) or conversation-only lessons from [Pimsleur](#). While there, learn to read, speak, and write the language as best you can – ideally while enrolled in a local school and making friends. When you return home, find a school that will let you take the Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL) tests offered by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) *and give you a grade* (not just credit) based on the proficiency you demonstrate. Without a grade, your student’s hard work to master a new language will not count towards their GPA, but it may count towards a Seal of Biliteracy in their diploma (offered in some states). AAPPL tests are available for several language proficiency levels in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Thai.

**PE:** Walking the dog. Taking surfing or jiu jitsu lessons. Hiking the Andes. Anything that involves moving more than fingers on a videogame console counts as physical exercise. Students keep track of their activities on a spreadsheet, which gives them experience learning how to use Excel. The parents or host families sign off that the activities were done. Every 75 hours is one semester of PE credit.

**And then we mentor.** Students located remotely check in with our school mentor once a week by Skype to be sure they stay on track towards the deadlines they set for themselves, adjusting for travel or illness as necessary. Parents get weekly progress reports so they can help prioritize activities. The time requirement? Because of the very individualized nature of the program, full-time students generally accomplish all their work in 4-5 hours a day, leaving the rest of the time free for other activities.



With a little advance planning, getting high school credit while traveling can be a fun and stimulating addition to an exciting year.

*Dr. Kathryn Kelly ([kkelly@ischools.us](mailto:kkelly@ischools.us)) is a toxicologist, science teacher, and college counselor. Born in Canada, she spent four of her secondary and college years in Germany and Austria before graduating from Stanford and Columbia. She founded I-School to enable motivated students to earn academic credit while pursuing their dreams anywhere in the world. She may be reached at 775-831-2423 or at [kkelly@ischools.us](mailto:kkelly@ischools.us).*

June 2019