

The
ASSIST Scholar
Handbook

For Students in
Day Schools

Please keep this booklet with you for
reference during your American year.

2024/25 Academic Year



ASSIST
SCHOLARS

The ASSIST Mission

ASSIST creates life-changing opportunities for outstanding international scholars to learn from and contribute to the finest American independent secondary schools.

Introduction

Congratulations on your selection as an ASSIST Scholar for the 2023/24 academic year! Your scholarship was earned through your accomplishments to date as well as by your participation in the scholarship competition conducted in your country. Many students desire to become ASSIST scholars, but only a limited number of outstanding young people are chosen for this special year.

While this scholarship is an honor and an opportunity, it is also a significant responsibility. You represent yourself, your family, your country, and ASSIST at the school you will attend. Much is expected of you, and we have full confidence that you will contribute significantly to your school community.

Before beginning your ASSIST year, you and your family should read, very carefully, all materials that are provided to you by ASSIST and by your school. You must come to the States embracing a spirit of cooperation, meaning that you have read, understood and are prepared to abide by the regulations governing your year in America.

It is disheartening for schools and ASSIST, and ultimately for you and your family, when you are not truly prepared to follow these important guidelines. We will work hard to support you, and we expect that you will honor these guidelines, which are established with your well being and success in mind.

These are a few examples of important rules that are not negotiable but often cause discord:

- Asking to stay for a second year of study in America.
- Asking to graduate from your American school.
- Asking to change schools.
- Asking to take a driver's education course or to drive a car.

If you have questions about any aspect of the rules governing this program, please clarify them in advance of your departure for America. The ASSIST representative in your country and those of us in America stand ready to help you.

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You and ASSIST

To date, 5,821 students from 54 countries have spent a year in America with ASSIST. You stand in a long line of successful and distinguished student ambassadors, and we believe that you are well prepared to contribute, as did your predecessors.

A Lifelong Relationship

Your relationship with ASSIST does not conclude at the end of the school year – rather, this year is the beginning of a lifelong relationship. We will follow you closely throughout your American year, and recent initiatives allow us to maintain contact with you after you return home, continue your studies, and begin your career.

Owing to the power of the ASSIST experience, ASSIST students now remain in contact with one another and with us long after their year of study concludes. ASSIST alumni can help one another with university selection, internship acquisition, career advice and placement, and identification of social and leadership opportunities.

Support During Your ASSIST Year

It is not uncommon during the year to confront challenges where you will need ASSISTance – from your teachers, host families, schools, parents at home, advisor and ASSIST. We ask that you will reach out to us when we can be genuinely helpful to you and make us part of important decisions. These may include issues with your visa, travel you intend to undertake, medical conditions and emergencies, and academic or social difficulties at school.

Developing Leadership Skills

As an ASSIST student, you will serve as an ambassador of your country and culture to your American school. An important component of our program is selecting students whom we feel can take a leading role in creating understanding across cultures, both during their exchange year and upon their return home.

At your American school, we encourage you to seek opportunities to share your perspective in classes, to speak publicly before the student body and parent groups, make presentations in class, to write articles for the newspaper or school website, post on social media, and to immerse yourself in the life of the community. You will enjoy your year more as you do so, and you will feel empowered by the contribution you make to the life of the school community.

Upon your return home, we also encourage you to take every opportunity to share what you have learned. Your school will often provide opportunities for you to speak about your experience, to write articles for social media posts or school publications, and to expand the power of your exchange year by sharing it with others. This helps to interest other talented students in an exchange year with ASSIST – and contributes to ASSIST's goal of creating a more peaceful, more understanding world. We encourage you to contact your Country Coordinator when you return home to learn how you can play a role in recruiting students and in building the alumni network.

We select students in part based on their academic abilities and personal qualities, but we also seek future leaders whom we feel will make contributions to their home cultures. Beginning with your ASSIST year, extending to your return to your home country, and with the support of the ASSIST alumni network, we know that many of you will become national and international leaders of note in the generation ahead.

Expectations of ASSIST Scholars

Of those to whom much is given is much expected.

ASSIST Scholars have been granted an extraordinary opportunity: A scholarship, at one of America's finest independent secondary schools. American schools grant very few scholarships to international students, and they only continue to do so for ASSIST when our Scholars conduct themselves using the highest standards as guidelines and when they contribute to the school community.

For ASSIST Scholars, it is not enough to refrain from breaking school rules or to meet the minimum expectations. Rather, each student is expected to exert maximum effort and to seek to be a role model for other students.

Behavior Unbecoming

ASSIST Scholars are expected to conduct themselves and to behave in keeping with the highest standards and in keeping with strong moral and ethical codes. If ASSIST students behave in a manner that brings discredit upon themselves or upon the program, they may be required to withdraw from the program and to return home. Examples include bullying, harming oneself or others, dishonesty, inappropriate use of social media, and insufficient appreciation for the opportunities provided by the school or host family.

Meeting Program Expectations

Each ASSIST Scholar is chosen for his or her promise to work diligently and to contribute to the programs of the school. Students who do not exert maximum effort, who seek only to serve their own interests, or who seem uninterested in becoming productive school citizens may be required to withdraw from the program and to return home.

Preparation

The remainder of this booklet is devoted to helping you prepare for your ASSIST year. This *ASSIST Scholar Handbook* outlines the key points you must consider, the important rules you must abide by, and provides advice on how best to prepare yourself.

You will receive other information from your school and from ASSIST, and we encourage you to review it all carefully – and to reflect upon ways to pre-

pare for a productive and enjoyable year. While no set of documents can fully anticipate every event in your life, we have found that this booklet, along with the other materials you will receive, form an excellent foundation for our students.

Important Medical Information

Health and Accident Insurance

ASSIST and the U.S. Department of state require that all students have complete health and accident insurance coverage before their arrival in the United States. There are two ways we permit to satisfy this requirement: you may purchase your insurance through ASSIST, or you may purchase the policy from your American school. **No other policies will be accepted.**

Physical Examination

Your American school and the United States Government require a yearly physical examination and specific vaccinations before entering the United States. ASSIST also highly recommends a thorough dental check-up, and an eye examination (particularly for those students with glasses), before leaving home, as you cannot participate in ASSIST or school activities without a certified physical, and your insurance in the U.S. does not cover these examinations.

Your School's Student Medical Information form must be completed by your parents and by your family physician – **and it is critical and required that all medical conditions are disclosed.** Students who hide significant medical issues may be asked to leave the program and return home. Copies **must** be downloaded to SchoolAdmin/Finalsite in your Parent Portal and to your American school, as outlined in the memo entitled Important Information About Your Year Abroad. You will not be allowed to participate in any school activities, especially sports-related activities, unless this form is completed as instructed.

Your school will require you to complete a medical form prior to your arrival, and we require that you provide a copy of this form to ASSIST.

Please pay close attention to the vaccines and booster shots required by your school, and make sure they are completed before you travel to the US. If your vaccinations are not completed, as required by your school and by the state the school is in, you will not be allowed to attend school or to participate in any school programs. The ASSIST GeoBlue Health Travel insurance **does not** pay for vaccines of any type; if shots are required, they will be administered at your expense.

Acute Medical Conditions

During your stay in the United States, you may become ill or experience emergencies that will require medical attention. In most cases, these situations will be covered by the short-term medical coverage issued for your stay abroad. In some cases, however, there will be acute medical conditions that are not covered by the short-term medical coverage policy and/or that may require you to be sent home for more extensive care. Examples of such cases would be life-threatening illness, anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders, and depression.

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)

HIPAA is the acronym for the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996. HIPAA is the first comprehensive Federal legislation designed to protect the privacy of personal health information. If you are evaluated or treated by a health care provider during your stay in the U.S., you may be asked to sign an Authorization for Release of Health Information form, which will ask you to designate those individuals to whom information about your medical condition is released. If you or your parents wish ASSIST to be informed of your medical condition so that we may provide support, ASSIST should be listed on this form, in addition to your parents or guardian, host family, and school personnel. We encourage you to list us so that we may monitor your health and well-being. Families who have chosen absolute privacy over partnership with us have often regretted this decision, as it limits ASSIST's ability to be fully functioning in support of a student's health.

Information for Your Host Family

It is very important that your host family have a copy of all of your important medical documentation: your physical examination form, emergency treatment release form, and insurance identification card and claim form. Remember that your host family will function just as your family would at home, so you should provide them with the medical information and documentation that will allow them to support your health needs.

Travel Preparation

Obtaining Your Visa (F-1 Visa)

Your school will be sending you the very important United States Government Form **I-20: Certificate of Eligibility for Non immigrant (F-1) Student**, which is required to apply for your F-1 Non immigrant visa. Your school will also send you instructions on how to complete the I-20 form, how to pay the SEVIS fee online (with Form I-901), and the additional documents you will need to apply for your visa.

Once you have received the I-20 form and paid the SEVIS fee (Form I-901), you should contact the closest American Embassy or Consulate to request information about obtaining an F-1 student visa. Given the concerns regarding safety and exchange as well as the often high volume of visa requests at American Consulates, we encourage you to begin the process of obtaining your visa as soon as you receive the paperwork from your school.

You will need to provide the following documents to the American Embassy or Consulate when applying for the visa:

- Passport
- I-20 Form
- SEVIS I-901 payment receipt
- DS-160
- An official, sealed transcript from your school reflecting grades, comments from teachers, class rank, and standardized test scores (TOEFL) if available
- A copy of the acceptance letter from ASSIST
- A copy of the acceptance letter from your school
- Financial evidence that shows your family has sufficient funds to cover expenses during the period of your intended study
 - A statement from your family's banker or a bank statement showing your assets
 - Proof of ownership of property, business or other assets
 - Or Financial Support letter from ASSIST

Please contact your school first, then ASSIST, if you have questions about the visa process.

At your U.S. Port of Entry, you will need to present the immigration officer with:

- Your passport with the F-1 visa
- Your Form I-20 (Embassy will accept a copy)
- Your Form I-94 (Arrival/Departure Record), completed before landing
- Your I-901 fee payment receipt

Although the Immigration officer should return your Form I-20 after granting you permission to enter the U.S., occasionally they may keep this form. Do not panic. When you arrive at your school, please inform the International Student Advisor or ASSIST Rep that your I-20 form was not returned to you when you entered the country. Your School can create a new form for you.

Obtaining Your Visa (J-1 Visa)

The United States Department of State has designated ASSIST a special status qualifying us as an official Exchange Visitor's Program, which entitles students in our program to come to the United States on a visa for one year. The Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status Form (DS-2019) allows the student to enter this country. Present the original DS-2019 when you apply for your visa at the nearest American Embassy or Consulate. They will accept a copy.

Given the concerns regarding safety and exchange, we encourage you to begin the process for obtaining your visa as soon as you receive the paperwork from ASSIST. We anticipate that it may take longer to receive a visa in the coming years, and indeed visa regulations and processes are now undergoing significant change. If we become aware of any changes, we will contact you.

The original DS-2019 should be presented again to the Immigration Service at the point of entry to the United States. Although this form should be returned to you at this time, the Immigration Service may keep your DS-2019. Please do not panic. When you arrive at the Orientation site, please report to the ASSIST office that your DS-2019 was not returned to you when you entered the country. We will send a new form to you at your school or host family's home after Orientation.

Packing

Please read your school handbook concerning clothing requirements/dress code at your school, and bring clothing appropriate for the climate. A few schools ask that boys have a dark blazer and white shirt for more formal occasions, and some schools require the wearing of a sport coat or blazer, shirt, tie, and slacks for classes. Requirements for girls vary also, so please check the catalog or contact the school. Please pay particular attention to schools that require uniforms, many of which will offer several options for purchase.

Remember that closet space may be limited, and you will undoubtedly make purchases while here in the United States, so pack accordingly. Also, we strongly recommend that you ship any items that you will not be needing right away (winter clothes, etc.) by surface mail – the least expensive way possible – to your host family. When you arrive in the United States, you will be responsible for carrying all of your own luggage to the site, and to the home of your host family. You may also be charged by the airlines if your luggage is in excess of their limits – **check with the airlines in advance**.

Small musical instruments and sports equipment that will fit into your suitcase might be included. Do not bring complete bed linens with you; your host family will provide them. Be sure to read your school catalog for details, and discuss any needs with your host family before you depart and with your advisor when you arrive.

Mobile Phones, International Calling and Internet Use

Most students have cell phones.

These are ASSIST's recommendations for mobile phone use:

- Students can check with their current mobile phone provider about a plan that will work in the U.S.
- Students may be able to purchase a U.S.-based SIM card for use with their personal mobile phone.
- Students may choose to purchase a prepaid phone package also known as a “pay-as-you-go” phone.
- Please do not expect your host family to add you to their family plan. Adding an extra line can be costly, and removing a line at the end of the hosting experience can pose additional challenges with their mobile plan carrier.

Students are expected to read, understand and abide by their school's mobile phone use policy, usually outlined in the student handbook.

For international calling, ASSIST recommends that each student use an international calling app like Zoom, WhatsApp, or FaceTime, which are free with a WIFI connection. While it is important for students to stay in touch with families and friends at home, exchange students spending too much time on the phone or on Zoom tend to have a difficult time adapting. It is important to remember why you are here, and to be sure your phone time use is not taking away from time with your host family and friends, or from schoolwork and activities.

Travel in Safety

A concern shared by all citizens in free societies is the safety of traveling to and living in another country. ASSIST is acutely aware of the changed landscape of international travel and study, as are our member schools. Our schools work very diligently to make their campuses as safe as possible, although we acknowledge that achieving absolute safety is beyond our power.

While the challenges encountered in traveling and studying abroad have increased, so has the mandate ASSIST feels to bring citizens from around the world together to develop friendships that will help form a more peaceful world in the generations ahead. As an ASSIST student, you will be part of this evolving world, and we hope your experience will prepare you to be an agent of positive change.

Arrival

Living with Your Host Family

We know that you will make every effort to get along with your host family, which is eager to show you something about the American way of life. While they might not expect you to agree with their way of doing things, or their political or religious philosophies, they will expect your cooperation in being willing to listen and learn, and in turn will want to learn something about your way of life.

Please keep in mind that this family has invited you to live with them because they are interested in you as a person, and they do not receive any financial compensation for this. Indeed, hosting an international student can be quite expensive. Therefore, you must expect to use some of your own money for personal needs. Your school may arrange to have you stay with more than one family during the course of the year. This policy works out very well, as it gives you the opportunity to experience American family life with different people, and to make more close friendships.

While you are with your American family, remember that although you will be treated like a guest in the beginning, you will soon become a member of the family and will be expected to participate in chores and responsibilities in the home. Family rules are expected to be observed by everyone, including you. Do everything you can to be of help to this family, which is giving you such a generous gift.

Please keep in mind that the phrase “thank you” is a central part of American hospitality and civility. It is almost impossible to say thank you enough. Saying thank you shows gratitude and makes host families feel appreciated.

Host Brothers and Sisters

If you have a host brother or sister, you should not expect that your interests will be identical. You will hopefully learn from each other as a result. Perhaps, on occasion, there may be conflicts that need to be worked out just as you would work out problems with your own brothers and sisters at home. Remember that all of your family members will be getting used to you in the beginning.

American Independent Secondary Schools

Attending an American independent secondary school will be a unique experience for you. You will find that the majority of students come from families which have had some higher education and are economically comfortable. Some students may come from very wealthy families, while others receive some form of financial help from the school. Please remember not to judge your fellow students by their economic backgrounds but rather as individuals who are interested in receiving the best education our schools have to offer. Have an open mind, and listen to their points of view, but at the same time share with them your own cultural and educational background in a manner that will encourage them to listen to your way of thinking. No one will expect you to like everything about America, but if you must be critical, do so constructively.

Since you have never attended an American independent school before, a new experience will be to conform to the regulations set by each independent school for its students. While rules vary in each school, generally they limit a student's freedom in a way that you may find difficult to understand. For example, there will be expectations about your behavior beyond the school day and away from campus; in many schools a dress code is established. You may be given "work" hours if you are late to class.

Please read your school handbook to familiarize yourself with these rules before school begins, and set a good example by following the rules without complaint. Remember that the school is giving you an ASSIST scholarship; your acceptance of it carries with it the obligation to conform to its rules and regulations. To quote an appropriate statement from a participating school's catalog:

It is not the School's purpose to demand blind conformity, but to encourage and train imagination and individual leadership, to stimulate creative thinking and action, and to reward the courage to be different without harm to self or others.

School Procedures

Advisor

Each school will appoint a faculty or staff member as a personal advisor to give you individual assistance with academic, social, and personal matters throughout the year. Your advisor could be a teacher, a school counselor, or even the Director of Admissions, and should be consulted about decisions with which you need help. Your school will also have an ASSIST representative at the school who will also be available to help you.

ASSIST Representative

At each school, we have designated an ASSIST representative, our local program representative, who is a key link between ASSIST offices and you at the school. The ASSIST representative will check in with you monthly during the course of the year and is available, in addition to your advisor and teachers, for support and advice.

Books

Try to purchase used books for your courses. If the school has none, perhaps you could purchase those you need from a student who previously took the course. See your advisor or representative about this detail.

Academic Schedule

Courses in American History and English (or American Literature) are required for ASSIST students (with a few exceptions). Other courses would be in accordance with your requirements in your home school and your personal interests. Math, science, and language, for example, could be taken in addition to American History and English.

If American History is not offered, or you are a tenth grader and are unable to enroll in American History, we ask that you select another course that has as its aim acquiring knowledge of American culture and history.

Spanish, Serbian and Bulgarian Convalidation

Spaniards, Serbians, and Bulgarians will receive information explaining the procedure for convalidation. Remember that ASSIST does not guarantee that.

convalidation is possible. If the school that you will be attending offers the courses that would make convalidation possible, and you can take them as a part of your normal academic schedule, then you can tell your advisor and academic dean in the fall that you will seek convalidation. It will be your responsibility to do all of the necessary paper work yourself well in advance of the close of school.

Driver's Education Course

ASSIST students are absolutely **forbidden** to drive a car, motorcycle, all-terrain vehicle, motor boat or any similar vehicle while they are in the United States – even before or after the end of the school year. We ask you to be honest and observe this rule for your own protection and for reasons of legal liability. Equally important, ASSIST students may not enroll in a Driver's Education course in America, since such courses have as an integral part of the curriculum the practice driving of an automobile, and this is not allowed. If you violate this rule, you will be asked to withdraw from the ASSIST program.

The United States High School Diploma

You are accepted by ASSIST and your school as a one-year exchange student and not as a candidate for a diploma. The most important factor is that you have a strong year as a good citizen and scholar, and receive the enthusiastic support of your school and ASSIST, should you ever want to return to the United States at a later date and attend an American university. Please do not ask your school to award you a diploma, or to change your grade status from the grade that you would normally be enrolled in had you remained in your home country. The American school has the sole authority to determine grade status and a student's eligibility for receiving a diploma. This decision is made prior to acceptance and can-not be changed.

Personal Expenses

We advise you to allow US \$1,800–\$2,500 for expenses such as the cost of books and supplies (you must purchase these in the U.S., and they are expensive), miscellaneous school fees, private lessons, entertainment, gifts, personal expenses, and transportation within the United States. Please bring only a small portion of that amount with you when you arrive. Your parents should contact your host family regarding transfer of the balance of your expense money. You should also have a credit card or debit card available that will work when used in the U.S. In some cases you will need to buy lunch at your school, and you should work out these details with the help of your advisor, host parent, or the ASSIST representative at your school.

We have provided a memo on our website that will help you to project the amount of money you will need for personal expenses during your exchange year. We are happy to advise you, and the school will help you manage your funds, but ultimately the responsibility is yours and your family's to make sure that you spend wisely and retain enough money to cover your expenses.

Please note: Fees and expenses vary widely from school to school, and ASSIST has no control over the fees charged by each member school. It is a good practice to plan in advance and to inquire about fees before participating in special activities so that you can be certain you have the funds to cover any expenses.

Part-Time Employment

ASSIST students must provide their own money for personal expenses. While students are not allowed to hold jobs during their year here, some of you may be interested in earning a little extra pocket money through part-time work. However, you must realize that your school will require you to be involved in the school program many hours during the day, in the evenings and on the weekends as well. Most likely you will not have time to add anything to your busy schedule.

You should know, however, that the United States government regulations permit you to do part-time, informal work not to exceed 10 hours per week. You may not appear on a payroll. The jobs of this type which might be available are language tutoring and baby sitting. Most often these jobs are done on a volunteer basis to show appreciation for the opportunities being provided. Many schools have community service jobs that all students do as part of a shared responsibility to their school, and no financial reimbursement is given.

School Rules and Regulations

Your year in America is governed both by the rules of ASSIST and by the rules of your school (as well as the rules of your host family). It is important that you understand all sets of rules and embrace them. In the few instances where ASSIST students have violated major rules, their disappointment at being asked to return home has been keen.

You should have received a link from your school to the student handbook. This should be read thoroughly, by you and your parents, in advance of your departure. Be clear that your school has its own philosophies and rules, and you cannot assume you will have a general knowledge that will suffice. **ASSIST supports the rules of each member school, and we are the school's partner in expecting you to abide willingly by those rules.**

A key issue regarding rules is the use of alcohol, smoking, and illegal drugs. In American society, as in your own, there are concerns about the use of alcohol and other illegal substances. Use of these substances is forbidden in every ASSIST school, and you are expected to abide by this important rule. The use of tobacco, including smokeless tobacco and electronic cigarettes/Vaping is also forbidden by ASSIST and your school. If you are exposed to the substance use of other students, and are bothered by it, you should contact a trusted faculty member to discuss this in confidence. If you need further help, please contact the ASSIST office in Suffield for confidential help with your concerns.

Hazing and Harassment

ASSIST and our member schools are committed to maintaining diverse, inclusive, and safe learning environments where all community members treat one another with respect. You should familiarize yourself with your school's definitions of cyber-bullying (inappropriate use of social media), hazing, harassment, and sexual harassment, and the school's corresponding anti-bullying and harassment policies. Our schools take violations of these policies very seriously, resulting in suspension or dismissal from the school.

Participation in School Programs

Leadership and Involvement

Unlike many schools systems in other parts of the world, American independent schools make the athletic, extracurricular, community service and leadership programs an integral part of the school experience. ASSIST students have made remarkable contributions to their school communities both in and outside of the classroom, and we encourage you to find meaningful ways to utilize your strengths and talents. This is an excellent way to develop leadership skills, to immerse yourself in the community, and to thank the school for granting the scholarship and opportunity to you.

Classroom

Our hope is that each ASSIST student will be given an opportunity in the classroom to express his or her particular views, as an international student and as an individual. We encourage you to speak up as a representative of your country as well as an individual in these situations. You may not always agree with what is expressed in class, but we hope you will disagree in a constructive and respectful manner so that your classmates may benefit from your point of view. You will find enriching relationships with your teachers and enjoy learning from them outside of class as well.

Athletics

International students will find that many American schools include athletics as a regular part of the school program. Your school's website will show you the variety of sports offered, according to the season, and we encourage you to continue the sports in which you are currently involved and to try new sports. This is one way to fully immerse yourself in school life, develop new friendships, and experience the camaraderie and school spirit that comes with being part of a team.

Extra-Curricular Activities

In addition to sports, we encourage you to participate in as many activities outside the classroom as time permits. There are many to choose from (see your school's website). Your school will expect you to become involved in the life of the school community and welcomes your contributions.

Cultural Events

Your school will provide opportunities for visits to museums, and to attend concerts, lectures, and plays in the area or nearby cities. There will also be cultural and social activities at your school. We hope you will take advantage of these opportunities to meet as many American students as possible and to learn something about the cultural life of Americans.

Public Speaking

Your American school, community church or a club may ask you – or you may volunteer – to give a talk about your school at home or about your country. We encourage you to do so. It will be a great opportunity for others to have a chance to learn something about you and your country. For this reason, we ask you to prepare a presentation over the summer in a format like Canva or PowerPoint. Please ask your school to record your presentation so you can share it with ASSIST.

Academic Reports

You will receive grades, effort ratings and comments for your academic courses several times during the year. These reports will be sent to your parents and to the ASSIST office in Suffield, CT. We know you will make every effort to do your best, but do not take your academic studies so seriously that you do not have time for anything else. We want you to take some time to develop friendships with other students and members of the faculty at your American school.

School Newspaper Pictures, Articles and Publicity

We would appreciate it if you would send ASSIST copies of any school news article, picture, or publicity which concerns you as an ASSIST student, and send them to our office. While we will be communicating with you often during the year, and welcome hearing from you and learning of your experiences, this material is also extremely helpful in our continuing effort to present ASSIST to others. Please send us information in electronic form and by electronic means, where possible, and accompanying pictures are very helpful. We hope to feature many of these stories in our publications and blog.

Vacations and Travel

Vacations

American students and families are quite generous in inviting international students to their homes to share holidays with them. As a student at a day school, it is likely that you will spend your holidays with your host family, but you may also choose to travel or stay with other friends, if this is acceptable to your host family. Please inform the ASSIST office of your plans for all school holidays, and especially notify us in April about the time period between the close of school and your return flight home.

Visits from Family and Relatives

If your parents or other relatives desire to visit, please clear their plans in advance and receive permission from your host family and the ASSIST Representative at your school.

Staying in the United States After School Closes

In most cases, your return flight home has been booked for the day the academic year concludes. If you plan to extend your stay in the United States beyond that point, you must first receive permission from ASSIST. You should not expect to stay with your host family beyond the end of the school year unless you receive an invitation from them.

This is **VERY IMPORTANT**, as we must know when you are leaving and how – and may need to contact you if we become aware of a change in the schedule of your flight. You are responsible for arrangement and payment of transportation to the airport from wherever you are vacationing and all costs after school ends.

Some ASSIST students ask to stay in the United States during the summer in order to travel. The following are important considerations:

- ASSIST's responsibility for you, and your school's responsibility for you, terminates with the end of the school year. Schools, host families and ASSIST expects you to leave for home at this time.
- ASSIST must have written permission from your parents if you are staying beyond the close of the school year.
- If you stay for part of the summer, you must arrange for your own transportation home, which cannot be later than your visa expiration date.
- You will need adequate funds and adult supervised places to stay.
- Students who wish to enroll in any other program, including a summer school, may not do so using the visa granted for the ASSIST program. A new visa must be granted from the new program.
- Your short-term health insurance covers you through your original departure date and would need to be extended at your own expense. Also flight change fees are your expense.

The main purpose of the ASSIST Program is for you to spend the year at an American school with its faculty and students, with American families, and with travel as an additional benefit. You may have more than two months of holiday time within your ten-month stay in the United States, during which you may travel to other parts of the country. We recommend that you make wise use of your vacation time, and that you return home when school ends

Special Travel Experiences • Outside of the U.S.

Increasingly, students have the opportunity to travel either with the school or with their host families to locations outside of North America. Travel to countries beyond North America will be granted if the experience enhances the fundamental educational experience of the ASSIST year. For all such travel, permission must be secured in advance from ASSIST.

Scholars with an F-1 Visa

During your ASSIST year, permission to travel to another country cannot be granted without (a) a letter from your family giving you permission to go to that country, and (b) a letter of invitation from the family or organization that will be hosting you. As well, you should plan to consult an official in the consulate of the country to which you plan to travel – requirements vary, both by country of destination and by country of citizenship. Leave plenty of time to get all of this done, as the entire process can take a month.

Scholars with an J-1 Visa

Special permission to travel to another country cannot be granted without (a) a letter from your family giving you permission to go to that country, and (b) a letter of invitation from the family or organization that will be hosting you. (c) You must also mail your original DS-2019 to the ASSIST office in Suffield, Connecticut before you take any trip outside of the United States so that we may sign it. Without our signature, you may not be allowed to reenter the country. As well, you should plan to consult an official in the consulate of the country to which you plan to travel – requirements vary, both by country of destination and by country of citizenship. Leave plenty of time to get all of this done, as the entire process can take a month.

Scholars with either Visa

Permission to travel to Canada (which may also require a visa), Bermuda, the Bahamas and Mexico is generally granted by ASSIST, assuming that you have followed the steps outlined above. If you desire to travel to a country other than those noted, permission must be sought, in advance of making plans, with the ASSIST office in Suffield.

Medical Emergencies When Traveling

When you are away from your school, it is important to be prepared for medical emergencies that may arise. You should always carry your insurance card with you, or download the GeoBlue App to have access to your insurance coverage even when school is in session, but you should also carry with you a copy of the form labeled “Parent Release for Medical Treatment and Emergency Medical Care.” Should you require medical treatment when away from school or your permanent host family, and should your parents be unreachable, you will need this form to allow medical professionals to treat you.

Further Study at American Secondary Schools and Colleges

When you accept an ASSIST scholarship, you are making a philosophical commitment to a two-year experience: a year in the U.S. at an outstanding independent school, and a year at home sharing what you have learned. At the conclusion of your ASSIST year, you may not remain in the United States to continue your studies at your American school, which as a member of our program has agreed that your scholarship will only be granted for one year.

ASSIST students may not apply for any further study at an American school, college or university until the ASSIST program has been fully completed and you return to your home country. We are designated by the United States Department of State as a “one-year exchange program.” You have been accepted into the ASSIST program with the firm understanding that you will return to your home country at the end of this one year in the United States.

An exception exists for postgraduate students who already have a diploma from their secondary school at home. Postgraduate students may apply directly to American colleges or universities and may enroll in the year following their ASSIST year.

Should you wish to return to the U.S. for college or university study, both your school and ASSIST can be helpful, but your pursuit of this goal must not interfere with your immersion experience. You must be respectful of your school's college counseling schedule, which generally focuses on 12th graders, although most schools will arrange meetings with 11th graders during the spring term. You should feel free to ask the college counselor(s) at your school about the process, and in what ways they can guide you and be helpful in your search. At most schools, you may be able to attend informational meetings presented by college admissions representatives visiting your school throughout the year. Please do not expect your host family to take you on tours of colleges unless they have specifically made the suggestion or have invited you along for a trip.

Through conversations with eminent universities in the U.S. and educational consultants abroad, it is our understanding that you will be a stronger candidate when applying from home rather than applying from an independent school in the U.S. Because American universities define "pools" of candidates, an international student applying from his or her "country pool" has a better chance of entering a competitive university than applying from his or her "American school pool," which is filled with applicants to these very same universities.

Most ASSIST schools will be helpful in identifying potential universities that match you well, and American teachers will gladly write letters of recommendation. ASSIST also writes letters of recommendation on behalf of our alumni. Over 500 ASSIST alumni have returned to the States for university.

We know a great deal about this process and strongly suggest you trust our judgment, and that of the school, in helping you.

After you return home to complete your secondary education, and as you continue the college search process, please inform us, and the ASSIST school that you attended so that we can support your application.

ASSISTance

As you prepare yourself to become an ASSIST scholar, please call upon us to help in your transition. This is a lifelong relationship, one that begins with selection and placement, continues through the ASSIST year, and continues through your university years and career. We look forward to being a part of your ASSIST year and future and hope we can provide helpful ASSISTance along the way.

ASSIST is a non profit organization with tax exempt status and is incorporated in the state of Connecticut. ASSIST is designated by the United States Department of State as an authorized Exchange Visitor Program. ASSIST is also able to facilitate the issuance of the J-1 visa under which our students study in the U.S. for one academic year on Exchange Visitor status.

ASSIST does not discriminate nor does it condone harassment on the basis of gender, race, color, religion, national or ethnic origin, disability, age, sexual orientation or any other basis proscribed by applicable policies or laws.

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