

International Exchange Programs: Good Practices

International exchange programs frequently play an integral role in universities' internationalization efforts. These programs encourage students at the home campus to study abroad, and they attract talented international students from partner institutions to the home campus.

But establishing an exchange partnership with a foreign university often requires tremendous institutional energy and commitment. And, once established, considerable attention must be devoted to cultivating the relationship. Moreover, when exchange partnerships are unsuccessful, they can be difficult and awkward to terminate.

Accordingly, prospective exchange partnerships should be approached carefully. The information provided here will help in the careful consideration of exchange opportunities. It is more beneficial to support a limited number of robust exchanges than to maintain a long list of inactive ones, and no institution can sustain an infinite number of international relationships.

Strong faculty support is necessary for a successful exchange relationship; however, faculty support alone is not sufficient. Strong student interest also is essential. When it comes to study abroad, faculty and student interest do not always coincide. Care must be taken to develop partnerships where the two overlap. This is particularly true in Texas, where evenly balanced exchanges are mandated by Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Rules. (See below, Legal Foundations of Reciprocal Exchange Programs.)

Exchange programs represent the institution, not only individuals. Thus, NAFSA: Association of International Educators and the Forum on Education Abroad recommend that prospective exchange partnerships be vetted by a committee whose membership includes faculty from a broad range of disciplines and at least one senior administrator knowledgeable about the institution's strategic goals for internationalization. This approach promotes thoughtful, reasoned decisions that will be respected by members of the university community.

Determining the Feasibility of an Exchange Agreement

Before pursuing an exchange agreement, the feasibility and appropriateness of the desired agreement should be established. Important questions to consider include:

- Does the proposed initiative have significant support from at least one academic department?
- Do the proposing departments at both institutions possess comparable strengths and exhibit a strong willingness to sustain an on-going relationship?
- Is there potential for long-term student interest and activity based on the courses available to students at the partner institution and requirements toward the degree that such courses will be permitted to fulfill at the home institution?
- Is the proposed agreement in a region or country in which the campus already has similar programmatic exchange relationships? If so, is there a strong rationale for the establishment of the proposed agreement and a demonstrated benefit to the university?
- Does the proposed partner institution offer students at compatible levels of study for exchange (undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral)?
- Are the academic calendars of the two institutions compatible?
- What evidence is there of the infrastructure necessary to administer the exchange at the host institution?

[The Standards of Good Practice](#) promulgated by the Forum on Education Abroad provide a more comprehensive framework for evaluating prospective partnerships.

In addition to the Forum's Standards of Good Practice, the American Council on Education (ACE), the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), and the International Association of Universities (IAU) have jointly developed a [checklist](#) to assist institutions in designing and assessing their international partnerships.

Exchange agreements between the campuses of The University of Texas System and foreign universities are governed by the Texas Education Code and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Rules.

The authority for exchange programs is established in the Texas Education Code § 54.060(d), which provides that “[t]he coordinating board by rule shall establish a program with the United Mexican States and with Canada for the exchange of students and shall establish programs with other nations for the exchange of students to the extent practicable.”

The rules regulating exchange programs are found in [Chapter 21, Subchapter AA of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Rules](#). The rules spell out

- the [purpose](#) of exchange programs,
- the amount of [tuition](#) that can be charged to participants,
- [reciprocity requirements](#),
- documentation requirements ([assurances](#) and [transcripts](#)),
- [reporting](#) requirements, and
- the availability of [formula funding](#).

§21.901 Authority and Purpose

(a) Authority. Authority for this subchapter is provided in the Texas Education Code, Chapter 54, Subchapter B, Tuition Rates. These rules establish procedures to administer the subchapter as prescribed in the Texas Education Code, §54.060(c) and (d), Resident of Bordering State or Nation or Participant in Student Exchange Program: Tuition.

(b) The purpose of the reciprocal educational exchange program is to enable Texas students of participating institutions to afford to participate in exchange programs with foreign institutions in order to help them better understand the culture, language, needs, and expectations of other nations of the world.

§21.905 Tuition Rate to be Paid

(a) If a reciprocal exchange program requires a tuition payment, the tuition rate to be paid by participants will be either the relevant rate normally paid at Texas institutions or the rate normally charged nationals or residents of other nations by their institutions. Tuition rates paid by participants will be defined by the agreements entered into by the participating institutions. The method of charging and collecting tuition is to be negotiated between the two institutions involved in the exchange. The tuition rate and payment may be any of the following methods:

1. pay the relevant tuition rate of receiving institution, paid to the receiving institution,
2. pay the relevant tuition rate of the originating institution, paid to the receiving institution, or
3. pay the relevant tuition rate of the originating institution, paid at the originating institution.

(b) A participant no longer participating in the exchange program, but continuing to enroll in the receiving institution will be expected to pay the rate charged other nonresident students beginning with the first enrollment period after the participant discontinues his/her participation in the exchange program.

§21.906 Reciprocity

The number of units of instruction exchanged would ideally be equal in any given year. If balance is not attained in any one year and more students from other nations are participating in the program than are students from Texas, parity is to be established within a five-year period.

§21.907 Assurances

Each participating institution must maintain records in the appropriate office which would include

1. proof of each participant's eligibility and
2. formally-executed exchange agreements with each exchange partner institution

§21.908 Formula Funding

When a Reciprocal Educational Exchange Program exchange takes place, the Texas institution may request formula funding for the hours taken by foreign students attending classes in Texas. They may not request formula funding for their students who go abroad under this reciprocal exchange program.

§21.909 Transcripts for Courses Taken Abroad

It is recommended that any course taken by a Texas student through study abroad be noted as such on the transcript, so that students participating in exchange programs will be given full credit for this unique experience when they apply for transfers, for admission to graduate school and/or for employment.

§21.910 Reporting Requirements

By October 31 of each year each participating Texas institution shall provide a program report to the Board on a form provided by the Board. The report shall include such things as the number of students who have participated in the exchange program, and the names and locations of the institutions with which the exchanges have taken place. Each institution is to define, demonstrate and report the basis on which their student exchanges are reciprocal.

Standard Agreement Templates

The UT System Office of General Counsel (OGC) has developed standard agreement templates to facilitate the formation of exchange programs. Generally, two agreements are required to implement an exchange program.

- First, a general [affiliation agreement](#) is entered into, expressing the parties' desire to collaborate and their intent to examine closely the possibilities for collaboration.
- Second, if sufficient basis for collaboration exists, a specific [program agreement](#) may be executed, detailing the terms and conditions of the collaborative activity (e.g., reciprocal student exchange).

The Board of Regents has delegated to each institution's president the authority to sign certain contracts on behalf of the Board, so long as those contracts conform to the requirements of the OGC. Review and approval by the OGC of exchange agreements using the approved standard forms (i.e., [affiliation agreement](#) and [program agreement](#)) is not necessary unless one of the parties to the contract makes or requests changes to the standard form contract.

For additional guidance, please consult [the contracts portion of the OGC website](#) or [contact OGC](#).

Examples of Good Practices at UT System Campuses

Campuses within the UT System have developed good practices and procedures for investigating the feasibility and appropriateness of potential exchange partnerships. The following documents may serve as helpful models in developing or refining approval processes and criteria:

- [UT Austin's Procedures for Establishing Exchanges with Foreign Institutions](#)
- [UT Austin's Exchange Program Worksheet](#)
- [McCombs School of Business Criteria for Selecting New BBA International Exchange Partners](#)