Exchanges can break down walls between us, for when people come together and speak to one another and share a common experience, then their common humanity is revealed. We are reminded that we’re joined together by our pursuit of a life that’s productive and purposeful, and when that happens mistrust begins to fade and our smaller differences no longer overshadow the things that we share. And that’s where progress begins.”

- President Barack Obama

“I have been impressed by everything that the FLEX students have accomplished. Their achievements inspire me in their breadth and ambition, in their values, and in the optimism that they express about being able to change their world.”

- Bill Bradley

Find Out About This Historic Exchange Program with the United States

In 1992, then-U.S. Senator Bill Bradley cosponsored with U.S. Congressman Jim Leach supporting the historic legislation providing for second-level youth exchange programs. The FLEX program was created by the United States Congress in 1992. It established a year-long, fully funded exchange program for secondary school students to travel to the United States for a year. Now in its 24th year, the FLEX academic year program has provided scholarships to over 25,000 secondary school students from Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia. The goal of the program is to promote mutual understanding between citizens of the United States and countries in the region, as students learn about each other and build bridges of understanding.

The FLEX program is funded by the United States Department of State. Selected students with disabilities are invited to participate in the competition. Approximately 20 students with disabilities are invited to the U.S. on the FLEX program each year. Selected students with disabilities must meet the same criteria as other participants in the program.

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What does the scholarship provide?

What is NOT provided?
The FLEX scholarship does not cover the following costs:
- Any costs associated with receiving an international passport
- Personal expenses not covered by the monthly stipend
- Excess baggage costs
- Telephone calls or internet use, including access to email
- Medical insurance, excluding pre-existing conditions and dental care

What does youth exchange achieve?
Exchange programs grew from a desire for nations and their peoples to build bridges of understanding after World War II. Since then, the youth exchange movement has grown and gained popularity in many countries throughout the world. Youth exchange is successful because teenagers learn about another country’s culture, and when that happens mistrust begins to fade and our smaller differences no longer overshadow the things that we share. And that’s where progress begins.

- After the FLEX program, the whole world changed for me. I met so many people in America, heard a lot of different opinions, I learned and tried many new things during this year. If you are unsure about participating in FLEX, I definitely recommend you to do this. Broaden your mind, learn, try, enjoy, share your culture all over, and be happy.”

- FLEX participant

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“Your program had a positive influence on our daughter. She became more independent and confident, and developed an optimistic outlook on life. I have adopted some of her confidence in the future and her positive outlook. My daughter has broadened her circle of friends and acquired invaluable experience. I can see that she has matured and become more responsible.”

- Mother of a FLEX participant

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Who pays for the program?
The FLEX scholarship is fully sponsored by the United States government and administered by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the U.S. Department of State with funding appropriated by the U.S. Congress. ECA fosters understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries around the world. ECA programs include educational and training programs that promote personal, professional, and institutional ties between private citizens and organizations in the United States and abroad. The FLEX program is supported at the local level by U.S. citizens and local secondary schools that voluntarily host, educate, and support students with no financial compensation.

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How are students selected?

Independent panels of American professionals in education and international relations in the United States will select program finalists and alternates. Selection will be based on merit as evidenced in a comprehensive application, teacher reference, and demonstrated preparation for a year-long exchange experience. Applicants also will be required to provide medical evaluations and be certified as medically fit to participate in the program.

The selection process will be completed in spring 2017, and all applicants will receive notification of their status by mid-May 2017. English-language proficiency is important but it is not the only element in selection.

How will I benefit from the exchange experience?

The FLEX program offers students an opportunity to learn about the people and culture of the United States. FLEX participants are also young ambassadors who teach Americans about the people and culture of their home countries. Students gain an appreciation for and develop sensitivity to other cultures, experience personal growth and independence, and become better prepared for adulthood in an increasingly interdependent world. Students form strong ties with their American host families and U.S. communities, building relationships that often last a lifetime. Many alumni have attended prestigious universities upon their return home, and later found exciting jobs that use skills learned during their stay in the United States.

Who is eligible to apply to the program?

In keeping with the U.S. Government-sponsored initiatives dedicated to promoting greater international understanding, the competition for the FLEX scholarship is merit-based and open at no cost to applicants who meet the following requirements.

Eligible applicants must:

1. Meet the grade/age requirements set for their country of citizenship.
2. Be a citizen of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland or Romania and be able to receive an international scholarship without a U.S. visa.
3. Have previously studied English and demonstrate preparedness for a year-long exchange experience.
4. Have graduated prior to program start date.
5. Be a citizen of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland or Romania.
6. Be a resident of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland or Romania and be able to receive an international scholarship without a U.S. visa.
7. Visit the American Councils office in your country or contact the American Councils office to receive information and apply to the program.

What happens after notification?

Upon notification, finalists, alternates, and their parents will receive information to prepare them for departure. They must officially notify their FLEX representative in writing that they accept the scholarship and must provide any additional documentation requested as well. Students must begin the process of applying for or renewing their international passport immediately upon acceptance to the program. The FLEX program will instruct participants on the process of applying for a U.S. visa.

From May through August 2017, selected U.S. exchange organizations will match finalists with qualified U.S. host families and arrange for enrollment in local secondary schools. In June and July 2017, scholarship recipients will participate in a pre-program orientation before flying to the U.S. Students will then travel to their U.S. host families and communities to begin the exchange experience in August 2017.

Please note: Students participating in the FLEX program must return to their home country at the end of the program on the date assigned by American Councils. The U.S. visa issued for program participants will not be amended or extended beyond the program end date for any reason.

What should you consider before applying to FLEX?

Students who are interested in the FLEX program should consider whether taking part in a year-long exchange program may have an adverse impact on their academic or personal future. Things to consider include but are not limited to:

• Will I have to repeat a year of school after returning home?
• Will I be home too late in 2018 to take final school examinations/university/institute entrance examinations? FLEX students return to their communities in late May and June.
• Will my university or institute defer my admission if I have already been accepted?
• Will I be required to serve in the military upon return?
• Will I be eligible to graduate with honors at my university and graduate school?

When and how can I apply?

The open competition for FLEX will begin in September 2016. Interested candidates who meet the eligibility requirements are invited to complete a preliminary online application located at https://asialamericancouncils.org/flex. A selection committee will evaluate online applications and select semifinalists in November. Semi-finalists will receive a longer application, take an English language proficiency test, write a composition, and be interviewed in person by American Councils staff. Applicants may apply only once online and may only take part in one interview. Contact the American Councils office in your country or visit http://discoverflex.org for more information.

Who organizes the program?

American Councils for International Education organizes recruitment, selection, orientation, and travel arrangements for the FLEX program. Founded in 1974, American Councils is an international non-profit organization working to improve mutual understanding between countries, exchange ideas among individuals, and enhance collaboration through education. It designs, implements, and supports innovative programs in the United States, Europe, Eurasia, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa.

Over the past 40 years, American Councils has become one of the premier U.S. international education and training organizations. It administers more than 30 exchange and training programs, including several U.S. government programs for secondary school students, university and graduate students, teachers, and professors. American Councils has professionally administered academic, professional, and cultural programs for tens of thousands of participants from Afghanistan, Africa, Eurasia, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Southeast Europe.

Many other private, non-profit organizations in the United States also support the FLEX program. The U.S. government has asked these organizations to place FLEX participants in supportive U.S. host families and to organize local activities during the year-long program.

Where can I get more information?

Inquiries may also be made at the U.S. Embassy’s Public Affairs Sections, or at the American Centers or Centers located in your country.

http://discoverflex.org

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