

A TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY WITH THE CULTURAL EXCHANGE AMBASSADORS PROGRAM

I am thrilled to share my experience having participated in this program, a journey that has not only broadened my horizons but has also added a unique dimension to my academic pursuit.

One of the highlights of my involvement has been the incredible opportunities it has brought my way. Notably, I had the chance to travel to Birmingham and actively contribute to the organization of the 2024 EDI festival. This hands-on experience was invaluable, providing me with insights into event management and fostering a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity.

The program has proven to be a dynamic platform for cultural exchange, enabling me to navigate and understand different cultural nuances on various levels. From connecting with fellow ambassadors to engaging with diverse communities, I have improved my skills in bridging cultural gaps and fostering mutual understanding. This aspect of the program has been particularly enlightening and has undoubtedly contributed to my personal growth.

I must emphasize the program's inclusive and supportive environment. It has provided me with a sense of security and belonging, making every class attendance a source of joy. The positivity and warmth within the program have not only enhanced my academic experience but have also played a crucial role in shaping my overall well-being.

Roxanne
Casutt



Testimonial

A Transformative Journey in Leadership and Intercultural Competence

Catalina Echiburú Carrasco

This semester I had the amazing opportunity to be a participant and to fulfill the role of a sub-group leader in the Cultural Exchange Ambassadors Programme, an endeavor that has undoubtedly shaped my perspective on leadership, communication, and the invaluable importance of diversity and inclusion.

This programme's focus on intercultural competence as well as intercultural leadership has been instrumental. Engaging with a diverse group of individuals from various cultural backgrounds not only broadened my horizons but also equipped me with a profound understanding of the nuances of a global context. This exposure fostered a keen sense of intercultural leadership, enabling me to navigate and lead effectively in a multicultural environment and gain a heightened sense of awareness of the importance of equity, diversity and inclusion. Moreover, this experience underscores the significance of fostering an inclusive environment where every voice is heard and valued.

One of the programme's standout features was its emphasis on collaborative work, cultivating my ability to function seamlessly within diverse groups. Through various team projects as well as lessons from Guido and Evi, I learned the art of group decision-making and consensus-building skills that are invaluable not only in a professional or academic setting, but on all aspects of life. Mostly, the programme provided a platform for me to refine my communication skill, with assertive communication being a cornerstone of my learning journey. This newfound assertiveness and confidence has proven to be a significant asset, enabling me to express my ideas effectively and connect with others on a deeper level.

The Cultural Exchange Ambassadors Programme has been a transformative chapter in my life. Undoubtedly, this has been an essential experience in my journey towards intercultural competence and international orientation, and has enriched me, both professionally and personally. It has equipped me with the skills needed for effective leadership in a globalized world, emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts, and instilled in me a deep appreciation for diversity and inclusion. I am grateful for the opportunity to have participated in this programme, and I am confident that the lessons learned will continue to shape my personal and professional journey for years to come.



Testimonial – Xinyu Lin

What is the biggest gain from this project? In addition to the knowledge learned in the classroom, it must be precious cross-border friendships. My team members are all from different countries. Through each group work, I can discover how different growth environments and cultural backgrounds affect people's thinking and expression. It is in this collision of different ideas and brainstorming that I have improved my global vision and gradually become a qualified global citizen. Listen to the opinions of other students with an open and tolerant mind. What we need to do is not to judge right or wrong but to treat others with respect and tolerance. I also firmly believe that this principle has an endless impact on me throughout my life. Finally, I also hope that my friends will get better and better in the future, and I also hope that more people can learn about and join this project!

Testimonial

Hi, I'm Filipa Carvalho, from Portugal and I am really happy to say that in September of 2023 I joined the Ambassador Programme, while I did a semester abroad in Amsterdam.

Being a Ambassador made it possible to get to know people from every part of the world, enhance my presentation skills and be able to not be afraid to show how I am and express my opinion freely, without any judgment.

When I saw the email to apply, I imagined myself being in events and representing UvA as an Exchange student. In reality, it was so much more than that. Each session brought me enlightenment of different topics, such as Safe and Brave Spaces, Story-telling, Democracy and Leadership. We worked in small groups in different activities, where we shared our stories and gave our opinion, always respecting the others and truthfully listening. Also, we did a boat tour that allowed all the ambassadors to hang out and get to know each other better.

This was an amazing opportunity that I recommend to anyone that wants to put themselves outside of their comfort zone and is willing to challenge themselves to grow their horizons.

TESTIMONIAL

Between the onset of spring and the closing days of summer, I immersed myself in the Ambassadors program, that opened doors to countless opportunities. This experience began shortly after I settled into the city, serving as an excellent platform to connect with fellow enthusiasts eager to explore diverse cultures and embrace the adventure of studying abroad. Our initial gathering saw us forming smaller groups, a setting that allowed each member to share their unique narratives within a safe and respectful space.

The assignments presented to us, both individual and collaborative, were purposeful and meticulously designed. Narrating our study abroad escapades enabled us to articulate our journeys, while highlighting our favorite spots in the city and sparked inspiration for hidden gems to uncover. Beyond these tasks, additional events such as the Study Abroad Fair enriched the experience. My involvement in the fair was driven by the desire to aid fellow students considering international study opportunities. Although I may not have possessed all the answers, guiding them through my past experiences in study abroad felt fulfilling.

The culminating XL Assignments were particularly stimulating. Taking part in an online brainstorming session with the University of Birmingham, focused on planning activities for the upcoming 2024 EDI Festival. Engaging with other ambassadors, exchanging ideas, and delving into their perspectives on the event was a rewarding experience. Throughout the program, I acquired valuable insights on networking, deep democracy, safe spaces, brave spaces, and storytelling.

Among the plethora of activities, the boat tour left an indelible mark. The ambiance, picturesque views, and the camaraderie among everyone were memorable. Laughter echoed, stories were shared, friendships deepened, and we relished a delightful snack together.

In closing, I express immense gratitude for the opportunity to collaborate with such an exceptional cohort and the program coordinators who ensured an enriching and enjoyable experience. Participating in this initiative has been an incredible journey, and I extend my best wishes to everyone involved in chasing their aspirations!

Testimonial

By Andreea Bratu

From the beginning of September until the end of November I have been part of the Cultural Exchange Ambassadors Programme and I believe it was an amazing experience which provided many opportunities.

Since the programme started soon after I arrived in the city it was first of all a very good way of meeting other students who share my passion for learning about other cultures and experiencing studying abroad. During the first meeting we were all divided in smaller groups, after which we got the chance to hear all our teammates' stories, while respecting the safe and brave space. I appreciated the fact that everybody got to share their experience while the others respected the speaker.

All the assignments that we worked on, both individually and as a team, had their purpose and were well thought. The one about our study abroad experience let us share our story, the favorite place in Amsterdam gave us ideas of locations we could discover and the privilege assignment helped us connect better as a team. Besides these, there were other activities we could join, such as: the Partner Day and the Study Abroad Fair. I joined the Study Abroad Fair as I wanted to help other students that were thinking of experiencing studying abroad. Although I did not have all the answers they were looking for, I believe I did a pretty good job in giving advice and answering questions regarding my past and present study abroad experiences. The fact that thanks to my past exchange in Marseille, France, I could join the "Study in France" information session, was a great opportunity for me, that also gave me a chance to practice my presentation skills. The XL Assignments towards the end of the programme were also interesting. I participated in the online brainstorming conference with the University of Birmingham in which we discussed possible activities and ideas for the upcoming 2024 EDI Festival. It was very nice to communicate with all the other ambassadors and hear their ideas and opinions regarding the event. Throughout the entire programme I have learned a lot about subjects like networking, deep democracy, the safe space and the brave space and storytelling. I will try to put into practice all the new information that I got.

Out of all the activities, I believe that my favorite one was the boat tour. I loved the atmosphere, the view and everybody socializing. We all laughed, shared stories, got to know everyone better and enjoyed a snack together.

To conclude, I would like to say that I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work and be surrounded by such amazing people and to meet the coordinators of the programme that made sure we all had a good time, while also learning new and useful things regarding different matters. I had a great time participating in this programme and I wish everyone involved good luck in pursuing their dreams!

Testimonial - Jingmei

The Culture Ambassador program has been one of my favorite courses at UvA so far. It is a diverse, well-covered program that promotes students to gain insight into studying abroad and develop the skills needed as an international and cultural representative ambassador. By attending sessions on various topics such as leadership, teamwork, networking, and sharing perspectives on studying abroad with peers, as well as participating in meaningful events like the International Staff Week, the program enhanced my understanding of diversity and mobility.

I really enjoyed how thoughtful and structured the weekly sessions were; they led me to gain a sense of the world's diversity. The themes centered on personal growth, from intercultural leadership to multicultural teamwork and networking, and finally ended with social identity and deep democracy. The program expanded from the personal to the social level, providing a comprehensive view of the general questions that students face today. The sessions gradually helped us discover the skills students need to improve, explore various understandings brought about by different backgrounds, and introduced strategies for facing different cultures in the future. The condensed and considerate syllabus truly enabled me to gain a lot from it and discover a new perspective on the world.

Moreover, it is a rare chance to self-reflect by sharing perspectives about the weekly topics and participating in different assignments during the program. The weekly assignments required me to think about my own past experiences and generate ideas to share with peers. Beyond that, other sign-up opportunities such as the Study Abroad Fair allowed me to contemplate the reasons and benefits of studying abroad and to practice what we learned from the program. I spent my whole afternoon at the Studying Abroad Fair, where I had so much fun communicating with students interested in studying abroad. By answering their various questions, I strongly felt that my communication skills had improved with an understanding of student mobility.

Overall, I really enjoyed the program and appreciated all the opportunities I received, the people I met, the connections we built, and all the fun activities we did together. It was a wonderful period that made me reflect on why I decided to study abroad and what aspects need a bit more attention in the future.

Testimonial - Helena Da Costa

Starting to write this article, it seems incredible that we're already at this point in the year. I signed up to the ambassador programme on the deadline day, coming across it for the first time from the archives of my e-mail, and was completely unsure what to expect. The chance to meet other exchanges in the unfamiliar city pushed me to go, and I'm so glad I did!



During the programme, we learned about ways to approach accessibility in education, completing assignments to turn our ideas into action; one which stuck with me was the difference between diversity and inclusion versus diversity and exclusion, as this is a distinction which is rarely identified yet integral to an exchange.

Meeting university

representatives from around the world at the Partner-Day event in

October translated this from concept to reality as it highlighted the disjunction between national and cultural borders, as people from diverse backgrounds began to share common experiences and interests. As my first ambassador event, this only piqued my intrigue more for the programme.



Nevertheless, attending the weekly sessions began to take a toll. Although I wanted to go, as



the days grew darker and the workload piled, venturing outside after a long day became harder. However, upon reflection, I don't think I ever left a meeting in the same mindset as I went in; establishing a regular routine, being around similarly-struggling exchanges – you leave with a sense of accomplishment, and I can't stress enough how valuable this was to lift my mood. Some advice which helped me tackle these difficulties: when you're feeling low, stressed, displaced, or all of the above, meet up with a friend you don't know so well – this took me out of my comfort zone, away from the monotonous routine I was falling into, and where better to find new people than at the Ambassador programme?!

Relating the skills we've learned to my own experiences, the programme was far more impactful than I initially realised. Students face restrictions disproportionately when considering about and living abroad. What appears to be a common theme however is the internal boundaries we place on ourselves. The way this programme has expanded what I believed was possible for me to achieve is therefore my own version of increasing accessibility, and I know this will stay with me for years to come.