IRSEP Iceland Final Report
2011-2012
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Final Reports are written by each Scholarship Exchange Program student at the completion of their time abroad. Final reports are meant to serve as an overview of the program and to orient the future exchange student. The information in this report is subject to change and is the experience of one person.

I. Obtaining a Residence Permit

**APPLYING FOR THE STUDENT PERMIT IS A VERY TEDIOUS PROCESS FOR STUDENTS OUTSIDE OF THE EU.** It will require you to be persistent, resourceful, and organized. Procedures may change, different authorities may provide different answers to your questions, and documents you require for your application may arrive late or be lost in the mail. Be prepared to put a considerable amount of time and energy into gathering application materials. Make copies of everything before you send off your application, because Útlendingastofnunar, The Icelandic Directorate of Immigration (UTL) requires that you provide original documentation for all material.

In the beginning of June, before your departure to Iceland, the University of Iceland will mail you a formal acceptance letter, accompanied by an “International Student Guide” and an informational packet entitled, “How to Apply for a Student Permit in Iceland.” A digital .pdf of both documents can be found online; they are susceptible to change from year to year, but the link to last year’s guides can be found here: http://www.hi.is/en/university/promotional_material.

While the university-issued information regarding student permit applications is helpful, I recommend that you directly consult the UTL, http://www.utl.is/index.php?lang=en, for the final word on student permit application requirements. The list of documents you will need for your student permit application can be found on the UTL website, http://www.utl.is/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=115&Itemid=127&lang=en.

It is important to follow the guidelines meticulously and to begin gathering materials as early as possible because it could take up to three months to gather everything.

The following materials must be submitted:

1. **Application form for a residence permit**: This must be signed and the original completed copy.

2. **One passport size photo** (35mm x 45mm): You can have these taken for a fee of $6.50 each at the Learning Abroad Center. You may want to print a few extra photos to have on hand as you will probably need one or two at some point during your time abroad.

3. **A photocopy of the applicant’s passport**: The validity of the passport must be at least three months beyond the proposed permit end date.
4. **Criminal Record Check:** This was my most difficult part to this process. You need to submit an FBI background check so it is important that you do this **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!** It can take up to eight weeks for the FBI to issue the report. Information on how to apply for an FBI criminal background check can be found here: [http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/background-checks/submitting-an-identification-record-request-to-the-fbi](http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/background-checks/submitting-an-identification-record-request-to-the-fbi). You must submit an application form to the FBI along with $18 and a set of your fingerprints. The previous link provides more information on each of the three necessary steps in order to submit a background check request.

5. **Medical Insurance:** Insurance must cover at least 2,000,000 Icelandic Krónur (ISK) and shall be issued by an insurance company authorized to provide services in Iceland. The insurance must be in effect for 6 months. After six months of living in Iceland, you will be covered by the Icelandic government. The CISI World Class Coverage Plan provided by the Scholarship is not licensed to provide coverage in Iceland, so it will not fulfill the permit requirements. If you have an insurance policy from a company recognized by the UTL on this list, [http://fme.is/?PageID=186](http://fme.is/?PageID=186), you will not need to purchase insurance. Otherwise, you will need to purchase insurance from an Icelandic national provider. I purchased insurance from Sjóvá, [http://www.sjova.is/english.asp](http://www.sjova.is/english.asp). To receive Sjóvá insurance, you will need to scan and send a copy of your passport and an insurance application, [http://www.sjova.is/files/2008_11_11_Application_for_sickness_cost_forms_signature.pdf](http://www.sjova.is/files/2008_11_11_Application_for_sickness_cost_forms_signature.pdf). After you fill that out, just email the copy of your passport and the application to [sjovalif@sjova.is](mailto:sjovalif@sjova.is). They will confirm receiving your application and then respond with the amount you will need to pay as well as a link to information about where to send payment. I had to pay a premium of 12,002 ISK and I never paid a single penny more for insurance the whole time I was in Iceland.

6. **Financial Support:** To prove support, the Learning Abroad Center will issue you a letter stating the terms of the scholarship. I received 75,000 ISK per month for the nine months of my exchange. However, the scholarship amount is below the minimum support for a single person as stipulated by the UTL. You will need to show proof of a total of 125,540 ISK/month. Because the exchange rate is in flux, you will have to do the math and make sure you have enough money to prove financial support. I had my American bank (TCF) print, stamp, and sign an official bank statement proving that I had the remainder of the money they required in my bank account. My parents loaned me some money to make it appear as though I had MORE money in my personal bank account before I had TCF print an official statement. They request kind of a ridiculous amount of money for such a short time and they will NOT allow you to show them any bank account that is not under your name. If you plan to use loans to live off of in Iceland or if you don’t have more than approximately $5000 in your personal bank account, you will have to figure out a way to prove you have money before loans are dispersed. You could ask the Office of Student Finance to provide you with an official letter outlining the financial aid you will have access to.

7. **School Confirmation:** You must provide confirmation of school registration for full time studies. Full-time studies at the University of Iceland is 30ECTS or units per term.
which is equivalent to 15 U.S. credits at the University of Minnesota. You will not be able to make your final course selections until you are in Iceland. For the permit, the university-issued acceptance letter should suffice. You can also indicate that you are doing full-time studies and make a list of the courses you intend to take. This list is NOT binding though so do not worry too much about it.

8. **Authorization:** The University of Iceland Office of International Education director will serve as your authorization. This person will notify you once your permit is approved or let you know if anything goes wrong.

9. **Housing Certificate:** You must prove that you have secure housing for the period of time that you plan to live in Iceland. I received an email from the Student Housing Office, Stúdentagarðar, saying that they reserved a spot for me in the international student dorm, Gamli Garður, so I sent a copy of that email. See housing sections 2 and 12 for more details.

*The processing fee for the student permit for me was 12,000 ISK with an additional 600 ISK for the transfer fee. The total 12,600 ISK must be paid through a wire transfer to the bank account of the UTL. There will likely be another processing fee at the American bank you send the wire from (mine was $45). As the UTL’s fee may change, you should refer to this webpage, http://www.utl.is/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=116&Itemid=143&lang=en, to make sure you wire the correct amount of money. Your student permit application will not be processed until the money has reached the UTL. A receipt with your full name and a personal identifier (passport number or birthday) should be sent along with your application materials as proof of payment. Because the acceptance letter from the University of Iceland will not arrive until the beginning of June, it is necessary to start gathering some of your student permit materials before then. In particular, your criminal background check and Icelandic medical insurance. For the fall semester, the student permit application materials must be submitted to the UTL no later than the given deadline. In the past, that deadline has been July 15th. The processing time for the residence permit application is approximately 3 months and you are not allowed to be in the country when it is being processed. The student permit must be approved before you enter Iceland. I had a few friends that had trouble gathering materials for their student permits before the deadline. They made it into the country just fine, but were later told they had to leave the country while their student permit was being processed. This meant that they had to take a flight to another country for a long weekend while the application was processed. The cheapest flight to Europe is around $300 last minute, so it is important to have your permit granted before you arrive so you don’t have to pay the extra fees and miss class. I encourage you to email UTL with any concerns you have and any updates you think are vital for your application processing. They are not very prompt but at least you cover yourself by letting them know if you are waiting on a document or if you aren’t sure which documents to send.

It is also important to make copies of the original documents that you receive or submit for the student permit. You may have to present documents such as your acceptance letter upon entering the country, so have them with you on your flight. You will need to renew your permit in January so keep all of your documents to re-use at that time. If you go home for Winter Break
make sure you send all your info for renewal in before you go because my deadline was when I was away and I forgot about it until the last minute!

U.S. citizens once needed a Schengen Visa (D-visa), another step that involved sending your passport to an embassy that issues such visas in Washington D.C. As of 2009, this is no longer necessary (but you may want to inquire and make sure their policy has not changed again).

You will not receive your official residence permit card until you arrive in Iceland… see “Arriving in Iceland.”

II. Preparing for your year abroad

a. Securing Accommodation
   i. I received the following email from Student Housing approximately 2.5 months before school began.

   Dear exchange student,

   Concerning your accommodation during your stay in Iceland, we have managed to book a room for you at the Student Dormitory that we hope you will like. The address you are booked in from 29 August – 31 December (or 26 May if staying for two semesters) is: Gamli Garður / Hringbraut, 101 Reykjavik. It is a furnished single room with access to a shared bath and kitchen with all facilities. The price for the room is ISK 39,000 per month and you should be prepared to pay ISK 60,000 as an insurance deposit in advance, which is fully refundable at the end of your stay if no bills are unpaid and no damage made to your room. With the first months rent you will be charged ISK 4,000 administration fee. Please contact the Student Housing Office as soon as possible, for further information and to confirm your room by e-mail: bjork@lfs.is. If you have not confirmed your room by 15 June it will be given to another student. If you will arrive before 29 August please make your own arrangements for accommodation.

   I was able to confirm my space at Gamli Garður and I lived there for the entire school year. It was nothing luxurious but it was probably the cheapest accommodation possible in Iceland, it was furnished, I had my own room, and if I had any concerns I was able to go directly to the University. I have heard one too many horror stories from peers who went the apartment/flat route to recommend it. It is possible to live off campus in a guesthouse or apartment or even a hostel but if you can live at the University I would HIGHLY recommend it. Gamli Garður is close to everything you need! You have the city on one side and the school on the other. You will have a furnished kitchen that you share with other people living in the building (one on each floor) and you will also have bathrooms on each floor. The rooms come with a single bed, desk, chair, wardrobe, shelving unit, and sink with a vanity mirror. Another thing that is nice about student housing is that you can apply for a rent subsidy of
15000 ISK a month. Many guesthouses and apartments do not qualify for this subsidy because of the strict guidelines around this subsidy.

ii. If after all the praise I have preached about Student Housing you still decide that you want to live in an apartment or flat, you can find places to stay on AirBnB, Facebook, and through a general Google search of “Long term Guesthouses in Reykjavík”. Facebook might be your best utility because EVERYONE in Iceland is on Facebook.

b. What to Pack
   i. Warm clothes- They say winters are mild but that wind is no joke, you won’t need shorts and tank tops so stock up on the warm stuff!
   ii. Wool socks- Your toes will be cold… but you can also buy a pair in Iceland, wool goods are kinda their thing.
   iii. Workout clothes- there is a small gym right on campus, it’s nothing glamorous but it does the job.
   iv. Outdoor clothes- Even if you aren’t outdoorsy at home, you will WANT to be in Iceland. Iceland will provide you with opportunities you can never even dream of so you have to be prepared!
      1. Hiking shoes
      2. Waterproof pants
      3. Windproof parka
      4. More wool socks
   v. A pillow- you can get away with using bed linens from Student Housing but their pillows are totally useless and you might just like having something from home.
   vi. Towels- You can toss these at the end to make room for souvenirs.
   vii. Toiletries- They are expensive in Iceland so it is best to just bring what you can.
   viii. Good shoes- You will be doing a lot of walking! Comfortable hiking, running, casual, and maybe even “going out” shoes are necessary. I had at least two pairs of cheap boots fall apart and buying new shoes in Iceland is as expensive as buying designer heels in the US… aka ridiculous.
   ix. One or two nice outfits- You may have a presentation in class or go on a science trip (an arranged trip to an Icelandic company where the students mingle with employees) where you want to look nice but you will for sure go out downtown and Icelanders LOVE to dress up!

Be smart about packing since you have to condense your life into two 50lb suitcases. Pack what you need first and then pack what you think you will want. Don’t stress about packing a big tub of peanut butter because you heard about your friend who went to Italy and didn’t have peanut butter… Iceland has peanut butter. Every exchange student is in your position so don’t think you are going to be a weirdo if you wear the same clothes over and over again, everyone is doing it. Do not stress too much about what you are packing though because you will be able to make do with what you pack especially if you go home for winter break or if you are only there for a semester.

III. Arriving in Iceland
I arrived the first day of school because Gamli Garður didn’t open until then. I didn’t want to find a guest house or hostel to stay in so I could “get adjusted” and I didn’t want to pay for it. It was not a big deal at all and I would actually recommend doing that. Even though it seems like you have to get so much accomplished right as soon as you get there, you will have time to get everything sorted out. I flew in at 7am on the day Gamli Garður opened and it happened to be the first day of school and orientation so I was pretty nervous. I followed the flow of people in the airport and hopped into the line of people “staying in Iceland” to get my passport checked. No one ever asked any questions about what was in my bags and how long I would be here or anything. So I hopped on over to the baggage claim, grabbed a free cart and loaded up. Once I left the baggage claim I went to an ATM and withdrew some money from my home bank account so that I would have enough cash to get me through the next week or so. I then walked over to the Flybus kiosk and purchased a Flybus Plus ticket. This cost me 4500 ISK which was equivalent to $38.52. This ticket got me straight to Gamli Garður and it will pick me up next time I need to go to the airport because it was a roundtrip ticket. However, there is a kiosk next to the Flybus called “Icelandic Excursions” and they have a cheaper fare and they offer the same exact service. So I say save your money and go with them. They are seriously right next to the Flybus kiosk, just look to your left.

Side note: I highly recommend going to the dutyfree shop in the airport to buy anything you didn’t bring from home because you will be in COMPLETE sticker shock when you go into the stores outside the airport.

At the airport you will have these short tasks to accomplish:

1. **Go through the line for passengers staying in Iceland to get your passports stamped.**
   (I had to ask which one, so don’t feel stupid if you do too.)

2. **Get some cash at the ATM.** (It’s cheaper than using a card for every little purchase if your bank charges international fees or exchanging your money from the US. I only brought $11 with me in US currency and I never needed it.)

3. **Go to the duty free shop and stock up.** (Totally optional but highly recommended.)

4. **Buy an Icelandic Excursions bus ticket.**

5. **Get on the bus.** Just wheel your bags out to the bus, let the driver know where you are going, and then go take a seat on the bus and relax.

IV. Arriving at the university:

If you are living in Gamli Garður you will need to first pick up your key. You have to go to Háskolatorg to get your key. It is about 3 buildings away from Gamli Garður. If you ask the bus driver nicely, they might take you to Háskolatorg and wait for you to get your key and then drop you off. If not, you will have to walk… which isn’t so bad, I just had to do it with 150lbs of luggage. Oh well, I got a nice workout. If you leave your bags by the front door at Gamli Garður, they won’t get stolen. People leave their babies in carriages outside of restaurants. However, being a city girl, there was no way I was going to leave all my clothes outside a building without any supervision so I understand if you are apprehensive about that. Back to getting to your key. Look around and you will see standing maps around campus. Locate Háskolatorg and walk over there. When you get to Háskolatorg you can take the elevator or the stairs to the next level up. On the upper level you will find the student housing office. Take a left when you get up there,
then a right. The door has a purple diamond that says FS above it. Walk on in and ask someone where you can get the key. (You will have to go back to this office to sign your lease once you have your kennitala so that you can then have internet access in your room.)

First steps at the university:

1. **Get key.**
2. **Unpack.** (You WON’T want to do it later and it will keep you busy so you don’t fall asleep and get jetlagged all week!)
3. **Go to Háskolatorg.** (You can get some food, use a public computer to update your facebook status, and even meet some new people. If you hear English, just jump in and ask if they are international students. Chances are yes and you can talk to someone about how tired you are!)

PHEW! So much information! Just breathe. You can do it. Then you can nap regularly for the rest of the semester. (Seriously you can!) Here is a condensed list of what you should accomplish during your first week in order to be completely situated and settled in.

V. **Your First Week**

Things you need to get accomplished within the first week:

1. **The first thing you should do is to visit the Directorate of Immigration.** You will need a copy of your acceptance letter and your passport. This is the place that will take your picture, generate a kennitala for you, and send you your residence card in the mail. I brought a copy of all my papers that I had to submit for my residence permit just in case. It is not too far to walk here from Gamli Garður but you can also take a bus.
have to press the button to stop when you are on the entrance ramp that is like a circle and feels like you are getting on the freeway, it is called Miklabraut. Once you get off at the next stop you kind of have to back track a bit because you will be on Miklabraut (that’s the street) and you want to head back towards the bridge and to the left. Grab a map so you will know where you are going. The seal of Iceland is on the building and it looks like a regular office building. Once you are inside go to the left and grab a number. The office is open Monday-Friday 10:00am-2:00pm.

It can take a few days or a few weeks to get your kennitala so make sure you go to this place as soon as physically possible. Until you have a kennitala you are at a standstill so you can attend classes that you plan to register for but you cannot access the university’s main communication system, register for class, or open a bank account until you have your kennitala. The first week of classes is not necessary to attend because a lot of people are still sorting out their schedules (including the professors) so do not think you are going to fail if you don’t go to a class. Everything is very relaxed in Iceland, you will learn this quickly. You can buy an ESN card at school when they sell them if you would like and you will get a NOVA sim card to put in a phone. If you have a phone at home that has a sim card in it call your carrier and have them unlock it before you go! Otherwise the cheapest phone in Iceland is about $70 and that is a little ridiculous. The ESN card also gives you access to drink specials, different parties, and different trips throughout the year. It is a good tool for meeting people. Plus it is 3500 ISK which is roughly $30.

Once you get a kennitala you can move on in the check list!!

2. **Go to the information desk and register for classes.** They will hand you some papers to write down your classes. You can change them online later so don’t worry if you end up changing your mind, especially for spring semester. Once you register for classes they will generate an UGLA log-in for you. It may take a day or three so just be patient but check back at the desk frequently.

3. **Sign your lease in the student housing office where you got your key.** While you are waiting for your UGLA information, you can get this done. You need to know your kennitala to sign this and be sure to hold onto the lease agreement! You can apply for a housing subsidy that reduces your rent by like $125 if you have the contract but we will get to that later. (That’s a lot of grocery money!)

4. **Set up your internet.** The housing director will give you directions on how to set up your internet and register your laptop on the network. You need to get your login from the info desk and the directions from the housing office in order to get set up. You can also register another WiFi enabled device like a smartphone or iPad. You can only have 2 devices on the wireless network and it only works when you are in campus buildings or downstairs in the common room.

5. **Set up a bank account.** In order to get your scholarship you need to set up a bank account. Landsbankinn is in the same building as the cinema and seems to be the most popular bank. Your scholarship will be direct deposited into this account so make sure to
email incoming@hi.is your bank information so that they can notify the right people about it. It will take a few days to get a debit card but you will get a letter in the mail that is in all Icelandic and it has a pamphlet about debit cards in there. The letter basically says you need to pick up your debit card in person at the bank. So bring that letter and your passport or drivers license to the bank and go get your card. Your account will be charged 1000ISK for the card and whenever you get your stipend, it will just deduct from that.

6. **Apply for the housing benefit.** The housing benefit is for students who have a lease longer than 6 months in Iceland and are staying in housing designed like dorms. You apply for this by first having two “witnesses” sign your lease. Look at the English copy and you will see that the two lines by where you signed are for “witnesses” to sign with their kennitalas. I had my “resident in charge” and my dormmate sign mine and it worked just fine. You will need to bring that lease and a screenshot of your UGLA homepage with you for your journey.

a. **First you have to go back to the same building but the office across the hall.** This is the “Sheriff’s Office.” You go in and take a number and wait for an associate on the right side of the room to help you. They will stamp your lease and tell you to go to VesturGarður. VesturGarður is just behind the university a ways. This is within walking distance.

b. **Go to VesturGarður.** You have to go to this place with your lease and a screenshot of your UGLA homepage. Don’t forget to bring your banking information with you!! The paper your initially get from the bank will suffice. Ask an employee here to give you a form to apply for the housing benefit. Fill out the form and then hand it in with your lease and your picture of UGLA. This will then apply the housing benefit to your bank account while you are in Iceland. It is not retroactive so make sure you get it done as soon as you can to save some money! Here is a map to where VesturGarður is:
VI. Living in Iceland

a. Health issues:
You are required to purchase medical insurance for your visa application, please refer to section I for details on how to attain medical insurance. As I said before, the premium I had to pay is 12,002 ISK. Iceland has a socialist healthcare system in which 85% of the costs are covered by the government. For the other 15%, you will be required to co-pay. The only time I needed to go to the healthcare clinic was when customs stopped some medicine my mom had shipped to me and I needed to get a prescription. It was really painless, in fact the most difficult was getting there because I had to take a bus I had never taken before. If you have to go you can expect to pay somewhere between 3,000 – 5,000 ISK per visit before enrollment into the national healthcare system. After you have lived in Iceland for 6 months, you will be enrolled in the system and the co-pay will be reduced to about 1,000 ISK. The closest clinic is Heilsugæslan Seltjarnarnesi. You will need to call 527-2070 to make an appointment. If you have an emergency, Landspitalinn (the hospital) is VERY close to campus but there are also clinics that are open 24 hours. Since you are also covered by CISI insurance, any medical charges you accrue while in Iceland can be submitted to CISI for reimbursement.

b. Money Matters:
Iceland’s national currency is the Icelandic Krónur (ISK). As I said before, when I arrived at the airport I withdrew ISK from the ATM. I looked into a currency exchange in the US but the fees were high so I just held out. It takes awhile to get the bank account set up and the scholarship awarded so I made sure I had enough money to last me at least a week. If you are anything like me, you will be shocked
by how much you spend the first week. After the first week or so, you will be
adjusted to prices and know when and where you are getting a good deal for
things. I have a TCF account at home and I was charged 3% for every transaction
I made. I found it was best to take money out of the ATM once or twice every two
weeks if I needed it for extra spending money because a) it kept me on budget and
b) I only had to pay a transaction fee when I got cash. Everyone in Iceland uses
their card for EVERYTHING. Also another nice thing is that at restaurants you
pay at the bar or the register after your meal and you don’t have to tip… they also
don’t give you evil glares if you ask to split the check like they do in the US.

There are two banks located on campus, Landsbankinn and Kaupping, and I
recommend opening a bank account with either one for convenience. I banked
with Landsbankinn and had no problems.

c. Stipend/Scholarship:
The terms of my scholarship were 75,000 ISK for 9 months. I received the
scholarship on the first of the month in my Icelandic bank account. Like many
students before me, I took out a loan before I went to Iceland and was able to
travel and buy relatively healthy food most of the time (fruits and vegetables are
kind of spendy because they have to be grown in greenhouses or imported) and
even go out quite a bit. The scholarship covers the necessities so ways to save
money would be by not eating out a lot and not drinking away your stipend in öl
(beer). I cooked a lot with other residents of Gamli Garður – it was a great way to
learn new recipes and share cultural experiences through food. One of my closest
friends in Iceland lived in th dorm so we ate pretty much every meal together. We
got pretty good at “fridge meals” aka making a meal out of all the random
ingredients we had in the fridges.

Below is a sample budget from a previous Scholarship Exchange Program
recipient. I am terrible with budgets but she seemed to be much more disciplined
than I was. 😊
d. University/Campus:
The University of Iceland is drastically different than the University of
Minnesota. There are only 15,000 students and it is a very condensed campus. At
any given point you will never guess that 15,000 students are enrolled there
because many students are distance learning and also many students just don’t
hang around campus the way we hang around the U. If you live in Gamli Garður,
it is about a 1 minute walk to the student center, so you never have to rush to
class. Many Icelanders still live with their families or go home for the weekend so
the campus really dies down on the weekends. Háskólatorg, the student center, is
home to all student services including the Office of International Education,
Stúdentagarðar, the Registration Office, the Service Desk, the Student Counseling
and Career Center, the University Bookstore, and Háma (a healthy, affordable
campus cafeteria). Any academic issue you may have should be addressed at the
student service center. Háskólatorg also has a computer lab where you can print
papers. When you have access to Ugla, you can purchase printing credits and
easily print off your papers at various computer labs around campus. Most
buildings on campus have a study room and computer lab. Þjóðarbókhið, the
University as well as National Library of Iceland, is located across the street from
the main campus. As a student, you can get a free library card at the library
information desk and utilize the library resources. They have an online catalog
and you are able to request inter-library loans for most books. Some ILL are free
but most cost 500ISK. Most courses keep a copy of the textbook they use in the
library that you can’t check out but can read while you are in the library.
Spending time at the library reading course textbooks instead of buying them can
save a lot of money. I bought textbooks first semester and then I found that I spent
way too much money. Second semester I used the copies at the library when I needed to use a textbook and not only did it save me money but it also provided a wonderful study environment for me. The library has two computer labs, a printing station and a copy machine but you cannot use your UGLA printing credit here. Other libraries you can utilize include the Reykjavík City Library and the Nordic House Library, but they have member fees if you want to check things out. Háskólabió, the campus movie theatre, doubles as a classroom by day and theatre at night. In the fall, there is the Reykjavík film festival and many movies are played right on campus. If you have a Landsbankinn card then you can get 2 for 1 movie tickets on most movies! The University of Iceland gymnasium, Sæmundargata, is located right next to Háskólatorg. The gym is very modest, but offers classes and open gym. They have 4 treadmills, an elliptical, stairstepper, and various strength training options. The Student Council and the Office of International Education co-organize an Icelandic Buddy program.

e. University Calendar:
Below is the academic calendar of the 2012-2013 school year. There are not very many breaks in class but there is typically a reading week for some departments (namely the language departments) in the middle of the semester to give students a break and for catch-up work. Depending on what department your courses are in finals could be a couple weeks apart. Each class’s schedule will vary so it is important to go during the first week to get your syllabi. However, I never had a class actually follow the syllabus- except for designated days off and reading weeks. Make sure you make it a habit to check your email before class so that you know if it is cancelled or not!

**Autumn 2012**

13 August - 3 Sept. Autumn semester instruction commences
31 August Orientation meeting for international students, at 10:00 in Háskólabió (University Cinema)
10 Sept. Final day to review course registration for autumn semester 2012
27 Sept. Autumn semester examination schedule published
1 Oct. Final day to withdraw from autumn semester courses/examinations
1 Nov. Final day to apply for special needs services at UI Educational and Career Counselling
23 - 30 Nov. End of autumn semester classes
3 - 18 Dec. Autumn semester examinations
19 Dec. - 4 Jan. Christmas break (both days included)
20 - 21 Dec. Makeup exams (due to illness)- all Schools except Social Sciences and Engineering and Natural Sciences

**Spring 2013**

7 - 14 January Spring semester instruction commences
7 - 8 January Makeup exams (due to illness)- all Schools except Social Sciences and Engineering and Natural Sciences
21 January Final day to review course registration for spring semester 2013
29 January Spring semester examination schedule published
f. **Academic Issues:**

As I stated before, to be a full time student at the University of Iceland you need 30ECTS which is equivalent to 15 University of Minnesota credits. In my experience, the University of Iceland courses are a lot less challenging than the University of Minnesota courses. A lot more weight is put on the final exam and little daily work is assigned. I also noticed that the professors seemed less prepared and the courses that I took that were taught in English were less challenging. I think this is because English is not the majority of the students in class’ native language and therefore the course content is not as complex due to the language barriers that exist. I am a dual major in Global Studies and Sociology of Law, Criminology, and Deviance so I really had a lot of room to pick classes to fit my academic plan. I talked with advisers before I left and I made sure to keep in contact with my advisers throughout the year in order to keep on track for graduation.

I took the following courses:

**Fall 2011**
- ÍSE004G- Pronunciation and Speech I (10e)
- ÞJÓ004G- Being Icelandic: Icelandic Folktales, Beliefs and Popular Culture Past and Present (10e)
- SAF006M- Trash Culture at the Museum (10e)

**Spring 2012**
- ÍTA206G- Italian Art History I: Before 1527 (5e)
- ÞJÓ208G- Old Nordic Religion and Belief (10e)
- JAR609G- Glaciology (8e)
- JAR610G- Volcanology (8e)

To find a list of courses taught in English, look here:  
https://ugla.hi.is/kennsluskra/index.php?tab=skoli&chapter=content&id=16270

Another thing to keep in mind is that you need to ask questions! If a course is only being taught in Icelandic but you really want to take it, ASK! If you want to take a course distance learning, ASK! If you want to take a graduate course, ASK! It cannot hurt to ask and usually something positive comes from it because the University of Iceland is so flexible.
g. Language Courses:
   I took one practical Icelandic course. I would highly recommend this over Vocabulary because it is much more practical if you are just curious in dabbling in Icelandic. I went to one vocabulary class and realized it was not for me because it was pretty overwhelming. But if you are interested in taking it and really pushing yourself, good on you! The University of Iceland offers an intensive language course during the month of August. The cost of this course is 499 euro and that includes a double room (two persons share a room). The accommodation includes; shared room, linens, towels, breakfast and lunch on weekdays, internet access, coffee/tea, access to kitchen and laundry facilities and shared living rooms. I did not take the course but heard positive things about it from everyone who took it. Here is a link to more information: http://www.ask.hi.is/page/ilpc.

   The University of Iceland has a BA program in Icelandic studies for foreign students in which students have to pass an admission exam before the fall semester to be accepted. If you choose to do the BA Program all of your courses will be Icelandic language courses. The University of Iceland has a free online resource, to learn Icelandic online: http://icelandic.hi.is/. It is a good idea to do a little bit of research before you arrive in Iceland if you plan on studying Icelandic.

h. Volunteer/Internships:
   Given the current state of the economy in Iceland, jobs and paid internships are hard to come by. I even had difficulty finding an organization that had volunteer opportunities. If you are looking to volunteer, the Red Cross http://www.redcross.is/id/1002296 and SEEDS http://www.seedsiceland.org/ could be good outlets for you. I suggest getting involved right away in order to make the experience more rewarding and worth-while. I tried to get involved with Food Not Bombs in Iceland but the year I was there they were not running. However, they were beginning a new project so if you are interested in working with that here is their website that you can contact them through: http://www.foodnotbombs.net/ICELAND.html.

i. Transportation:
   I walked almost everywhere in the city. Gamli Garður is right on campus and is just 10-15 minute walk to the city centre. The bus fee is 350ISK per ride. The bus stop is right outside of Gamli Garður and you can easily get to the mall, Kringlan, and pretty much anywhere else. I recommend taking the bus to Mt. Esja and to Hveragerði. To see the routes check out http://www.straeto.is/english. I bought a school year bus pass and the price was very comparable to the U-Pass. I used the bus all the time to get to places but many of my friends didn’t have bus passes so I also walked a lot. I think I got my money’s worth ESPECIALLY in the winter!
Leaving Iceland: I left Iceland in November to go to Germany/Czech Republic, December to come home for a month, and March to go to Ireland/ Northern Ireland. I was able to travel via Icelandair and Iceland Express. I got a great deal on airfare to Germany on hopkaup.is which is an awesome site that is kind of like Groupon (I bought a lot of good deals on this site from plane tickets to meals to spa treatments). I took buses in Germany to the Czech Republic and I flew Aer Lingus in England to get to Ireland. It is definitely possible to travel to mainland Europe but it is not as easy as students who study abroad in Italy for example. It is kind of expensive, but I thought it was worth it. Travelling to other countries was one of my favorite parts to my year abroad and it was also something that was really important to me when studying abroad.

j. Communication:
I communicated with friends and family back home using Gmail, Skype, e-mail, facebook and postcards. DOWNLOAD GMAIL CHAT NOW! I was able to call phones in the US for FREE whenever I wanted because my gmail couldn’t detect that I was out of the country. You must download it in the US before you leave in order for it to be free otherwise it is $0.01/min. It was easy and cheap to stay in contact using the other methods. To communicate with friends in Iceland, I got a cell phone, it was really nice to have and most of the exchange students had them. Most of the cell phone providers can be found at the Kringlan. Nova is the best plan - you get free calls to other Nova phones so make sure to tell all your friends to get Nova as well! The cheapest phone is around 8,000 ISK so make sure to budget for that. I would add approximately 1,000 ISK to my phone every couple of months to contact people that didn’t use Nova. You can also send free texting online through ja.is, http://en.ja.is/hradleit/. ESN, the exchange student group that often hosts parties to get everyone together, sells cards to the student union that include a free Nova sim card. Even if you don’t go to the parties, it is worth it just to get the card for discounts and the sim card.

k. Safety:
I felt very safe in Iceland. The crime rate is very low, much lower than Minneapolis and even with the economic crisis going on I never saw anything get out of hand. Pepper spray is actually illegal in Iceland. However, the night life in Iceland can get pretty rowdy and Icelanders like to break glass on the streets so be careful of that. Just remember it is important to be safe and smart when you go out at night, as with any city. Make sure you are with friends and that you walk home together.

l. Resources:
I found the past Scholarship Exchange Program participants to be the most valuable resources for me. It was nice to be able to ask them questions and hear first-hand experiences before I left. Don’t be afraid to contact me, piet0172@umn.edu, if you have any questions! Before I came to Iceland I purchased a guide book that was very helpful. I recommend getting a Lonely Planet guide if you want to travel around Iceland. The Office of International
Education, [http://www.ask.hi.is/page/ask_english](http://www.ask.hi.is/page/ask_english) was a good resource as well as the University of Iceland’s website, [http://ww.hi.is](http://ww.hi.is). They also host great trips throughout the semester. They are cost effective and go to many of the main tourist attractions in Iceland. They are a great way to see Iceland without spending an arm and a leg and without having to plan things yourself.

**m. Scholarship Exchange Program Requirements:**
I did not take the Global Identity optional course but I have heard from others that it was helpful. Instead, I did reflecting on my own through my own blog that I created on Wordpress.

While abroad, it was great to act as a U of M representative. I actually got to have Thanksgiving dinner with a group of Icelandic U of M alumni! They reached out to me and were really wonderful to talk with. They even made marshmallow fruit salad. Many Icelandic students you meet may actually be interested in studying at the U as well so I really enjoyed “selling” a university I was so proud of to them.

**VII. Overall Experience**

Everyone is unique and we each perceive different experiences in different ways. There is no telling what you will learn from your year abroad and how much you will grow personally, intellectually, and professionally.

Iceland became my chance to get to know myself better by finding things that made ME happy. I focused on getting to know myself by paying attention to the small things in daily life that made me proud of myself or made me feel happy like cooking a good meal or going for a run, pushing myself to try new things I would never again have the opportunity to do like ice climbing on a glacier, and spending a lot of time reflecting on my values and my future. It sounds cheesy but I think Iceland for me was meant to be a personal growth experience. Things really turned around for me after I began to relax and let go of things I could not change. I tried new foods, made great friends, and have albums upon albums of spectacular pictures that will always remind me of the amazing times I had. It was not always fun and it was definitely not always easy but I know I am a better person because of it. I do not regret going to Iceland and I am extremely grateful for this opportunity.

Iceland is a truly unique place full of wonderful adventures to be had and absolutely breathtaking beauty. There is no place on earth that can compare to Iceland. The most important advice I can give you is that you get out of this experience what you put into it. A positive attitude, an adventurous spirit, and a desire to learn will be the best things you can bring with you and the best tools to bring the most memories back. This scholarship provides a once in a lifetime experience that will be completely unforgettable. Just breathe and keep an open mind and the rest will fall into place.