EPA Internships in Europe
Brussels Spring 2012 Program
Pre-Departure Guide
Contents

Welcome ..................................................................................................................................... 4
Programme administration and support ............................................................................................ 4
EPA Contact Numbers ......................................................................................................................... 4
Arriving in Brussels ...................................................................................................................... 5
What to say to the Immigration Officer .............................................................................................. 5
What to expect at the airport ............................................................................................................. 5
Housing and accommodation ....................................................................................................... 6
Your new address in Brussels.............................................................................................................. 6
Where you are situated in Brussels and your immediate surroundings ............................................ 7
Venturing out for your first social ....................................................................................................... 7
Location Map ...................................................................................................................................... 8
About Belgium ............................................................................................................................. 9
What is Brussels like? .......................................................................................................................... 9
Money and recommended Euro funds ........................................................................................ 10
Transferring funds to Belgium and bank cards ................................................................................. 10
Banking.............................................................................................................................................. 10
Health and Insurance ......................................................................................................................... 11
Budget and expense guide ......................................................................................................... 12
Additional Travel Expenses ............................................................................................................... 12
Travelling within Europe ............................................................................................................ 13
Air Travel ........................................................................................................................................... 14
Train Travel ....................................................................................................................................... 14
Bus / Coach Travel............................................................................................................................. 14
Travel Safety...................................................................................................................................... 15
Communication ......................................................................................................................... 15
Telephone ......................................................................................................................................... 15
Internet ............................................................................................................................................. 15
Mobile ............................................................................................................................................... 15
Office Telephone ............................................................................................................................... 16
Smart Phones .................................................................................................................................... 16
What to bring ............................................................................................................................ 16
Attire ................................................................................................................................................. 16
Hygiene ............................................................................................................................................. 17
General.............................................................................................................................................. 17
Orientation and your first week in Brussels................................................................................. 18
Registration in Brussels ..................................................................................................................... 18
University ........................................................................................................................................ 19
Vesalius College ................................................................................................................................ 19
Academics ......................................................................................................................................... 19
Your Internship .......................................................................................................................... 20
Understanding the European Union............................................................................................ 21
Culture Shock .................................................................................................................................... 22
Office Culture .................................................................................................................................... 22
Travelling during your Internship ................................................................................................ 22
Safety ........................................................................................................................................ 23
Registered Taxi’s ............................................................................................................................... 23
Alcohol .............................................................................................................................................. 23
Police ................................................................................................................................................. 24
Hospital ............................................................................................................................................. 24
Emergency Services .......................................................................................................................... 24
Pan European emergency number ................................................................................................... 24
Checklist .................................................................................................................................... 25
Welcome

Dear student, welcome to the EPA Spring 2012 program in Brussels. An enormously exciting and rewarding experience awaits you and I trust you will find your term here a most enjoyable and successful one. In order to assist you in preparing for your arrival please find following your pre-departure guide; each section will detail a general view of what to expect and items that require action / noting on your part are clearly marked with bullet points.

Programme administration and support

As your Program Director, I will ensure you are received and settled into your new environment in Brussels along with the materials you need to begin your semester. I will be available for general guidance, queries, advice on Belgian culture and equally to assist with issues that may arise from sickness, accidents and unexpected news. As responsible adults, I am also here should you wish to discuss confidential matters, if I’m unable to assist I will refer you to a trusted source outside of EPA for support.

EPA Contact numbers

Ruby Bhambra

EPA Program Director Brussels

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Arriving in Brussels

It will be a fairly brisk and breezy day when you arrive in January so please ensure you have your winter coat to hand. If you are carrying an international mobile, do remember to switch off your phone once you have made your call home; international charges from Belgium are reasonably high and even more so for mobiles.

What to say to the Immigration Officer

If you are asked by the immigration officer upon presenting your passport about the EPA Internship Program, please do NOT use the word ‘working’. Describe the program as an unpaid ‘stage’ (pronounced ‘Stahj’) or ‘internship’ for which you will be receiving university credit towards your degree. If you do wish to attempt this in French:

Bonjour Monsieur / Madame,

Je serai en Belgique pour quatre mois pour terminer mon stage pour lequel je vais recevoir des universitaires. Je vais également être inscrit au college Vesalius pour compléter mes cours.

Your student visa generally will not cover the entire period of your stay, however, by registering at the local town hall (Commune) within 8 days of your arrival (or having an appointment scheduled within 8 days of your arrival) you will receive the necessary documentation to lengthen your visa to cover the entire period. If for some reason you are unable to complete the extended visa application process, let me know as soon as possible.

What to expect at the airport

When you arrive at Brussels airport, please exit the baggage collection to the arrivals hall, in the centre is an information desk and you will see the EPA placard around this area.

If you’re travel is delayed or altered in any way, please have your parents / guardians call to advise me. As a safety measure, if you do not arrive on your scheduled flight, I will contact your parents as a matter of course.

- There is an exchange desk just behind baggage claim should you wish to change your currency.
- If you were unable to get 6 European sized passport photos, there is a photo booth on the main concourse where you can have these taken.
Housing and accommodation

The accommodation arranged for EPA students consists of apartments within residential buildings. These buildings are generally located within easy reach of both the city centre and your designated office. As with all cities space does come at a premium and Brussels being the centre of European Parliament and hosting a large transient community is no exception. On the whole, Europeans tend to live in smaller spaces than Americans do and often don’t always enjoy the same level of material comforts. That said, the apartments we have organised are of a high standard and include good quality appliances, high speed internet and a lounge area. The kitchens are fully equipped with crockery, pans and utensils and you have use of a shared bathroom. Each apartment also has access to a washing machine, dryer, iron, ironing board and hairdryer.

- Please note if you are bringing DVD’s from overseas, do not try to play them from any DVD players in the apartments, these will only play the European standard. If the DVD player does become ‘locked’ you could be charged for the damage or even a full replacement.

Your new address in Brussels

I will accompany you to your new address:

Rue Victor Greyson, 3
1050 Ixelles
Brussels
Belgium

Landlord: Javier Palacio

- You will be signing your apartment contract directly with the Landlord and therefore are wholly responsible for any damages you cause.

EPA covers all your accommodation costs through to the morning of the last day of the program, however, should you wish to stay on after this date, please ensure you make arrangements directly with the Landlord at your own cost and in plenty of notice.

- You must check out of the apartment by **12pm on Sunday 20th May 2012**
- You should consider purchasing additional travel insurance prior to your departure to cover your valuables such as laptops, music players and electronic books.
- It is worth enquiring whether your parent’s current home insurance covers you for any accidental damage caused to the apartment while you are here.
- Key losses are extremely costly (in excess of €600), please bear in mind that a new main lock to the building has to be fitted along with new keys issued to all the residents.
Where you are situated in Brussels and your immediate surroundings

You will find that street names in and around the capital are written in both French and Flemish. Your commune of Ixelles (French) or Elsene (Flemish) is located in the south of Brussels and is divided into two parts by Avenue Louise, which is part of the City of Brussels municipality. The smaller west part of the municipality includes Rue du Bailli and extends roughly from Avenue Louise to Avenue Brugmann. The accommodation is located approximately three kilometres from the centre of town as is easily accessible by metro, tram or bus.

Some noted sites within walking distance are:

- The buildings of the Abbaye de la Cambre house a renowned school for the visual arts, the National Geographic Institute and various parish functions.
- The Ixelles Ponds and Tenbosch Park offer a welcome green spot in the middle of the city.
- The Art Deco building on Flagey square used to house the studios of the Belgian radio and television broadcasting companies (RTBF and VRT). The Résidence de la Cambre is another notable Art Deco building.
- Several Art Nouveau houses built by Victor Horta in various surrounding streets.

Venturing out for your first social

For your first Belgian social, may I suggest a small resto bar named ‘L’amour fou’ at 185 Chausee d’Ixelles. It has good food at reasonable prices and the clientele is a pleasant mixture of international students and Belgians alike.

For more of a student feel, head towards Place Eugene Flagey; the atmosphere is here is always a buzz with events and there are quite often live bands.
Location Map

Your accommodation is denoted by the ‘A’ flag.
About Belgium

Belgium, officially the Kingdom of Belgium, is a federal state in Western Europe. It is a founding member of the European Union and hosts the EU's headquarters, and those of several other major international organisations such as NATO. Belgium covers an area of approximately 30,528 square kilometres and has a population of about 11 million people. Straddling the cultural boundary between Germanic and Latin Europe, Belgium is home to two main linguistic groups, the Dutch-speakers, mostly Flemish (about 60%), and the French-speakers, mostly Walloons (about 40%), plus a small group of German-speakers. Belgium's two largest regions are the Dutch-speaking region of Flanders in the north and the French-speaking southern region of Wallonia. The Brussels-Capital Region, officially bilingual, is a mostly French-speaking enclave within the Flemish Region. A German-speaking community also exists in eastern Wallonia. Belgium's linguistic diversity and related political conflicts are reflected in the political history and a complex system of government.

Historically, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg were known as the Low Countries, which used to cover a somewhat larger area than the current Benelux group of states. The region was called Belgica in Latin because of the Roman province Gallia Belgica which covered more or less the same area. From the end of the middle ages until the 17th century, it was a prosperous centre of commerce and culture. From the 16th century until the Belgian Revolution in 1830, when Belgium seceded from the Netherlands, many battles between European powers were fought in the area of Belgium, causing it to be dubbed the battleground of Europe, a reputation strengthened by both World Wars.

Upon its independence, Belgium participated in the Industrial Revolution and, during the course of the 20th century, possessed a number of colonies in Africa. The second half of the 20th century was marked by the rise of non-violent conflicts between the Flemish and the Francophones fuelled by cultural differences on the one hand and an asymmetrical economic evolution of Flanders and Wallonia on the other hand. These ongoing conflicts have caused far-reaching reforms of the formerly unitary Belgian state into a federal state which could lead to a complete partition of the country in the future.

What is Brussels like?

Brussels is a wonderfully cosmopolitan city and English being such a widely spoken language, does make it very easy to settle in. The city itself is smaller than most other European capitals making it extremely easy to get around affordably. Even though the population is around 2 million, Brussels maintains a certain charm, character and warmth which many visitors have commented on. There are numerous events and traditional shows throughout the year highlighting Belgian culture and providing a great opportunity to meet locals. If you didn’t know, Belgium itself, is famous the world over for its fine chocolate making heritage, strawberries, beer and of course, Belgian fries!
Money and recommended Euro funds

Regardless of how you decide to manage your finances while in Brussels, EPA recommend that you arrive with approximately $1000 USD (or equivalent in another currency) in cash, which you can exchange for Euros. The airport exchange rates are excellent and by changing your currency here, you will have a little cash for water or a small purchase and adequate funds to last until sums have been transferred to your new account.

Transferring funds to Belgium and using International bank cards

You should consider the easiest way for you and/or a member of your family to transfer money from the US to Belgium. Some considerations are noted below, but you will need to look into the charges levied by your own bank or credit card issuer for international withdrawals and wire transfers as these can vary greatly.

A Visa or MasterCard with a PIN number is useful for cash advances and ATMs are easily found all over Europe, you should, however, check the withdrawal charges before you depart. It is highly recommended that you take a credit card as a backup, even if it is not your main source of funds while in Europe, it is always useful in an emergency.

An American ATM card with a bank belonging to Cirrus or Visa Plus can also be used on many ATMs here and in other cities. You may wish to note that some students have found that they are unable to withdraw money from their savings accounts. Apparently for some banks cash card withdrawals have to be made from checking accounts. It is worth calling your bank to get all this clear before you leave.

- Remember to bring the PIN number for your credit card along with the card stop number
- Notify your credit card provider that you will be in Europe for up to 4 months
- Check withdrawal charges before you depart
- Travellers’ checks are not as readily accepted due to counterfeits

Banking in Belgium

Opening a bank account in Belgium is the most common way to manage money during your stay. Belgian checking accounts are free for students and when you arrive I will provide further details on where you can open your account with an expat contact who speaks English. Your account will come with a debit card which is accepted all over Belgium.

- Cashier’s cheques can take up to 3 weeks to clear, please ensure you have adequate funds during this period.
- Transfers from an account in the US to an account in Belgium, typically take up to 5 working days, other countries may vary.
Health and Insurance

The often cold and damp weather of Northern Europe can challenge even an excellent immune system, as you will not be covered by any Belgian health insurance plan, it is important that you secure health insurance that provides adequate coverage in Europe as well as expatriation.

Charges for a standard visit to a doctor can vary between €20-35 and are payable at the time of the appointment; you’ll receive a stamped receipt which can then be submitted for refund to your insurance company. Should you need to go to the hospital in an emergency situation, you may need to provide a deposit of several hundred Euros via a credit card as you don’t have the advantages of the national health care system.

An organisation called Community Help Service operates a confidential 24-hour English-speaking help line for any sort of medical or emotional crisis and is an excellent source for medical referrals.

- Community Help Service telephone number 02 648 40 14
- For liability reasons Belgian internship providers require proof of your health coverage, so please ensure you take a copy of your health insurance cover with you otherwise you may not be able to work.
- Your health insurance cover is a separate document to the medical certificate your physician signed for your Visa.
- If you are taking any medication, try to bring enough to last you the whole of your stay abroad. Bring a clear description of the medication from your doctor/pharmacist ready to show customs officials. All medication and vitamins should be in individual containers and clearly labelled.

I have been furnished with a confidential copy of your medical status should you wish to discuss any concerns, rest assured these will be managed in a delicate manner.
Budget and expense guide

Your personal budget is a highly individual matter and is often dictated by available funds, priorities and tastes. Whilst Brussels isn’t the most expensive city in Europe it is worth noting that it has a hugely transient community and therefore some costs can be higher than expected. The following guide provides with an outline to expected monthly costs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Groceries</td>
<td>€250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunches while at work</td>
<td>€100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile phone</td>
<td>€25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and entertainment</td>
<td>€150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housekeeping</td>
<td>€50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>€30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic supplies</td>
<td>€50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Estimated monthly costs</strong></td>
<td><strong>€655</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Mobile Phone</td>
<td>€50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commune Registration Charge</td>
<td>€40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxi t0 / from airport (max)</td>
<td>€100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fixed one-off cost</strong></td>
<td><strong>€190</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional Travel Expenses**

If you are considering weekend travel in and around Europe, please account for a further +/- €1000 for approximately five weekend trips.

- Please take this accounting as an estimated guide. Your own expenses will vary significantly depending on how much travelling and socialising you do.
Travelling within Europe

Students coming to Belgium with a classic student visa (type D) which is single-entry, should be aware that until their registration with local authorities is complete, Belgian law does not officially allow them to re-enter the country if they leave Belgium during their stay. The local registration process is unfortunately a lengthy one and may not be finalised until close to the end of the semester.

As there are generally no more border checks on roads or railways between countries in the E.U., this issue is more of a technicality for students wishing to travel to other European countries on weekends and holidays and has not prevented previous EPA students from travelling outside of Belgium. EPA is, however, required to notify students of Belgian law on this matter, and cannot be held responsible in the unlikely event that re-entry should be denied. Our experience is that travel within the Schengen territory is generally risk-free. Travel outside this area during the program is, however, strongly discouraged, as there have been cases of students being refused re-entry. Even once the Belgian registration process is complete, travelling outside the Schengen area and then re-entering Belgium is not permitted by local law for those with single-entry visas. Students wishing to travel to these countries, such as the U.K., should plan to include stops there either before arriving in Belgium or after the closure of the program.

Students who have obtained a multiple-entry visa can travel freely in and out of Belgium even before their registration process is complete. Once again, however, travel outside of the Schengen territory is discouraged.

Schengen Agreement

The name "Schengen" originates from a small town in Luxembourg where in March 1995, seven European Union countries signed a treaty to end internal border checkpoints and controls. More countries have joined the treaty over the past years and the country members now exceed thirty.

Schengen Members

Austria  Iceland  Czech Republic  Malta
Belgium  Italy  Latvia  Slovenia
Denmark  Luxembourg  Poland  Greece
Finland  Netherlands  Hungary  Spain
France  Norway  Lithuania  Estonia
Germany  Portugal  Slovakia

- Please note that the UK and Ireland are not part of the Schengen agreement.
Air Travel

There are two main airports in Belgium that will be of use to you; the National Airport of Belgium, located in Zaventem (10km from the centre) is where the majority of international flights land, Brussels South Airport in Charleroi (46km south of Brussels) where many budget airlines operate. You can now travel relatively inexpensively with discount airlines to a number of destinations in Europe as well as finding great deals with main carriers such as Brussels Airlines. Most discount flights arrive and depart in Charleroi and the Brussels City Shuttle runs a very good service every 30 minutes from Gare du Midi for €22 return. Here are a few discount airlines that previous students have recommended:

Ryan Air  http://www.ryanair.com
WizzAir  http://wizzair.com/
Air Baltic  http://www.airbaltic.com

Train Travel

Train travel is still the best way to visit to Amsterdam, Paris, Cologne and Düsseldorf, for offers and pre-booking please review:


International train tickets can also be purchased at Gare Leopold/Luxembourg located right behind the European Parliament building.

Please take note that past interns, many of whom came with Eurorail 15 day EU passes, have said that making the most of a pass during the internship was very exhausting and that they didn’t enjoy the last few excursions, so, please do consider carefully before purchasing these. In addition, the launch of high-speed trains (such as the Thalys) has meant that older trains that are accessible with the Eurorail pass have been reduced in numbers. It is also worth noting that Eurorail pass holders do pay hefty supplements to upgrade.

Bus / Coach Travel

Eurolines is a coach service with travel routes all over Europe and although slow, service and prices are considered good and are useful if you’re on a budget. For offers and pre-booking please review:

http://www.eurolines.be/eng/other_products/promotions_2/
Travel Safety

You are reminded that you should take every precaution necessary to ensure your own safety and that of your belongings whilst travelling. If you do decide to travel alone within the Schengen territories, please advise me via email of your departure date, destination and expected return date.

- Always carry a duplicate of your passport and visa in a separate location to your wallet.
- Notify the EPA Program Director if travelling alone.

Communication

Although telephony charges in Belgium have decreased in the last few years due to calling cards and network competition, charges are considered above average for Europe.

Telephone

Your apartments do not have landlines, however, you will have access to wifi allowing you to use your laptop and Skype for long distance calls.

Internet

All apartments have high speed wifi which is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in addition you will also have internet access at Vesalius.

Mobile

I would highly recommend you purchase a mobile phone once you’ve arrived; it’s a good option to have constant means of communication with other members of the group as well as being accessible to friends and family. You can buy an inexpensive mobile phone (for use in Europe only) inclusive of a SIM card for the equivalent of about $30 USD / €50. Pre-paid cards can be purchased in increments of 5, 20, 25 and 50 Euros to top up your credit as and when you need.

BASE is our recommended service provider as calls with all other BASE users are extremely low. No Belgian provider is recommended for long-distance calls as overseas rates are very costly, however, incoming international calls to your Belgian mobile phone are free of charge and therefore a useful way for people at home to contact you.

I will make arrangements to take you to a BASE shop during your orientation week for those of you who require a mobile.
Office Telephone

Although the phone in the office where you are interning may be available to you, do not be tempted to make international calls without receiving specific permission from your supervisor for each and every call. To initiate calls without authorisation constitutes fraud and could even result in your dismissal; this applies even if you use your own pre-paid calling card or the caller is paying.

Smart Phones

Smart phone services, charges and access codes vary from country to country, therefore, if you are bringing a Smart phone, please speak to your provider beforehand for roaming charges and access codes.

What to bring

The Belgian climate, typical of Northern Europe, is for the most part mild and moderate, however, the weather can be rather interchangeable and unpredictable, so do be prepared. Following is a simple guide as to the basics you should bring, but do bear in mind as closet space is limited be considerate when packing. You will need casual wear and smart office wear for your internship; on a day to day basis, you should be smart, however, for those of you interning outside of Parliament, be prepared to be relax your style according to the tone of your office.

Attire

Casual Wear

- Trouser / skirt / denim / legging
- Long Sleeve top / t-shirts / jumper / cardigan
- One pair good walking shoes
- Smart evening shoes
- Thermal top
- Waterproof boots
- Thick winter coat / hat / gloves / scarf
- Windbreaker
- Non-slip house socks
**Office Wear**

- One conservative two piece colour matching suit (dry cleaning $20)
- Shirt / tie / lace-ups / city bag or smart ruck sac for men
- Blouse / discreet top / mid heels or flats / smart rucksack or handbag for women

**Hygiene**

- Shampoo / conditioner / toothbrush / toothpaste / shower gel / deodorant
- Contact lens solution
- Shaving cream / razor blades (generally cheaper in the US)

**General**

- Umbrella
- Prescription medicine (adequate supply or additional written prescription)
- Socket convertors / adaptors
- Electronics (laptop)
- USB Key
- Mini torch
- 6 European size passport photos (or have them taken at Brussels airport)
- Luggage

Soft sided luggage is useful to bring as it expands for the trip home, but do bear in mind that inevitably you will have more to go home with and your flight baggage allowance won’t have changed. If you are planning short trips around Europe, please ensure you have a small weekend bag or ruck-sack.

You do not need to bring hairdryers, bed linen or towels.
Orientation and your first week in Brussels

Your first week in Brussels will be very busy with an awful lot of information to absorb, take things in your stride and consult me when you have queries.

Once you’ve settled into your apartments on Monday, I’ll start with a welcome meet and greet and have you sign your Housing Agreements and inventories. I’ll also give you an overall view of the coming week inclusive of a detailed orientation schedule from Vesalius which will commence on Wednesday the 18th of January. The Vesalius orientation will cover amongst other things:

- Class registration
- Vesalius Tour of Campus
- Student ID Card
- Managing finances
- Belgian Healthcare
- Computer Pass
- Explanation of community / housing responsibility (heating, appliances, rubbish disposal)
- Tour of parliament
- Commune Registration

In addition, you will also have an opportunity to open your bank account and purchase a mobile phone.

Registration in Brussels

Within the first three days of your arrival you will need to register at the Commune (Town Hall) by calling the following number 02 515 6601 and making an in-person appointment. Vesalius will also provide further information on your Commune and what services it provides.

Commune d’Ixelles
Maison Communale
Chausee d’Ixelles 168
Ixelles 1050
Main Switchboard: 02 515 6627

Please ensure that you have the following supporting materials as well as the originals when you attend your appointment:

- Copy of your passport
- Copy of your visa
- 4 European Passport sized photos
- €40
University

Vesalius College

Vesalius College, commonly known as VeCo is a Liberal Arts institution situated in the heart of Brussels. The college operates in association with the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (The Free University of Brussels) and is named after Andreas Vesalius. Vesalius was one of the first and foremost pioneers in the study of anatomy during the Renaissance period and often noted as one of the premier free thinkers of his time.

This belief is what links the college and its partner institution, the VUB. Both the College and the University adhere to the principle of liberal inquiry, unfettered by prejudice deriving from religion, race, gender, or political ideology. Andreas Vesalius embodied this ideal in a unique way in the sixteenth century.

Born in Brussels around 1515, Vesalius was to become a pioneer of modern medicine, as evident in his crowning achievement, the first treatise of scientific anatomy, the De humani corporis fabrica libri septem, published in 1543 and meticulously illustrated with 323 woodcuts.

The college was founded in 1987 and offers three-year Bachelor’s Degree programmes in accordance with the Bologna process. Vesalius College is one of the few educational institutions in Belgium teaching exclusively in English; it has a relatively small student body of around 300 undergraduates, of whom, approximately a quarter are study abroad pupils.

Academics

You are expected to take two courses from the Vesalius Spring 2012 course schedule relevant to your degree; you will receive four credits for each college class and eight credits for the internship element.

At the end of the internship, your Supervisors evaluation also forms part of your final grade.

Should you have any concerns regarding your academic papers or study materials, please arrange time to speak with your course professor and discuss your concerns in the first instance. If you feel you would like to address your concerns further, please contact the EPA Director for additional advice on how to progress the matter.
Your Internship

To begin let me start by congratulating you on your posting; by now you will have received confirmation of your placement in Brussels and a link to some early reading materials which should assist you in understanding your MEP office or organisation. It is of vital importance that you review these links as you would do with any employer, your Supervisor will expect you to have some knowledge of the organisation at the interview.

One of the key things to bear in mind is that the success of your internship is directly related to how you perform and interact as a person. A good attitude combined with enthusiasm, initiative, diligence, efficiency and a personable nature all contribute to a good experience. Naturally each internship experience will be different because of the time, place and personalities involved, however, what you make of it, is where the real value is. Depending on your future plans, use this time in Brussels to network and build a contact list which you can call upon post your graduation. In the working world, many roles and avenues have opened purely on the basis of good connections and continued rapport so, do use your time valuably.

As with all internships, EPA requires that the majority of work assigned to an Intern must be of an educational or challenging nature and that each student must ultimately be given responsibilities he/she has to deliver on. There will however, be times when standard office administration and routine will be the norm, do expect this and be aware that understanding business administration is just as important as the more challenging tasks of an office.

Whilst I will be available to offer guidance, assistance and support, you will be encouraged to develop and optimise this experience in your own way and according to your own priorities.

- Order simple business cards from Vista Print once you’ve arrived and have your mobile number.
- Your interview has been arranged for the second week and a separate document detailing this will be sent shortly.
- Take your proof of healthcare cover with you to your interview.
- Understand the organisation / policies of the MEP office you will be working in.

For those of you taking posts within European Parliament, you will also be sent a document on understanding the European Union, it’s institutions and how they work together; please ensure you study these materials carefully as providers often comment that students are not aware of the infrastructure.

Please note that at EPA, we endeavour at all times to arrange placements corresponding to your stated interests and relating coursework. We also consider the office environment, tone and the nature of the interaction you can expect. We do try to honour your requests and preferences, however, as competition for these limited posts is fierce, we can never guarantee working with specific MEPs or other organisations.
Understanding the European Union

Regardless of where you are taking your internship (parliament or non-parliament) it is still important that you understand the fundamental basics of the European Union. For those of you taking up posts with an MEP office, a further detailed document on the various institutions will follow shortly.

The European Union is an economic and political union of 27 member states which are located primarily in Europe. The EU traces its origins from the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the European Economic Community (EEC) formed by six countries in 1958. In the intervening years the EU has grown in size by the accession of the new member states and in power by the addition of policy areas to its remit. The Maastricht Treaty established the European Union under its current name in 1993. The latest amendment to the constitutional basis of the EU, the Treat of Lisbon came into force in 2009.

The EU operates through a hybrid system of supranational independent institutions and inter-governmentally made decisions negotiated by the member states. Important institutions of the EU include the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, the European Council, the Court of Justice of the European Union, and the European Central Bank. European Parliament is elected every five years by EU citizens.

The EU has developed a single market through a standardized system of laws which apply in all member states. Within the Schengen Area (which includes EU and non-EU states) passport controls have been abolished. EU policies aim to ensure the free movement of people, goods, services and capital, enact legislation in justice and home affairs, and maintain common policies on trade, agriculture, fisheries and regional development. A monetary union, the Eurozone, was established in 1999 and is currently composed of 17 member states. Through the Common Foreign and Security Policy the EU has developed a limited role in external relations and defence. Permanent diplomatic missions have been established around the world and the EU is represented at the United Nations, the WTO, the G8 and the G-20.

With a combined population of over 500 million inhabitants or 7.3% of the world population, the EU generated a nominal GDP of 16,242 billion US dollars in 2010, which represents an estimated 20% of global GDP when measured in terms of purchasing power parity.

- ‘Understanding European Parliament’ document to follow.
Culture Shock

After the initial thrill and excitement wears off, do expect some frustration both at work and in your new neighbourhood, this is merely due to the pressures of coping with a foreign culture, language and a new environment. EPA interns, who are normally used to feeling confident and successful whilst at home, may perceive themselves as failing to perform up to their own high expectations and are often puzzled by this strange sensation. During your orientation at Vesalius we will explore this phenomenon called "culture shock" and how this can occasionally affect your confidence.

Your personal experiences of change and adaptation from your past will help you weather the culture shock and the knowledge you gain from it will bring you un-teachable insight. There is no shame in culture shock – it is part and parcel of living abroad. Knowing the symptoms and recognising them is part of the cure.

Office Culture

As with all new environments, understanding and adapting to office culture is equally as important. You may find that on occasion, Europeans tend to speak more freely than in the US; their comments may relate to how they feel about other cultures or nationalities and often these can be quite strong views that you may or may not share. Do see these conversations and remarks in a positive manner, whilst you may not be familiar with the directness, all cultures operate differently, when in doubt or unsure of how you should reply, be diplomatic and above all be respectful when referring to people from all walks of life.

Travelling during your Internship

Of course while you are in Europe, you will want to travel and experience as much as possible within your budget and timeframe. Whilst we encourage you to broaden your horizons with cultural and educational visits, please manage and plan these trips with consideration; arriving at work on a Monday morning, bleary eyed and exhausted, will be noted and should the supervisor find this a regular occurrence, I can assure you, I will be contacted.

I would strongly suggest that you first settle into your classes and intern post, consider your committed hours and then manage your social time before planning any excursions. Vesalius will also provide further information on planned tours and trips.
Safety

At all times, please use common sense to ensure your own safety; whilst Brussels is considered reasonably safe, it is still a city and therefore suffers from petty crime and theft as most cities do. Do bear in mind that although your accent and conversation may be common to you, for an opportunist, a young woman with an American accent, on her mobile while walking alone late in the evening could be seen as a potential target. Be discreet and if you are socialising late into the evening, do be safe when travelling home or when in doubt, take an official taxi.

- Be discreet when talking on your mobile in public.
- Women, please wear your handbags at the front and keep them zipped.
- Do not wear your music player while walking alone in the evening in a quiet area.

Registered Taxi’s

Taxi Bleu are registered taxis with licensed drivers who call carry ID cards; the cars are distinctive and do have an Taxi Bleu sign on the side. After you’ve dialled, the automated service will give you an option for English.

- Taxi Bleu (English option too) 02 268 00 00

Alcohol

Please drink sensibly, considerately and maturely; remember that Brussels is a small city and it is not uncommon to bump into people from your office or Parliament while socialising. While you’re an EPA Intern we expect you to conduct yourself in a manner befitting of your post and all times. Remember, poor behaviour reflects on you, EPA, your university and the good relations people have trusted you with. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me for a confidential conversation.

Alcohol is generally not served at EPA dinners or events.
Police

The nearest police station is just behind the church at Place Flagey:

Ile Division

Rue Alphonse De Witte 30
1050 Ixelles

Telephone: 02 515 72 11
Fax: 02 515 72 00

Open every day from 7am to 10pm

Hospital

In case of an accident or an emergency, the nearest hospital is:

Saint Michel Europa Ziekenhuizen

Linthoutstraat 150
1040 Etterbeck

Telephone: 02 614 30 00
Emergency: 02 614 39 00

Emergency Services

- Police 101
- Ambulance 100
- Fire Brigade 100

Pan European emergency number

- 112

Calls to this number are free from a mobile or a landline.
Checklist

- Passport.
- Visa.
- Two copies of your passport and visa in separate locations to your original.
- Paperwork issued by your university.
- Buy an A4 folder with tabs to hold this guide and other documents you’ll be issued.
- Exchange your currency at the airport.
- 6 European sized passport photos or have them taken at the airport or in Brussels.
- You will be signing your apartment contract directly with the Landlord and therefore are wholly responsible for any damages you cause.
- Book or consider your return flight carefully, you must check out of the apartment by **12pm on Sunday 20th May 2012**.
- Consider purchasing additional travel insurance prior to your departure to cover your valuables such as laptops, music players and electronic books.
- Enquire whether your parent’s current home insurance covers you for any accidental damage caused to the apartment while you are here.
- Two copies of your Health Cover along with the original.
- Bring adequate supplies of medication to last you the whole of your stay abroad. Bring a clear description of the medication from your doctor/pharmacist ready to show customs officials. All medication and vitamins should be in individual containers and clearly labelled.
- Remember to bring the PIN number for your credit card.
- Notify your credit card provider that you will be in Europe for up to 4 months.
- Check withdrawal charges before you depart.
- Travellers’ checks are not as readily accepted due to counterfeits.
- Please note that the UK and Ireland are not part of the Schengen agreement.
- Order simple business cards from Vista Print once you’ve arrived and have your mobile number to put on them.
- Your interview has been arranged for your second week and a separate document detailing this will be emailed shortly, print and file.
- Understand the organisation / policies of the MEP office you will be working in.
- Review ‘understanding parliament’ summary to be emailed shortly.
- Contact numbers / Skype names / email addresses of friends and family.
- Purchase a Lonely Planet / Travel Guide to Belgium.
- Read about Belgium and it’s distinct French and Flemish side.