



# Preparation for your Foreign Learning Experience

## PREFLEX trainer's guide

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This trainer's guide can be tailored to your programme's learning needs and time availability.  
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## **1. PREFLEX training sessions: methodological approach**

The PREFLEX training aims at supporting students in answering the question: how can I maximize my chances of success during my foreign experience in acquiring, developing and practicing international competencies?

Your role as a trainer, and ideally, as a mentor is to invite students to become proactive in finding out their learning objectives for their study/work abroad experience. You will guide students to understand why international competencies matter in this new phase of their learning journey, and you will open a space where students can feel empowered and more prepared to develop new international competencies prior their departure.

One of the key issues in this pre-departure process is to bring students to envision their challenges at the same time they develop a sense of ownership for this new learning process. Students are encouraged to be independent, to research their possibilities and to think of possible strategies on how to maximise their learning experience.

The main emphasis of PREFLEX lies on the purposeful acquisition of international competencies. The purposeful acquisition of the international competencies “intercultural competencies and cultural adaptation strategies while addressing language, academic and social skills. It will also address practical issues pertaining student’s individual projects such as: what do you need to arrange prior departure? What is needed in order to comply with school requirements? How to follow-up with your internship/study mentor(s)?” (see student guide for more on the course objectives). Goal setting is not exclusively the responsibility of the students. It is very important that the academy or department also defines and prioritizes the professional, academic, personal, social, linguistic and intercultural competencies to be acquired, and plans for the assessment of these competencies after the return of the students (*cf.* Deardorff, 2009).

The course is developed to be facilitated in a combination of classical lectures, interactive in-class exercises (mind mapping, dialogue, and case analysis), self-reflection, pre-departure research, peer-to-peer interactions and individual homework.

## **2. Flow of the course:**

The course is designed to be delivered in 2.5 days (but shorter or longer versions are available upon request).

The course starts with a kick-off session, where students are briefed about the purpose of the course, the topics, the methodologies and their expected input (see appendix I

for suggested programme for the kick-off). During this kick-off as well as the first session, students get acquainted with the concept of international competencies.

The second day focuses on the importance of goal-setting, followed by a lecture on intercultural competence and an exercise on intercultural challenges. Students are invited to elaborate their goals related to the acquisition & development of international competencies, and they are encouraged to foresee what intercultural differences can become challenging during their foreign learning experience (see appendix I for suggested programme).

During the third day (see programme in appendix II) students will make a presentation elaborating on their goals and intercultural challenges. Students are expected to do some research and frame their goals and challenges in the context of the host organization. A lecture on cultural adaptation and cultural stress will follow, and students will complete a case study which can help them identify the phases of cultural adaptation and possible managing strategies. After that, students will be introduced to the action research model, which they are expected to apply in their subsequent reflection process while abroad. Students then will be given practical tips and instruction aimed at answering the question of how to learn by action research & reflection?

After the last session, students are expected to have a meeting with their mentor, in which they discuss and map out a mentoring and self-monitoring plan for the time that the student will stay abroad.

Upon return, mentors are expected to organize a come-back session where students can share their experience together with others (for ideas on how to set-up the come-back session see appendix III). During this session, special attention will be given to the capitalization of international competencies, where student reflect on how their foreign learning experience has provided with new skills and knowledge, which can be incorporated in their professional profile.

### **3. Mentoring and PREFLEX**

One of the most crucial elements in the purposeful acquisition of international competencies is the mentoring of students. Mentoring not only happens during the PREFLEX training, but also during their stay abroad and after their foreign experience.

Mentoring is generally accepted to be a powerful tool for helping people through difficult situations and periods of transition. Support of any kind at a turning point in life speeds up the process of transition and allows the recipients to adjust more quickly. In a student context, the process of beginning a new study or internship in a foreign country – as well as coping with a new cultural environment – can take some getting used to (Partridge, 2008).

If the training in the Netherlands was successful, the students will be mindful of the cultural differences and will have the beginning of an open, respectful and curious

attitude. They will start to observe, to listen, to see and will be increasingly able to analyze and relate their experiences and to reflect on the effect they have on them.

Nonetheless, experience of many lecturers and studies of the Research Group International Cooperation of The Hague University of Applied Sciences show that students need a mentor when they are abroad to make the most of their foreign experience. Students greatly value getting answers to their queries, support and encouragement and help in coping with new and unfamiliar methods of teaching and learning.

Mentoring may also take away many of the risks of a student having a bad experience and returning home prematurely without any of the envisioned competencies acquired.

Students will need help in their monitoring their progress and in their critical reflection on their experiences and in getting them down in their Reflection Paper. By being there for them during their time abroad, the last phase of the PREFLEX training, including the discussion of their Reflection Paper and the Capitalization Exercise will be that more valuable and effective.

The capitalization exercise involves having students reflect on how they can incorporate their acquired international competencies in their professional profile.

Finally, mentoring will give the lecturers information and insights that are of value to the next round of PREFLEX training. Every lecturer has his own approach to students, but there may be a number of general pointers having to do with clarity on the aims and objectives, managing expectations, confidentiality, boundaries, ideas of the role of mentor, frequency and modes of interaction and the ending of the mentoring. In The Hague University of Applied Sciences the mentoring of students abroad ought to be taken more seriously. There should be an institution-wide, or at least academy-wide mentoring scheme proving the framework and reference point for all mentors. Both students and staff should be aware of the mentoring scheme and feed their experiences back into it to contribute to its continuous improvement.

Ideally the mentors of the students should be the lecturers who have been conducting the PREFLEX training and/or lecturers who are familiar with the students. That way there may be more trust. Misunderstandings, confusion and false expectations will be limited and there will be more scope for adjustments when and where needed. Feedback from students to their mentors should be part of the process, not least as a means for continuous improvement of quality.

It is hard to overestimate the value of mentoring.

Finally, The Hague University of Applied Sciences stands at the beginning of defining, prioritizing and assessing international competencies. The lectorate International Cooperation will gladly assist in the lecturers and team leaders who are interested.

## Appendix I – Programme for day 1 and 2

### PREFLEX day 1: Kick-off

International Competencies, intercultural adaptation and goal-setting for your international assignment

**10.00-10.15** -Welcome

**10.15-10.30** -Course description / getting acquainted

**10.30-11.00** – Introduction to international competencies –

**11.00-11.30** – Group discussion: how international are you? What does it mean to be internationally competent?

**11.30-12.15** – Plenary discussion

**12.15-12.30** – Feedback & closing

#### Instructions:

- Use the provided Powerpoint presentation included for introducing the concept of international competencies. Study pages 3-5 of the student guide.
- During the group discussion, encourage students to discuss their international experience, either academic, personal or professional.
- During the plenary discussion, encourage students to question what international competencies they already possess and which they might be lacking.

### PREFLEX day 2:

International Competencies, intercultural competences and goal-setting for the acquisition & development of international competencies

**10.00-10.15** -Welcome

**10.15-11.00** - Competencies and goal-setting

**11.00-11.30** - Mind mapping your goals

**11.30-12.00** – Sharing outcomes of mind mapping

**12.00-13.00** - Lunch

**13.00-13.45** – Intercultural Competencies

**13.45-14.30** – Group discussion: what intercultural challenges can I expect during my foreign Learning experience? What do I need to research?

**14.30-14.45** - Plenary and closing

#### Instructions:

- Introduce the topic of goal-setting using the provided Powerpoint. Study pages 20-22 of the student guide.
- In groups of three, ask students to think of their academic, professional & personal/social goals by means of a mind map. If you would like to know about mind mapping check the link [www.thinkbuzan.com](http://www.thinkbuzan.com).
- Introduce intercultural competencies using the provided Powerpoint. Study pages 5-17 of the student guide.
- In groups of 3, encourage students to discuss their key challenges regarding their intercultural competences. These challenges are related to their foreign learning experience.

- Homework:

- Based on your mind map, write your 3 main goals (academic, personal, professional) for your study abroad. Make a visual representation of these goals. You can use a power point or a mood board. During the next session, you will have the chance to present and share these with your peers.
- Make a brief classification of the intercultural challenges that you might find in your host institution. Back up your information with research (online, application of theoretical concepts, interviewing a fellow student). Add these to your presentation.

**Be creative and authentic!**

## Appendix 2: Programme for day 3

### PREFLEX day 3:

How to recognise cultural stress & how to learn by action research & reflection?

**10.00-10.15** - Recap day & evaluation

**10.15-11.00** - Show & tell by the students

- Presenting goals and expected (IC) challenges
- Plenary discussion

**11.00-11.45** – Cultural Adaptation: “challenging culture shock”

**11.45-12.15** - Group discussion on cultural adaptation:

- Case study + questions for discussion
- What is your experience so far?
- What can go wrong? And how to prepare?

**12:15-13.00** Lunch

#### Instructions:

- Students present their homework. Their show and tell should not last more than 5 minutes.
- During the discussion, encourage students to ask questions, give advice or tips to each other.
- During the lecture “cultural adaptation” use the visuals provided in the Powerpoint. Study pages 24-30 of the student guide.
- Use the case study a Mexican student in the Netherlands (see p. 29 in student guide) for discussion. A variation is to ask students to come up with a script, where they recreate their advice to Martha. Students can role-play this script.

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**13.00-13.30** - Short report from group discussion

**13.30-14.15** - Learn by reflection: action research model

**14.15-14.45** - Group discussion on

- How to make my reflection report attractive?
- How can I keep track of my progress? How to self-monitor?

**14.45-15.00** - Short report per group

**15.00-15.30** - Visualisation and instructions to the letter

**15.30-16.00** - Closing and evaluation

#### Instructions:

- Students present their solutions to Martha’s case. As indicated above, they can also do this by means of a role play.
- Students are introduced to action research and their reflection report (see pages 31-37 of the student guide).
- During the discussion, explore with students how they would like to present their reflection report – It is important to encourage a creative approach, as reflection might be perceived as “dull” for some students.

- Homework:

- Make appointment with mentor & discuss plan of action
- Deliver letter in sealed envelope to someone whom you trust. This person will keep it until your return.

## PREFLEX Day 4:

### Come-back session

#### Ideas:

- Deliver a short introduction on capitalisation of international competencies.
- Have students prepare a digital story telling (see definition below) or a visual slide show based on their final reflection report (see student guide for instructions).
- Open letters they wrote in their preparation course and compare to report/digital storytelling (this can be done in a lottery form).
- Stimulate discussion:
  - What was the turning point during your foreign learning experience?
  - What goals did you achieve?
  - What new skills do you bring with you?
  - How can you capitalise on your foreign learning experience? What next?

#### WHAT IS DIGITAL STORYTELLING?

- This is a “short, first person video-narrative created by combining recorded voice, still and moving images, and music or other sounds. Digital storyteller: Anyone who has a desire to document life experience, ideas, or feelings through the use of story and digital media. Usually someone with little to no prior experience in the realm of video production”. The digital stories can relate to past, present and/or future
- Thinking about the contents, ask yourself the following questions: What were the highlights of your experience? What anecdote can you tell, that reflects the essence of your learning? What do you recommend fellow students going abroad for a similar experience?
- The length should be approximately 3-4 minutes
- You can find instructions on the web page of the Center for Digital Story telling through the following link: <http://www.storycenter.org/cookbook.pdf>