



**GERMAN AMERICAN
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM**

LONG-TERM EXCHANGE STUDENT ORIENTATION GUIDE

AMERICAN GAPP COORDINATOR

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LONG-TERM EXCHANGE STUDENT ORIENTATION GUIDE FOR THE AMERICAN GAPP COORDINATOR

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1. PRE-ARRIVAL ORIENTATION AND PLANNING

Thank you for your willingness to host a German exchange student at your high school through GAPP! We appreciate all the hard work you put into planning a successful exchange and welcoming the student to your school. This packet provides some information and recommendations for how to prepare and orient the student both before and after they arrive.

School Information and Rules

Since German teenagers are often not used to being at school until the afternoon, following common rules at U.S. high schools (for example, those concerning dress code, off-campus privileges, and smoking), please take care to explain any rules that may be culturally different from those at their German high school. We recommend sending your school's student handbook and course catalogue/guide to the German GAPP coordinator at your partner school well in advance of the exchange—the German coordinator can then review these materials with the student as they prepare for their exchange. Be sure to explain any abbreviations in the handbook or course catalogue/guide. The student should also compile a list of questions for you that can be addressed either before or after they arrive.

Immunizations

Please make sure the exchange student and their family are aware of all immunization requirements at your school, as these often differ from German school requirements. It's best to explain the requirements to both the German GAPP coordinator and the exchange student and their family as early in the process as possible so the student has time to receive any missing immunizations and submit their records by your school's deadline. The American GAPP coordinator should serve as a liaison between the student and the school administration office, assist with translating the immunization records to English (if needed), and submit the records to the administration office on behalf of the student.

Contact Information at School and in Host Community

The student should have access to a list of contact persons (and emails/phone numbers) at the school—these could include their advisor or homeroom teacher, the German teacher(s), the administration office, the school counselor, the athletics office, etc. They should also be given a list of resources in their host community, including medical facilities/hospitals, libraries, recreation centers, gyms/sports facilities, banks, and public transportation (if applicable).

Identifying Sexual Abuse or Exploitation

Please provide the student with age- and language-appropriate information about how to identify sexual abuse or exploitation in advance of their arrival. Please note that you are obligated to report any allegations of sexual misconduct towards an exchange student to the Department of State, the local authorities, and the GAPP office.

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Course Schedule

Putting together a course schedule for the exchange student can be a challenge, as you'll need to ensure that courses taken in the U.S. count towards required credits at their German school. The American GAPP coordinator should work with the exchange student and the German GAPP coordinator to select courses that fulfill the student's credit requirements at the German school while also enabling them to explore some of the unique course offerings of U.S. high schools, e.g., AP or Honors courses, theater, dance, P.E., band or orchestra, etc.

Athletics

If the student is interested in athletics, help them navigate signing up for tryouts or joining practice groups offered by the school. The GAPP coordinator is also responsible for completing any paperwork required for exchange student participation in athletics. Keep in mind that some school districts and high schools have detailed approval processes, so it's best to familiarize yourself with your school's process well before the student arrives. Please note that exchange student participation in athletics (especially at the varsity level) is not guaranteed.

Preparations for the Student's Arrival

If your school has student ID cards, you may want to arrange for the exchange student to have one—even if the school doesn't require that exchange students have IDs, it's a good souvenir. The student should be assigned a locker and any other loaned school equipment, as well as log-in credentials for the school's computer system, in advance of their first day. If applicable to your school, the student should also be placed in an advisory or homeroom.

SPARC Training and Test

Please note that the U.S. Department of State requires training for local coordinators in conflict resolution, emergency procedures, child safety standards, sexual conduct codes, procedures for reporting allegations of sexual misconduct, abuse, or neglect, and host family screening and selection. All American GAPP Coordinators must read the Secondary School Program Annual Renewal of Certification (SPARC) module offered by the U.S. Department of State and complete GAPP's SPARC test annually.

2. FIRST DAY ORIENTATION

Welcome and School Tour

The in-person orientation should take place on the first day the exchange student attends school and should familiarize them with the school facilities and schedule, as well as with teachers and staff who are available to support them during their exchange. The GAPP coordinator, an administrator, or an authority figure should review the school rules and emphasize any that differ from typical German school rules. This would also be an appropriate moment to mention cultural differences in the U.S., state and local laws, and social norms in your community.

There could be an official greeting by the school principal, in which they can clarify their expectations and personally invite the exchange student to attend school events (e.g., they could be gifted free tickets to school plays, sports games, homecoming festivities, prom). School apparel and merch make excellent welcome gifts for the student on the first day and foster a sense of belonging.

Welcoming the exchange student in a morning announcement or assembly can also make the student feel recognized and raise awareness of the exchange among students, faculty, and staff.

The GAPP coordinator, student government leaders, or a few students from a German class could give the exchange student a tour of the school in the morning. The tour should give the student additional information about places in the school that may differ from German schools, or where special procedures must be followed, e.g., the gym, art classroom, theater, or library. If students lead the tour, a brief “tour guide training session” could be useful, as American students may not know how their school differs from a typical German school or in which ways it may seem particularly “foreign” to the exchange student. It’s also a good idea to give the student a map of the school.

Emergency Procedures

As part of the orientation, please make sure the student is aware of any emergency drills (fire, lockdown, natural disaster, etc.) at your school, along with the procedures the student will need to follow during those drills (or emergencies).

Meeting Place

The GAPP coordinator and exchange student should have a designated time and place (an office or classroom) where they can meet each week or month, as deemed appropriate. These meetings should be planned into the student’s schedule and should not be sporadic or happen organically. These regular meetings provide an opportunity for the student to ask questions about their school and host community, receive academic and social guidance, and process their intercultural experiences in a supportive space. The GAPP coordinator can also remind the student of any upcoming school events or activities and encourage the student to participate.

Once per month, the GAPP coordinator should also ask the student to fill out their part of the monthly report, in which they rank (on a scale of 1 to 5) their opinion of their progress in school, in their host family household, and with friends. Monthly meetings also create a space for the exchange student to share about their academic and extracurricular activities, any challenges they're encountering (academically or socially), and their experiences with their host family, which the GAPP coordinator can use to complete each monthly report.

Living with a Host Family

Living with a host family affords each student a unique opportunity for immersion in their host community by developing close relationships with their host family and participating in family or community activities and traditions. It is, however, quite an adjustment for the exchange student, and the GAPP coordinator should be the first point of contact for any questions or concerns about their host family or living situation.

In addition to screening and selecting the host family and conducting a pre-arrival orientation with all members of the host family that includes information about cross-cultural interactions, the GAPP coordinator should be prepared to support to the student in their adjustment to living with a host family. It's important to convey to the exchange student that you're willing to listen to them and help them feel at home in their host community, whether that means talking with them about their intercultural challenges or placing them in a new host family (following the host family change procedure outlined on page 12 of the GAPP Guidelines for Long-Term Exchanges document).

Since you already maintain regular communication with the host family to complete monthly reports for the student, you are uniquely well-positioned to help resolve any potential misunderstandings or conflicts between the student and their host family.

Host Family Orientation

Although GAPP provides each host family with an orientation packet similar to this one, we advise you to also set up a time to meet with the student's prospective host family to discuss the following: best practices for hosting developed in your community, strategies for intercultural communication and conflict resolution, and general information about the GAPP long-term exchange program and the U.S. State Department Exchange Visitor Program guidelines.

Monthly Reports and 60-day Program Report

As the American GAPP coordinator, you are responsible for supervising the student and updating the GAPP office on the student's progress by submitting a [Monthly Report Form](#) for each month during the student's exchange. Each month, you must contact both the student and the host family to complete the Monthly Report Form. The first monthly contact (and one contact during the second semester, if applicable) must be conducted in-person, and subsequent contact may take place in-person, via phone/video call, or via email, so long as they are properly documented.

You are also responsible for designating a school official or administrator to visit the student in their host family home within 60 days of their arrival and fill out the [60-Day Program Report Form](#).

3. SPECIAL PROJECTS FOR THE GERMAN STUDENT

Intercultural experiences are not one-sided on the part of the German exchange student—American students also learn about different ways of life when they interact with the German student. Giving the German student additional projects and assignments—such as presentations, visits to German classes, or visits to elementary or middle school—encourages meaningful cultural exchange for both parties. The German student’s presence also raises awareness of GAPP and fosters interest in GAPP exchanges among American students.

Presentations in German Class

Your school’s German language learners are a built-in audience for presentations by the German student about their community in Germany or about a topic of interest for American students learning German (e.g., German popular music, sports, or cuisine). The presentation could take place in a German class or be built into a GAPP information session. For more advanced students of German, the presentation could be conducted in German. Creating a presentation for the school’s German class(es) can be a positive intercultural experience for both the German student, who receives a platform to share about their country, and the German learners, who become exposed to a different way of life and can ask a fellow teenager their questions.

Integrating the German Student into German Class

If you arrange for the German student to visit German classes, consider the ways in which they could be a source of knowledge for the students. A presentation is one method, but interviews, conversation assignments, research projects, and games are also possibilities.

Visit to Elementary or Middle School

Organizing a visit for the German student to the district’s elementary or middle school can also be rewarding—the German student may feel at ease with younger students, and the elementary/middle school students will have perhaps their first exposure to German people and culture. The German student could give a short presentation or offer a basic German language lesson and then answer questions from the elementary/middle school students. This visit can make a lasting impression on the younger students and encourage them to study German in high school or participate in a GAPP exchange in the future.

U.S. Department of State Code of Federal Regulations

For more information about the regulations for the Secondary School Student Exchange Visitor Program, please refer to the U.S. State Department [Code of Federal Regulations, Part 62 - Exchange Visitor Program, Subpart B, 62.25 - Secondary School Students](#).

Comments, concerns, and suggestions for improvement to this orientation guide are always welcome. Please email gappLT@goethe.de to provide feedback.