

Important Information and
Understandings
for
ASSIST Students

For Students
in
Boarding Schools



Today's Scholars. Tomorrow's Leaders.

Please keep this booklet with you for
reference during your American year.

2011/12 Academic Year

Introduction

Congratulations on your selection as an ASSIST student for the 2011/12 academic year! Your scholarship was earned through your accomplishments to date as well as by your participation in the scholarship competition conducted in your country. Many students desire to become ASSIST scholars, but only a limited number of outstanding young people are chosen for this special year.

While this scholarship is an honor and an opportunity, it is also a significant responsibility. You represent yourself, your family, your country, and ASSIST at the school you will attend. Much is expected of you, and we have full confidence that you will contribute significantly to your school community.

Before beginning your ASSIST year, you and your family should read, very carefully, all materials that are sent to you by ASSIST and by your school. You must come to the States embracing a spirit of cooperation, meaning that you have read, understood and are prepared to abide by the regulations governing your year in America.

It is disheartening for schools and ASSIST, and ultimately for you and your family, when you are not truly prepared to follow these important guidelines. We will work hard to support you, and we expect that you will honor these guidelines, which are established with your well being and success in mind.

These are a few examples of important rules that are not negotiable but often cause discord:

- Asking to stay for a second year of study in America.
- Asking to graduate from your American school.
- Asking to change schools.
- Asking to return home for a holiday or break.
- Asking to take a driver's education course or to drive a car.

If you have questions about any aspect of the rules governing this program, please clarify them in advance of your departure to America. The ASSIST representative in your country and those of us in America stand ready to help you.

Mission Statement

To promote mutual understanding, cultural interchange and a more peaceful world, ASSIST provides opportunities for outstanding international students to attend the finest American independent secondary schools on one-year scholarships, and for students and teachers from these schools to engage in educational experiences abroad.

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You and ASSIST

More than 4,000 students from 46 countries have now spent a year in America with ASSIST. You stand in a long line of successful and distinguished student ambassadors, and we believe that you are well prepared to contribute, as did your predecessors.

A Lifelong Relationship

Your relationship with ASSIST does not conclude with Orientation in the U.S. – rather, our time together before you travel to your school is the beginning of a lifelong relationship. We will follow you closely throughout your American year, and recent initiatives allow us to maintain contact with you after you return home, continue your studies, and begin your career.

Owing to the power of the ASSIST experience and the opportunities afforded by the Internet and e-mail, ASSIST students now remain in contact with one another and with us long after their year of study concludes. In the years ahead, we envision ASSIST alumni helping one another with university selection, internship acquisition, career advice and placement, and identification of social and leadership opportunities.

You will share with other future leaders of many nations an unusual experience as an ambassador and scholar at a leading American independent school. With this experience as a frame of reference, your connection with ASSIST – and with each other – is a powerful foundation for your growth and future.

Support During Your ASSIST Year

Each month, ASSIST will write you by e-mail with important information, with suggestions for making a smooth transition, and with requests for information. It is critical, therefore, that we have on file the e-mail address you intend to use during your exchange year. As well, we will also write your parents and homestay parents, so please report to us any changes in their electronic addresses.

It is not uncommon during the year to confront challenges where you will need ASSISTance – from your teachers, host families, schools, parents at home, advisor and ASSIST. We hope that you will reach out to us when we can be genuinely helpful to you and make us part of important decisions. These may include issues with your visa, travel you intend to undertake, medical conditions and emergencies, and academic or social difficulties at school. ASSIST is entering its 43rd year of service, meaning that we have deep institutional experience in helping international students at our schools.

News of Your Experiences and Successes

We have developed an electronic newsletter that is shared with the entire ASSIST family. During the year, we encourage you to write us with observations about American education and culture, with stories of interesting experiences you have had or trips you have taken, and with updates about academic, social, leadership and athletic awards you have earned. We are interested to hear from you, and we will also utilize some of these updates as stories in the newsletter.

Developing Leadership Skills

As an ASSIST student, you will become an ambassador of your country and culture to your American school. An important component of our program is selecting students whom we feel can take a leading role in creating understanding across cultures, both during their exchange year and upon their return home.

At your American school, we encourage you to seek opportunities to share your perspective in classes, to speak publicly before the student body and parent groups, to write articles for the newspaper or school web site, and to immerse yourself in the life of the community. You will enjoy your year more as you do so, and you will feel empowered by the contribution you make to the life of the school community.

Upon your return home, we also encourage you to take every opportunity to share what you have learned. Your school will often provide opportunities for you to speak about your experience, to write articles for the school or local newspapers, and to expand the power of your exchange year by sharing it with others. This helps to interest other talented students in an exchange year with ASSIST – and contributes to the ASSIST mission of creating a more peaceful, more understanding world.

We select students in part based on their academic abilities and personal qualities, but we also seek future leaders whom we feel will make contributions to their home cultures. Beginning with your ASSIST year, extending to your return to your home country, and with the support of the ASSIST alumni network, we know that many of you will become national and international leaders of note in the generation ahead.

Preparation

The remainder of this booklet is devoted to helping you prepare for your ASSIST year. *Important Understandings* outlines the key points you must consider, the important rules you must abide by, and provides advice on how best to prepare yourself.

You will receive other information from your school and from ASSIST, and we encourage you to review it all carefully – and to reflect upon ways to prepare for a productive and enjoyable year. While no set of documents can fully anticipate every event in your life, we have found that this booklet, along with the other materials you will receive, form an excellent foundation for our students.

Important Medical Information

Health and Accident Insurance

ASSIST requires that all students have complete health and accident insurance coverage before their arrival in the United States. If you are uncertain about this, please contact the ASSIST representative in your home country or the office in the U.S.

Physical Examination

Your American school and the United States Government require a yearly physical examination and specific vaccinations before entering the United States. ASSIST also highly recommends a thorough dental check-up, and an eye examination (particularly for those students with glasses), before leaving home.

The Student Medical Information form must be completed by your parents and your family physician – **and it is critical and required that all medical conditions are disclosed.** Copies must be sent to the ASSIST office in the U.S. and to your American school, as outlined in the memo entitled *Important Information About Your Year Abroad*. You will not be allowed to participate in the ASSIST Orientation and any school activities, especially sports-related activities, unless this form is completed as instructed.

You will receive medical forms from ASSIST and from your school. Please complete both sets of forms and ask your physician to complete his/her part and sign them during your physical examination. Return the school form to the school, and send a copy to ASSIST. Return the ASSIST form directly to us.

By receiving both forms, we can ensure that you meet the requirements both of your school and of the U.S Department of State.

Acute Medical Conditions

During your stay in the United States, you may become ill or experience emergencies that will require medical attention. In most cases, these situations will be covered by the short-term medical coverage issued for your stay abroad. In some cases, however, there will be acute medical conditions that are not covered by the short-term medical coverage policy and/or that may require you to be sent home for more extensive care. Examples of such cases would be life-threatening illness, anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders, and depression.

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)

HIPAA is the acronym for the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996. HIPAA is the first comprehensive Federal legislation designed to protect the privacy of personal health information. If you are evaluated or treated by a health care provider during your stay in the U.S., you may be asked to sign an Authorization for Release of Health Information form, which will ask you to designate those individuals to whom information about your medical condition is released. If you or your parents wish ASSIST to be informed of your medical condition so that we may provide support, ASSIST should be listed on this form, in addition to your parents or guardian, host family, and school personnel. We encourage you to list us so that we may monitor your health and well-being.

Medications

In the orientation mailing you will receive from ASSIST, you will find a number of forms labeled *Authorization for the Administration of Medications during the ASSIST Orientation*. Connecticut State law and regulations require an authorized prescriber's (Physician, Physician's Assistant, Registered Nurse Practitioner) or Dentist's written order – and the parent's or guardian's authorization – for a nurse to administer medications during the ASSIST Orientation. Please read this information carefully and organize your prescription and over-the-counter medicine carefully so that we can administer medication to you during the ASSIST Orientation.

Students are not allowed to take daily medications on their own in the State of Connecticut. All daily medications will be collected at the beginning of Orientation, will be distributed by our staff nurse as prescribed, and will be returned at departure.

Travel Preparation

Obtaining Your Visa

Your school will be sending you the very important United States Government Form **I-20: Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student**, which is required to apply for your F-1 Nonimmigrant visa. Your school will also send you instructions on how to complete the I-20 form, how to pay the SEVIS fee online (with Form I-901), and the additional documents you will need to apply for your visa.

Once you have received the I-20 form and paid the SEVIS fee (Form I-901), you should contact the closest American Embassy or Consulate to request information about obtaining an F-1 student visa. Given the concerns regarding safety and exchange as well as the often high volume of visa requests at American Consulates, we encourage you to begin the process of obtaining your visa as soon as you receive the paperwork from your school.

You will need to provide the following documents to the American Embassy or Consulate when applying for the visa:

- Passport
- SEVIS I-901 payment receipt
- An official, sealed transcript from your school reflecting grades, comments from teachers, class rank, and standardized test scores (SSAT, TOEFL) if available
- A copy of the acceptance letter from ASSIST
- A copy of the acceptance letter from your school
- Financial evidence that shows your family has sufficient funds to cover expenses during the period of your intended study
 - A statement from your family's banker or a bank statement showing your assets
 - Proof of ownership of property, business or other assets

Please contact your school first, then ASSIST, if you have questions about the visa process.

At your U.S. Port of Entry, you will need to present the immigration officer with:

- Your passport with the F-1 visa
- Your Form I-20

- Your Form I-94 (Arrival/Departure Record), completed before landing
- Your I-901 fee payment receipt

Although the Immigration officer should return your Form I-20 after granting you permission to enter the U.S., occasionally they may keep this form. Do not panic. When you arrive at Orientation, please inform the ASSIST staff that your I-20 form was not returned to you when you entered the country. We will inform your school and have them create a new form for you.

Packing

Please read your school catalog concerning clothing requirements at your school, and bring clothing appropriate for the climate. A few schools ask that boys have a dark jacket and white shirt for more formal occasions, and some schools require the wearing of a sport coat or blazer, shirt, tie, and slacks for classes. Requirements for girls vary also, so please check the catalog or contact the school. Please pay particular attention to schools that require uniforms, many of which will offer several options for purchase.

Remember that closet space is quite limited, and you will undoubtedly make purchases while here in the United States, so pack accordingly. We also recommend that you ship any items that you will not be needing right away by surface mail – the least expensive way possible – to the school. When you arrive in the United States, you will be responsible for carrying all of your own luggage to the Orientation site, to the homestay visit, and then to your dormitory at the school! You may also be charged by the airlines if your luggage is in excess of their limits.

Small musical instruments and sports equipment that will fit into your suitcase might be included. Remember to bring pictures or slides of your hometown and perhaps the area in which you live to show to your new American friends. Do not attempt to bring complete bed linens with you. You may opt for linen service where the school provides them for a fee, or you can purchase them easily and inexpensively after you arrive at the school. Be sure to read your school catalog for details, and discuss any needs with your advisor when you arrive.

Mobile Phones, International Calling and Internet Use

Although it is not necessary for ASSIST students to have *mobile phones* during their year in the U.S., many choose to utilize them. These are ASSIST's recommendations for mobile phone use:

- Students can check with their current mobile phone provider about a plan that will work in the U.S.
- Students may be able to purchase a U.S.-based SIM card for use with their personal mobile phone.
- Students may choose to purchase a prepaid phone package also known as a “pay-as-you-go” phone.
- Please do not expect your host family to add you to their family plan. Adding an extra line can be costly, and removing a line at the end of the hosting experience can pose additional challenges with their mobile plan carrier.

Students are expected to read, understand and abide by their school's mobile phone use policy, usually outlined in the student handbook.

For *international calling*, ASSIST recommends that each student use an international calling card, credit card, Skype or similar Internet calling program. While it is important for students to stay in touch with families and friends at home, exchange students spending too much time on the phone or on Skype tend to have a difficult time adapting. It is important to remember why you are here, and to be sure your phone time use is not taking away from time with your host family and friends, or from schoolwork and activities.

We recommend that you limit your phone calls to an acceptable number per month (1-2 times/week), and limit the time spent on each call. E-mailing and letter writing can be great alternative forms of communication, and not only are they usually less expensive than a phone call, but they also allow the recipients to read your words over and over again and also forward them on to others who want to hear your stories.

The *Internet* can be a great tool for finding information, for entertainment, and for staying in touch with family and friends. However, it is important to remember that the use of the Internet at your host's home or at school is a privilege. Abuse of this privilege can create many problems for you, your homestay family, and your school. You are expected to read, understand, and abide by your school's policies on Internet and computer use.

In addition to being a great tool, the Internet can also be a great distraction, detracting from your immersion experience. We recommend that you limit your use of the Internet. The more time that you spend on the Internet chatting to friends and family from home, the less time you are spending on homework or on socializing with dorm parents and friends at your school, or with

your homestay family during breaks. You came to the U.S. to experience American culture. You cannot do this successfully if you are spending too much time focused on home.

Travel in Safety

A concern shared by all citizens in free societies is the safety of traveling to and living in another country. ASSIST is acutely aware of the changed landscape of international travel and study, as are our member schools. Our schools work very diligently to make their campuses as safe as possible, although we acknowledge that achieving absolute safety is beyond our power.

While the challenges encountered in traveling and studying abroad have increased, so has the mandate ASSIST feels to bring citizens from around the world together to develop friendships that will help form a more peaceful world in the generations ahead. As an ASSIST student, you will be part of this evolving world, and we hope your experience will prepare you to be an agent of positive change.

Arrival and Orientation

ASSIST representatives will meet you at the airport when you arrive. An orientation program, to be held prior to your travel to your school or homestay family, will be provided by ASSIST. Transportation, room and board are included. The purpose of the orientation is to provide a time for you to socialize with the other ASSIST students (including those from other countries) and with our staff, and to attend workshops that will help you with adjustment to life in the United States.

In this regard, we hope that you will make an effort to prepare yourself by reading something current in the areas of American politics, government, history, science, geography, or literature. We will be sending you ASSIST orientation materials to help you with your preparation for a cross-cultural experience, and it will be important that you give this material your thorough attention.

Homestay Experience

Unless your school begins classes immediately following the ASSIST Orientation, you will be the guest of an American homestay family for the period of time between the close of the orientation session and the opening of school. Please keep in mind that this family has invited you to live with them because they are interested in you as a person, and they do not receive any

financial compensation for this. Therefore, you must expect to use some of your own money for personal needs.

We know that you will make every effort to get along with your homestay family, which is anxious to show you something about the American way of life. While they might not expect you to agree with their way of doing things, or their political or religious philosophies, they will expect your cooperation in being willing to listen and learn, and in turn will want to learn something about your way of life. Some families will have teenage children, which will give you the chance to meet others your own age. Most families will take you sightseeing in the area and give you some background about the region in which they live.

During the school year, you will make friends who will invite you to spend weekends or school vacations with them. This is a wonderful opportunity for you to meet a variety of people. Your homestay family is not expected to host you for weekends and school vacations during the school year, although you may develop a relationship with them that makes this possible. It will be your responsibility to make plans with other friends during those times. Should you need help with this, your advisor should be called upon to assist you. We hope you will write a letter of thanks to your homestay family after your visit. Try to keep in touch with them during the year, and perhaps have an occasional visit.

American Independent Secondary Schools

Attending an American independent secondary school will be a unique experience for you. You will find that the majority of students come from families which have had some higher education and are economically comfortable. Some students may come from very wealthy families, while others receive some form of financial help from the school. Please remember not to judge your fellow students by their economic backgrounds but rather as individuals who are interested in receiving the best education our schools have to offer. Have an open mind, and listen to their points of view, but at the same time share with them your own cultural and educational background in a manner that will encourage them to listen to your way of thinking. No one will expect you to like everything about America, but if you must be critical, do so constructively.

Since most of you have never attended a boarding school before, a new experience will be to conform to the regulations set by each independent boarding

school for its students. While rules vary in each school, generally they limit a student's freedom in a way that you may find difficult to understand. For example, the number of free weekends you are allowed to spend away from the school may be limited; perhaps there will be a bed time hour designated; and in some schools a dress code may be established. You may be given "work" hours if you are late to class or do not appear at meals.

Please read your school handbook to familiarize yourself with these rules before school begins, and set a good example by following the rules without complaint. Remember that the school is giving you an ASSIST scholarship; your acceptance of it carries with it the obligation to conform to its rules and regulations. To quote an appropriate statement from a participating school's catalog:

It is not the School's purpose to demand blind conformity, but to encourage and train imagination and individual leadership, to stimulate creative thinking and action, and to reward the courage to be different without harm to self or others.

School Procedures

Advisor

Each school will appoint a faculty or staff member as a personal advisor to give you individual assistance with academic, social, and personal matters throughout the year. Your advisor could be a teacher, a school counselor, or even the Director of Admissions, and should be consulted about decisions with which you need help. The ASSIST representative at the school will also be available to help you.

ASSIST Representative

At each school, we have designated an ASSIST representative, our local program representative, who is a key link between ASSIST at our offices and you at the school. This person will be identified to you by Orientation, and they will take a special interest in your well-being and adjustment. The ASSIST representative will check in with you monthly during the course of the year and is available, in addition to your advisor and teachers, for support and advice.

Roommate

Most schools have double rooms, which means you will be sharing a room. We

suggest that you and your roommate make decisions together about furnishings. You might like to bring posters from home to decorate your dorm room.

Books

Try to purchase second hand books for your courses. If the school has none, perhaps you could purchase those you need from a student who previously took the course. See your advisor about this detail.

Academic Schedule

Courses in American History and English (or American Literature) are required for ASSIST students. Other courses would be in accordance with your requirements in your home school and your personal interests. Math, science, and language, for example, could be taken in addition to American History and English. Whatever courses you choose, please keep in mind that you will not receive preferential treatment in workload or grading. Expect difficulties in the beginning, but later on you will be glad you were competing on the same basis as the American students.

If American History is not offered, or you are a tenth grader and are unable to enroll in American History, we ask that you select another course that has as its aim acquiring knowledge of American culture and history.

Spanish and Bulgarian Co-Validation

Spaniards and Bulgarians will find a paper in this packet explaining the procedure for co-validation. Remember that ASSIST does not guarantee that co-validation is possible. If the school that you will be attending offers the courses that would make co-validation possible, and you can take them as a part of your normal academic schedule, then you can tell your advisor and academic dean in the fall that you will seek co-validation. It will be your responsibility to do all of the necessary paper work yourself well in advance of the close of school.

Driver's Education Course

ASSIST students are absolutely forbidden to drive a car, motorcycle, all-terrain vehicle, motor boat or any similar vehicle while they are in the United States – even before or after the end of the school year. We ask you to be honest and observe this rule for your own protection and for reasons of legal liability. Equally important, ASSIST students may not enroll in a Driver's Education course in America, since such courses have as an integral part of the

curriculum the practice driving of an automobile, and this is not allowed. If you violate this rule, you may be asked to withdraw from the ASSIST program.

The United States High School Diploma

You are accepted by ASSIST and your school as a one-year exchange student and not as a candidate for a diploma. The most important factor is that you have a strong year as a good citizen and scholar, and receive the enthusiastic support of your school and ASSIST, should you ever want to return to the United States at a later date and attend an American university. You are not, under any circumstances, to ask the authorities at your school to award you a diploma, or to change your grade status from the grade that you would normally be enrolled in had you remained in your home country. The American school has the sole authority to determine grade status and a student's eligibility for receiving a diploma. This decision is made prior to acceptance and cannot be changed.

Personal Expenses

We advise you to allow US \$1,800–\$2,500 for expenses such as the cost of books and supplies (you must purchase these in the U.S., and they are expensive), miscellaneous school fees, laundry, private lessons, entertainment, gifts, personal expenses, and transportation within the United States. Please bring only a small portion of that amount with you when you arrive. Your parents should send the balance directly to the school for deposit to your account – if the school offers this option – or to a local bank where you can open up an account. You may draw on these funds as needed.

In this packet is a memo that will help you to project the amount of money you will need for personal expenses during your exchange year. We are happy to advise you, and the school will help you manage your funds, but ultimately the responsibility is yours and your family's to make sure that you spend wisely and retain enough money to cover your expenses.

Part-Time Employment

ASSIST students must provide their own money for personal expenses. While students are not expected to hold jobs during their year here, some of you may be interested in earning a little extra pocket money through part-time work. However, you must realize that your school will require you to be involved in the school program many hours during the day, in the evenings and on the weekends as well. Most likely you will not have time to add anything to your busy schedule.

You should know, however, that the United States government regulations permit you to do part-time, informal work not to exceed 10 hours per week. You may not appear on a payroll. The jobs of this type which might be available are language tutoring and baby sitting. Most often these jobs are done on a volunteer basis to show appreciation for the opportunities being provided. Many schools have community service jobs that all students do as part of a shared responsibility to their school, and no financial reimbursement is given.

School Rules and Regulations

Your year in America is governed both by the rules of ASSIST and by the rules of your school. It is important that you understand both sets of rules and embrace them. In the few instances where ASSIST students have violated major rules, their disappointment at being asked to return home has been keen.

Among the items sent you by your school should be a student handbook. If one has not been sent to you, please contact the school and request one. This should be read thoroughly, by you and your parents, in advance of your departure. Be clear that your school has its own philosophies and rules, and you cannot assume you will have a general knowledge that will suffice. **ASSIST supports the rules of each member school, and we are the school's partner in expecting you to abide willingly by those rules.**

A key issue regarding rules is the use of alcohol and illegal drugs. In American society, as in your own, there are concerns about the use of alcohol and other illegal substances. Use of these substances is forbidden in every ASSIST school, and you are expected to abide by this important rule. The use of tobacco, including smokeless tobacco, is also forbidden by ASSIST and your school.

If you are exposed to the substance use of other students, and are bothered by it, you should contact a trusted faculty member to discuss this in confidence. If you need further help, please contact the ASSIST office in Suffield for confidential help with your concerns.

Participation in School Programs

Leadership and Involvement

Unlike many schools systems in Europe, American independent schools make the athletic, extracurricular, community service and leadership programs an integral part of the school experience. ASSIST students have made remark-

able contributions to their school communities both in and outside of the classroom, and we encourage you to find meaningful ways to utilize your strengths and talents. This is an excellent way to develop leadership skills, to immerse yourself in the community, and to thank the school for granting the scholarship and opportunity to you.

Classroom

Our hope is that each ASSIST student will be given an opportunity in the classroom to express his or her particular views, as an international student and as an individual. We encourage you to speak up as a representative of your country as well as an individual in these situations. You may not always agree with what is expressed in class, but we hope you will disagree in a constructive and respectful manner so that your classmates may benefit from your point of view. You will find enriching relationships with your teachers and enjoy learning from them outside of class as well.

Athletics

International students will find that many American schools include athletics as a regular part of the school program. All students who are physically able are expected to participate in some form of sports activity each day. Your school catalog will show you the variety of sports offered, according to the season, and we hope you will be cooperative in participating in these activities. You will have an opportunity to participate in the sports you play at home, and it is also enjoyable to try new sports during seasons in which you do not have a sport you normally participate in.

Extra-Curricular Activities

In addition to sports, we encourage you to participate in as many activities outside the classroom as time permits. There are many to choose from (see your school catalog). Your school will expect you to become involved in the life of the school community and welcomes your contributions.

Cultural Events

Your school will provide opportunities for visits to museums, and to attend concerts, lectures, and plays in the area or nearby cities. There will also be cultural and social activities at your school. We hope you will take advantage of these opportunities to meet as many American students as possible and to learn something about the cultural life of Americans.

Public Speaking

Your American school, community church or a club may ask you – or you may

volunteer – to give a talk about your school at home or about your country. We encourage you to do so. It will be a great opportunity for others to have a chance to learn something about you and your country.

Academic Reports

You will receive grades, effort ratings and comments for your academic courses several times during the year. These reports will be sent to your parents and to the ASSIST office in the USA. We know you will make every effort to do your best, but do not take your academic studies so seriously that you do not have time for anything else. We want you to take some time to develop friendships with other students and members of the faculty at your American school.

School Newspaper Pictures, Articles and Publicity

We would appreciate it if you would make copies of any school news article, picture, or publicity which concerns you as an ASSIST student, and send them to our office. While we will be communicating with you often during the year, and welcome hearing from you and learning of your experiences, this material is also extremely helpful in our continuing effort to present ASSIST to others. Please send us information in electronic form and by electronic means, where possible, and accompanying pictures are very helpful. We hope to feature many of these stories in our electronic newsletter and on our web site.

Vacations and Travel

Vacations

American students and families are quite generous in inviting international students to their homes to share holidays with them. If you have not been invited anywhere for a school holiday, make this fact known to your advisor, allowing enough time in advance, and he or she will help you make plans. Often, your American classmates are unaware that you have not received an invitation, but if they knew, they would be pleased to have you visit their homes. You are responsible for transportation costs, unless you can ride with the parents of your friends. Please inform the ASSIST office of your plans for all school holidays, and especially notify us in April about the time period between the close of school and your return flight home.

Going Home for Christmas or Other Vacations

You are expected to stay in the United States for the full ten months. If you violate this rule, you may be asked to withdraw. Our policy is that permission

will not be granted to return home for holidays under any circumstances other than a death or grave illness in your immediate family. You will learn more about Americans by spending your holiday time in their homes. You will be in the United States for only ten months. Since you know in advance the exact dates you will be in the United States, you must arrange for special examinations and other personal matters before you leave home, or until you return home at the end of the school year.

Visits from Family and Relatives

Since ASSIST wants you to receive as much exposure as possible during your American experience, and to make a smooth integration and adjustment to this way of life, we strongly discourage visits from parents, relatives, and friends from home for the first six months of your ASSIST year. Your parents may well receive invitations to attend school functions, including Parents Weekend in the fall, but we encourage them to decline these invitations. ASSIST, and all other exchange organizations, have learned that students have a much more successful exchange experience if they become fully integrated into a new culture and do not have visits from family until the latter part of their year in America.

If your parents or other relatives desire to visit, it is best if it occurs in the spring term. Professional or other unique travel opportunities may bring your family to the States before six months have elapsed, and we do not rule out visitation in this case if it is the only time your family members could visit with you. The six-month guideline is drafted with your adjustment and well being in mind, and we strongly encourage you to adopt it.

Staying in the United States After School Closes

In most cases, your return flight home has been booked for the day after the conclusion of the academic year. If you plan to extend your stay in the United States beyond that point, you must find friends to visit or make travel plans for the period between the closing of school and the date of your return flight home. It is also possible that you might receive an invitation to remain with your host family, but you must not assume this, as they may have made other plans.

Discuss this with your school advisor and inform the ASSIST office of your plans (an e-mail reminder will be sent to you in this regard). This is VERY IMPORTANT, as we must know when you are leaving and how – and may need to contact you if we become aware of a change in the schedule of your flight. You are responsible for arrangement and payment of transportation to the airport from wherever you are vacationing.

Some ASSIST students ask to stay in the United States during the summer in order to travel. The following are important considerations:

- ASSIST's responsibility for you, and your school's responsibility for you, terminates with the end of the school year. Schools, host families and ASSIST expect you to leave for home at this time.
- ASSIST must have written permission from your parents if you are staying beyond the close of the school year.
- If you stay for part of the summer, you must arrange for your own transportation home, which cannot be later than your visa expiration date.
- You will need adequate funds and places to stay.
- You may not enroll in any other program, even a summer school, that requires a change of visa or that keeps you in the U.S. past the date of the visa issued through your school (including the 60-day grace period).
- Your short-term health insurance covers you through your original departure date and would need to be extended at your own expense.

The main purpose of the ASSIST Program is for you to spend the year at an American school with its faculty and students, with American families, and with travel as an additional benefit. You may have more than two months of holiday time within your ten-month stay in the United States, during which you may travel to other parts of the country. We recommend that you make wise use of your vacation time, and that you return home by the middle of June.

Travel Outside the United States

During your ASSIST year, permission to travel to another country cannot be granted without (a) a letter from your family giving you permission to go to that country, and (b) a letter of invitation from the family or organization that will be hosting you. You must also have the designated school official sign your I-20 form before you take any trip outside of the United States. Without this signature, you may not be allowed to reenter the country. As well, you should plan to consult an official in the consulate of the country to which you plan to travel – requirements vary, both by country of destination and by country of citizenship. Leave plenty of time to get all of this done, as the entire process can take a month.

Permission to travel to Canada (which may also require a visa), Bermuda, the Bahamas and Mexico is generally granted by ASSIST, assuming that you have followed the steps outlined above. If you desire to travel to a country other

than those noted, permission must be sought, in advance of making plans, with the ASSIST office in Suffield. Permission will be granted in those instances where the educational value of the trip is significant and enhances the overall experience of the ASSIST year.

Medical Emergencies When Traveling

When you are away from your school, it is important to be prepared for medical emergencies that may arise. You should always carry your insurance card with you, even when school is in session, but you should also carry with you a copy of the form labeled "Parent Release for Medical Treatment and Emergency Medical Care." Should you require medical treatment when away from school or your permanent host family, and should your parents be unreachable, you will need this form to allow medical professionals to treat you.

Further Study at American Secondary Schools and Colleges

When you accept an ASSIST scholarship, you are making a philosophical commitment to a two-year experience: a year in the U.S. at an outstanding independent school, and a year at home sharing what you have learned. At the conclusion of your ASSIST year, you may not remain in the United States to continue your studies at your American school, which as a member of our program has agreed that your scholarship will only be granted for one year.

ASSIST students may not apply for any further study at an American school, college or university until the ASSIST program has been fully completed and you return to your home country. We are designated by the United States Department of State as a "one-year exchange program." You have been accepted into the ASSIST program with the firm understanding that you will return to your home country at the end of this one year in the United States.

An exception exists for postgraduate students who already have a diploma from their secondary school at home. Postgraduate students may apply directly to American colleges or universities and may enroll in the year following their ASSIST year.

Should you wish to return to the U.S. for college or university study, both your school and ASSIST can be helpful, but your pursuit of this goal must not interfere with your immersion experience. You must be respectful of your school's college counseling schedule, which generally focuses on 12th graders,

although most schools will arrange meetings with 11th graders during the spring term. You should feel free to ask the college counselor(s) at your school about the process, and in what ways they can guide you and be helpful in your search. At most schools, you may be able to attend informational meetings presented by college admissions representatives visiting your school throughout the year. Please do not expect your host family to take you on tours of colleges unless they have specifically made the suggestion or have invited you along for a trip.

Through conversations with eminent universities in the U.S. and educational consultants abroad, it is our understanding that you will be a stronger candidate when applying from home rather than applying from an independent school in the U.S. Because American universities define "pools" of candidates, an international student applying from his or her "country pool" has a better chance of entering a competitive university than applying from his or her "American school pool," which is filled with applicants to these very same universities.

Most ASSIST schools will be helpful in identifying potential universities that match you well, and American teachers will gladly write letters of recommendation. ASSIST also writes letters of recommendation on behalf of our alumni. More than 220 ASSIST alumni have returned to the States for university, with Harvard leading the way with 36 Scholars. We know a great deal about this process and strongly suggest you trust our judgment, and that of the school, in helping you.

After you return home to complete your secondary education, and as you continue the college search process, please inform us, and the ASSIST school that you attended so that we can support your application.

ASSISTance

As you prepare yourself to become an ASSIST scholar, please call upon us to help in your transition. This is a lifelong relationship, one that begins with selection and placement, continues through Orientation and the ASSIST year, and continues through your university years and career. We look forward to being a part of your ASSIST year and future and hope we can provide helpful ASSISTance along the way.

ASSIST is a non profit organization with tax exempt status and is incorporated in the state of Vermont. ASSIST is designated by the United States State Department as an authorized Exchange Visitor Program. ASSIST is also able to facilitate the issuance of the J-1 visa under which our students study in the U.S. for one academic year on Exchange Visitor status.

ASSIST does not discriminate nor does it condone harassment on the basis of gender, race, color, religion, national or ethnic origin, disability, age, sexual orientation or any other basis proscribed by applicable policies or laws.

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