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# Sustainable Travel Policy for Short Programs

Student mobility can leave a significant carbon footprint. A round trip in the economy class from Zurich to Paris emits more than 300 kg of $CO_2$ per passenger.[1] In comparison, traveling the same distance by train emits some 6.3 kg, i.e. only about 2 per cent of the amount.[2] Avoiding a round trip in economy class from Zurich to Rio de Janeiro saves more than 6 tons of $CO_2$, which is four times the amount of the annual climate compatible emissions budget for one person.[3] These data show the enormous emissions air travel emits.

While most Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have binding sustainable travel policies for staff, there are none for students beyond recommendations to use environmentally friendly means of transportation and the provision of financial incentives to do so. Following consultation with UZH faculties, institutes and the UZH Sustainability Team, Global Student Experience (GSE) has formulated the "Sustainable Travel Policy for Short Programs". The policy outlines which programs will or will not be promoted and funded by GSE, and why. "Short-term mobility programs" comprise all physical student exchange opportunities with durations shorter than those of "classic student mobility" programs which typically last a term, a semester or a year. "Promotion" means (1) distribution of information on the programs in question via the GSE website and other channels, "funding" (2) the provision of scholarships for the programs. The policy is linked on GSE's website for short programs.

This policy was drawn up following the overarching sustainability efforts at UZH. The UZH Sustainability Policy states that UZH should act as a role model in supporting sustainable development. This includes steps to reduce carbon emissions taken by Central Services units such as GSE within their respective areas of operation.[4] GSE continues to encourage students to participate in short-term programs, but is conscious of the fact that this creates potential incentives for unsustainable travel. The evolution of classic semester mobility to more inclusive formats like short programs is a fundamentally positive development in increasing opportunities for academic experiences abroad.[5] Initiatives like these will see student mobility numbers rise in the coming years and many HEIs, including UZH, have included this goal in their wider internationalization objectives.[6] The environmental impact of shorter mobility programs abroad may be proportionally higher than that of longer programs, however. More students will have more opportunities to participate in mobility programs more frequently. Shorter stays also lead to the desire for shorter travel times, which in turn favors air travel. This shows the paradox of sustainable internationalization. HEIs must find a reasonable way to balance promotion of shorter programs with efforts to reduce mobility-related carbon emissions.[7]

For the purposes of this policy, the practical answer lies in a short program's duration: Studies suggests there is a kind of optimal ratio – the "transformative value" – between the duration and the academic value of a short

[1] See atmosfair flight offset.
[2] UZH uses atmosfair's calculations for flight-related emissions. Depending on the RFI factor and other data used, the exact emissions can differ. For the values of the train-based emissions, see INFRAS 2021.
[3] The climate compatible annual emissions budget for one person is defined as 1.5 tons of $CO_2e$ per person per year, see atmosfair.
[4] See measures of the faculties and other units at UZH.
[5] FRAME Alex et al (2020). Identifying Barriers to Student and Staff Mobility among European Universities. FORTHEM Alliance.
[6] See UZH Global Strategy 2030.
[7] ALVES Helena et al (2023). Sustainable internationalisation for a sustainable Europe: The role of Higher Education internationalisation in fostering a more environmentally friendly continent. Brussels: Green Erasmus Partnership.

mobility stay. The widely agreed-upon minimum duration is three weeks, though ideally it would be longer.[8] While there are calls for the minimum duration for short programs to be significantly longer[9], UZH's former International Relations Office reached the same conclusion of a three-week minimum duration in the context of its UZH International Summer Schools (UZHISS). On this basis GSE has formulated the following policy for the promotion and funding of short programs:

**GSE expects students to travel abroad by train or other low carbon transportation. If air travel is necessary, the minimum duration for the short program must be three weeks.**

1. GSE will promote and fund short programs requiring air travel only if their duration is three weeks or more (e.g. for short programs overseas).
2. GSE supports the use of environmentally friendly means of transportation by providing additional scholarships, especially if this results in multi-day travel.

Exceptions can be made in special cases and are subject to approval from GSE.

In sum, GSE expects students to use ground transportation wherever possible. Scholarships for short programs lasting less than three weeks will be contingent upon the use of environmentally friendly transportation. GSE does not want to stop students from participating in (shorter) programs in locations only reachable by air, but it has taken the conscious decision to no longer promote, fund or organize such programs. This policy affirms GSE's commitment to pursuing more sustainable practices not at the cost of, but as a necessary factor in responsible internationalization.

[8] ERDEI, Luca Alexa, KÁPLÁR-KODÁCSY, Kinga (2020). International Student Mobility at a Glance – Promising Potential and Limiting Barriers of Non-traditional Mobility. Desk Research Report. Budapest: ELTE Eötvös Loránd University Department of Erasmus+ and International Programmes.
[9] DE WIT, Hans, ALTBACH, Philip (2020). "Time to cut international education's carbon footprint". University World News. Accessed 28.08.2023.