

Virtual Student Handbook

STUDY OF THE U.S. INSTITUTES FOR STUDENT LEADERS FROM EUROPE



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Welcome!

Congratulations for being chosen to participate in the Study of the U.S. Institutes for Student Leaders from Europe Program! FHI 360, a Washington, D.C.-based NGO, will implement the Study of the U.S. Institutes for Student Leaders from Europe, a program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). We are proud and excited to have you as participants in the program. You will spend your time participating in enriching workshops and activities, gaining invaluable leadership skills, immersing yourself in another culture, engaging with Americans, and getting to know your peers.

FHI 360 staff will keep in touch throughout your three-week Institute to see how your program is going and to make sure you receive all needed support. Along with FHI 360 staff, university staff members, and ECA staff will be available to answer questions and ensure you have the best possible experience.

Cultural exchange is one of the best ways to understand your place in this wide world we all share. We hope you will make the most of this unique opportunity.

Welcome to the SUSI family!

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Your Program

Expectations

You were chosen for this program because your teachers, community members, and family believe you have demonstrated leadership aptitudes, maturity, integrity, and open-mindedness. Because of their faith in you, we have high expectations for you during this program. In addition to the rules outlined in the Code of Conduct, there are three main attributes we expect you to demonstrate:

- **Openness** – You are here because you want to learn more about others and would like them to learn more about you. An open mind and a smiling face will earn you many new friends and treasured memories.
- **Responsibility** – As young leaders, you have already shown your ability to excel in your schools/communities and overcome challenges. Participating in the SUSI program involves a higher level of responsibility to ensure success. Being a cultural ambassador, participating in activities, being a positive member are responsibilities that only you can fulfill.
- **Enthusiasm** – This is the easy one. You would not be in this program if you were not already excited to learn and do the best you can. Use that same enthusiasm to make the most of every day and enjoy each new activity we have planned for you.

Do your best to meet these expectations and this experience will be as wonderful and memorable as you hope it will be.

Program Activities

The program will consist of virtual academic learning, interactive activities, practical experiences, and other opportunities for you to learn about leadership, volunteerism, and the United States. The activities will be a mix of virtual classroom studies, virtual site visits, virtual leadership training sessions, and virtual social time with your peers. These activities will be a mix of both synchronous and asynchronous to allow for flexibility in completing the program.

Keeping in touch with FHI 360 staff

While at on your program, FHI 360 staff will want to check in on your program progress. While we will not be with you the whole three weeks of your virtual time at the Institute, we will be checking in via Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to keep in touch with your stories and photos. You may always contact FHI 360 staff with any questions or concerns you have during the program.

American Culture

Each and every American represents American culture in his or her own way, especially virtually. It is a large country that is always growing, changing, and reinventing itself. The United States is full of complex views and contradictions that can be confusing at first. It will take time to become familiar with our customs, and nobody expects you to be perfect from the first day. The best approach is to relax, smile and ask honest questions, knowing that this will be a time of learning and discovery.

This section includes some general guidelines to the way Americans act. As you know, no one rule can define any culture, and during your program you may see people acting differently than is written in this section. FHI 360 staff and your American peer mentors are happy to answer any questions and be your cultural guides.

Politeness

Whenever you ask for help or someone helps you, it is polite to say “please” and “thank you.” In fact, you will hear yourself saying please and thank you a lot. This is a good thing! Your presenters, your fellow students-everyone likes to hear these words. Using these words is a basic sign of respect and will make every situation easier.

Directness

While Americans value politeness, they like to get “straight answers” and can be very direct in their communication. They might ask very specific questions early in a conversation or might end a discussion quickly. Please know these manners are not meant to be rude or impatient – it is just part of the culture.

Some visitors will find the way Americans use “yes” and “no” to be confusing. For example, some cultures consider it very rude if you say “yes” first time you are asked a question or offered something. It is the opposite in the United States. If you say “no” when asked or offered something, people will think you truly mean it and may not ask you again! Don’t be nervous about saying “yes” or “no” the first time you are asked a question or offered something.

Humor

Americans love to laugh. Everyone that explores a new culture for the first time will make mistakes and you will be no different. For example, one American visiting Jordan completely confused the meanings of *marhaba* and *mabrouk*. During the first days of his program, instead of saying “hello” he told everyone “congratulations” for meeting him! Instead of being offended, people got a good laugh out of the mistake and continued the joke by giving him the nickname *Mr. Congratulations*. Don’t be afraid to laugh about the simple misunderstandings that will happen.

“It’s not good or bad, it’s just different...”

Remember that American culture is neither better nor worse than your culture; it’s just different.

Every country has their own unique history and contributes in its own valuable way to the global community. We quite simply ask that you keep an open mind. As you know the United States is a large

mix of ethnic backgrounds, religions, sexualities, and even different cultures within the same country. No one person will be the same as another, and that's part of the beauty in this new experience. While country pride is important and productive, please note it is considered impolite to frequently talk about countries in terms of good and bad.

Being on time

Arriving, even virtually, on time is a critical part of Americans' daily routine. Even in the summer, many families have very full schedules with multiple appointments they must attend every day. The person who is often late is considered rude, so please arrange your schedule so you log on to program activities *before* they are scheduled to start.

Religion in the U.S.

Followers of almost every religion, large and small, live in the United States. You will find Muslims and Christians, Hindus and Jews, people that follow multiple religions or people that follow no religion. Whatever their decision, each person contributes something to American culture.

Religion is a very personal subject for many Americans, so don't be offended if some people do not wish to talk about their beliefs. If you do discuss religion with your peers, remember it is considered rude to tell someone what they believe is wrong. While it is interesting to see how someone's religion is different, focusing on the beliefs your religions share can create strong trust and understanding.

Politics

The United States, like every country, has its own blend of politics covering local, national and international subjects. As with religion, Americans consider their political views to be personal and won't often talk about them except with close friends or family. You should feel free to talk about topics that are important to you; just remember that some people don't appreciate political conversations.

Sharing your culture

Since this is a cultural *exchange*, don't be shy about sharing your culture with your fellow students. You are all very unique individuals coming from a wide range of backgrounds, and that's what we love about you! Think about what makes you proud to be from your country. Is it the culture? The people? The land? During your program you will not only represent yourself as an individual, but you will also represent your friends and family. Ask them what they think is special about your culture and country.

People will be excited to virtually meet you and will have many questions about who you are and where you're from. Think about the ways you can best share answers with them. Maybe you could show pictures or a video of your home and your daily life. Are there any traditional items that you feel represent your country? Maybe you could play a playlist of your favorite songs. Whatever you choose, think about what is most meaningful for you to share with others.

Code of Conduct

Congratulations on being chosen to participate in the Study of the U.S. Institutes for Student Leaders from Europe! To help this be a successful and rewarding experience, all participants must agree to the following Code of Conduct:

1. I understand this is a time of learning and cross-cultural exchange. I will respect the culture and opinions of others.
2. I will take my role as a cultural ambassador for my country and my family seriously, and will always represent them in the best way possible.
3. I agree to follow the rules and expectations of the staff at each university and FHI 360, host families and program presenters.
4. If I do not follow the rules of the Department of State per the SUSI Terms and Conditions, I understand this will result in consequences. This could be exclusion from program activities, my parents being told of my behavior, or early removal from the program.
5. I promise to always be on time and prepared for every session.
6. I will help make my program a positive learning environment for myself and the other participants by always participating during program activities.
7. If I have problems or concerns I cannot fix by myself, I will ask Institute or FHI 360 staff to help me.
8. I will do my best to experience something new every day and promise to have as much fun as I can!

I agree to participate in the Study of the U.S. Institutes for Student Leaders from Europe as described by the Code of Conduct.

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____