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COMM EXCHANGE

Comm Exchange is an opportunity for ten Northwestern Qatar students to spend the Spring semester of their Junior year as a fulltime student and experience life as Northwestern University student at the University’s home campus in Evanston, Illinois. The period of exchange spans two quarters at the home campus – from January to June.

The selection committee assesses applications based on criteria specified later in this handbook. Selection is competitive and determined by the quality of applications. Alternates are not selected. Final approval is subject to visa requirements in the United States.

Timeline

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Application Process Opens</td>
<td>Summer Break</td>
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<td>Application Deadline</td>
<td>First Tuesday of Fall Semester</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-Departure Sessions</td>
<td>Bi-weekly through Fall Semester</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fly to Chicago</td>
<td>Last Week of December</td>
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<tr>
<td>First day of classes</td>
<td>January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last day of exams</td>
<td>June</td>
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Cancellation of Comm Exchange Program:

The Comm Exchange Program will be cancelled on the following circumstances:

1. The US Embassy in Qatar suspends the issuance of student visa applications
2. The United States government does not allow non-US citizens to enter the country
3. The home campus moves classes from live to remote status
4. Force majeure such as pandemic, war, terrorist acts, epidemic and the like

It is therefore pertinent that applicants need to work closely with their Academic Adviser to work on alternative plans should the Comm Exchange Program be cancelled.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

To be eligible for the Exchange, the applicant must:

- Have a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.2 at the time of application
- Be a full-time student (taking a minimum of 3 NU-Q classes) at the time of application
• Have completed 4 full-time (fall and spring) semesters at the time of application
• Have completed 5 full-time semesters at the beginning of Comm Exchange
• Have earned junior standing (14 units according to NU-Q policy) by the start of Comm Exchange
• Have completed all MIT major requirements for the first two years of the degree program prior to participation in Comm Exchange

Students are NOT eligible to participate in Comm Exchange if they:
• Are planning to graduate in the same academic year as participation in Comm Exchange
• Are on academic probation
• Have unresolved incompletes
• Have a registration hold
• Have a current academic integrity investigation
• Have a current non-academic conduct violation
• Have a financial hold

NOTE: Any disciplinary actions, past violations of academic integrity, or other issues may disqualify a student regardless of his/her other qualifications. If any of these issues arise between acceptance to Comm Exchange and departure to the United States, a student may be removed from the program.

Plan ahead and ensure to raise your questions about eligibility, Evanston classes, or how Communication Exchange works in relation to your degree/graduation plan, to your NU-Q primary Academic Adviser at the earliest opportunity.

PRE-DEPARTURE REQUIREMENTS

Pre-Departure Sessions

Selected students are required to participate in six pre-departure sessions. The sessions will be scheduled during the Fall Semester and will always take place in the evening to accommodate the staff in Evanston. At each session, someone from the main campus joins remotely to discuss a specific topic that is relevant for planning and preparing for the semester in Evanston. For example, during the session on Living in Evanston, staff from the Office of Undergraduate Housing and Residential Life will be available to answer any questions about this aspect.

Meet With Your Academic Adviser

A vital requirement in planning your pre-departure sessions involves meeting your adviser to prepare a schedule of classes for the two quarters of coursework at the home campus. Students should conduct their own research about available courses to determine those of specific interest before meeting the adviser. Students will be asked to provide a current degree audit during the fall term and prior to registering for classes on the Evanston campus.
Visa Application

To participate in Comm Exchange, any student who is not a U.S. citizen with an American passport must apply for a J-1 Student Visa. There are two fees in the application process: the U.S. SEVIS fee and the DS-160 fee. The actual fee amount varies according to nationality. Each student should check online for the precise amount depending on their home country and citizenship. Comm Exchange is an elective program hence payment of visa fees should be borne by the student and will not be covered by Northwestern University Qatar.

The visa process can be tedious, and visa and travel requirements can change. We advise students to start the process immediately upon notification of acceptance. Although each student must submit their own application, the Communication Program Administrative Assistant can help with clarification of instructions and guidance. NU-Q cannot guarantee the approval of the student’s visa application. The issuance of visa is entirely at the discretion of the U.S. Embassy. NU-Q will not provide immigration support if the visa application is denied.

Student Travel Requirements

Since Comm Exchange is a school-sponsored trip, participating students must adhere to the NU-Q Student Travel Policy. This means completing all the pre-departure requirements and paying the QAR 500 travel fee. All students should review the NU-Q Student Travel Requirements before applying.

IN-RESIDENCE REQUIREMENTS

Registration

All students must maintain full-time status while studying at the Evanston campus. The full-time course load is three courses in each of the two quarters, i.e. Winter and Spring. Thus, Comm Exchange students must complete 6 courses in total during the period they are in residence at the Evanston campus. This is a requirement of the U.S. State Department for all students on J-1 visas. Students who have fallen out of valid J1 status by failing to register for and complete the required course load will have their SEVIS record terminated.

During preregistration for the Winter and Spring quarters, which will take place in November and February, each student will be registered for 1 course in the School of Communication at the main campus. The School of Communication offers courses in: Communication Sciences and Disorders, Communication Studies, Performance Studies, Radio/Television/Film, and Theatre. Most students choose from the offerings provided by the Radio-TV-Film department (RTVF) or the Communication Studies department (COMM_ST). Students should consider courses that will extend or compliment their degree.
Academic Advisers in Qatar and at the School of Communication in Evanston will help with course selection. Approval to register in any given course is not guaranteed.

You should contact your Academic Adviser as soon as possible to discuss your goals for the exchange and to determine the best options to progress with your academic plan.

**Earning a Minor**

Several minors are offered at the home campus that are not available at NU-Q. Earning a minor during the Comm Exchange period is possible in some cases but often difficult for a number of reasons:

- Courses the student needs may not be offered during those quarters
- Students may not be able to register for a given course
- Students at NU-Q may not have completed the necessary prerequisites for classes in Evanston.

Students seeking to complete an Evanston minor should speak with their Academic Adviser as early as possible to determine what is realistic and, when deemed possible, to fulfill any advance requirements during the fall semester at NU-Q before going to Evanston. NU-Q and NU-E do not guarantee the completion of minors; and even students who attend NU-E on the COMM Exchange Program may not be able to complete an Evanston minor with courses that are available during the time they are enrolled at the main campus.

If a student receives special permission to declare a minor offered only on the Evanston campus, that student must notify their NU-Q Primary Academic Adviser in writing and provide a scan of any minor, certificate, module, or other transcript-visible declaration from the Evanston department offering the minor, certificate, or module. This must be done before their return to NU-Q from Evanston. NU-Q does not guarantee that it will be able to provide classes required for minors that NU-Q does not offer.

All minors, whether at NU-Q or NU-E, must be officially declared by the end of the Junior year. This applies to all students, whether participating in Comm Exchange or not. **NOTE:** NU-Q cannot guarantee the completion of a minor for any individual student or guarantee seats in courses for students enrolled in minors.

**Housing**

For the duration of the Comm Exchange period at NU-E, all NU-Q students must reside in student housing. Any request for off-campus living will be declined. Housing assignments are determined by NU-E Residential Services and NU-Q is not involved in the process of assigning housing in Evanston for COMM Exchange students. Comm Exchange students will follow the same application process as NU-E's students living on campus and must follow the policies and procedures of NU Residential Services.
APPLICATION

The Comm Exchange application consists of five questions that students should prepare to answer in advance of completing the online application:

1. Why do you want to participate in Comm Exchange? Please make clear the reasons you want to participate in this program as they relate to two things: A) your academic plan and goals and B) your career ambitions.

2. Specify five courses you would like to take and explain how each is connected to your academic plan and the progress you have already made in your coursework. Note: You will take more than five courses. The committee is looking to see if you have done a thorough job of preparing and planning for a productive academic experience.

3. Beyond academic and professional interests, explain how and why participating in Comm Exchange will contribute to your personal development. How would Comm Exchange contribute to your personal growth?

4. What associations, activities, and experiences do you hope to engage in during your semester on Comm Exchange, if you are selected?

5. Describe the personal support network you would rely upon during the Comm Exchange semester, both in terms of family and friends as well as NU-E resources.

In preparing your response to Question 2, please review the Northwestern Undergraduate Catalog (NU-E, not NU-Q’s version). In addition to the catalog, we encourage students to look at Evanston schedules for previous terms available on CAESAR for a clearer picture of courses that have been typically offered. As with all university course catalogues and schedules, all courses are not offered every term or every year. Again, consulting with your Academic Adviser after this step will clarify what is realistic in planning for coursework during the Comm Exchange period.

The Comm Exchange application opens during Summer Break and closes during the first week of each Fall Semester. When the applications interface opens, a link will be sent by email and the application should be completed and submitted online.

Please note that the application must be completed from start to finish once you begin. It is not possible to save an unfinished form and return to it later. We recommend that students prepare their responses in a separate document ahead of time to enable copy-pasting them into the application form. Do not leave the form open in the browser for several days thinking to come back later. Doing so will prevent accurate submission of the application information. Inaccurate and incomplete applications are removed from the pool of files reviewed by the Comm Exchange Selection Committee.
Selection

The Comm Exchange Selection Committee consists of the Director and two faculty members from the Communication Program. Applications are blind reviewed. This means the Committee won’t know who submitted each application. All applications are evaluated equitably. The Committee will select the ten best applications evaluated based on the given criteria/rubric. All the applicants will be notified of the result of their respective application through their university email.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I currently have an incomplete, can I still apply?
Yes, although this will influence potential selection. We encourage all interested students to apply, but if acceptance is approved this would be conditional. Incompletes must be resolved before the start of Comm Exchange.

How many classes do I have to take in Evanston?
Evanston uses a quarter system instead of a semester system. That is why Comm Exchange is only possible during the spring semesters at NU-Q. Otherwise, NU-Q students could not earn enough credits to graduate on time in Doha. The home campus has a winter quarter and a spring quarter. Comm Exchange students must be registered for three classes in both of the two quarters. Failing to do so will violate U.S. visa requirements. Therefore, all students must maintain registration in 3 full Evanston credits for both Winter and Spring terms at Evanston (i.e. 6 courses in total). This is a non-negotiable U.S. requirement.

How many units / classes will I earn during my two quarters in Evanston?
The quarter system is shorter than the semester system. As a result, the amount of credit earned in each class is not the same. 1 Evanston unit is equivalent to .70 NU-Q units. Completing 3 NU Evanston units each quarter earns the student 2.10 NU-Q units for a total of 4.20 units of credit for the equivalent NU-Q semester. That amount slightly exceeds the typical unit total students would have otherwise earned if remaining in residence at NU-Q for the same period. In practical terms, this means NU-Q students are able to graduate on-time.

Can I take classes to satisfy an NU-Q minor while studying at the home campus? (For example, Media & Politics or Middle East Studies)
It may be possible, but there is no guarantee an NU-Q student can register for any particular course at NU-E. Please consult your Academic Adviser.

Can I take classes to satisfy my Strategic Communication Certificate?
No.
I only want to go for the Winter quarter and return to Doha after that. Can I go for just one term only?
No. Comm Exchange students must commit to both the Winter and Spring quarters. In practice, classes at the home campus end about one month later compared with our ending dates in Qatar because of differences in the quarter versus semester systems.

I’m planning to graduate in the same semester as the period I would be on Comm Exchange. Am I still eligible for Comm Exchange?
No. Northwestern requires all students to be in residence during the semester they will graduate. That is why it is not possible to do Comm Exchange during the senior year.

If I don’t want to live in student housing. Can I find my own accommodation off campus?
No. All Comm Exchange students are required to live in on-campus student housing.

Will I have a roommate in Evanston?
Potentially. NU-Q students undergo the same process and have same experience like the students at the main campus. Each student is required to submit a student housing application. NU-Q is not involved in decisions about where students live and all housing assignments are determined based on availability.

Will I be able to stay in all-female housing on the home campus?
Students can indicate this as a personal preference. There is only one all-female housing at the Evanston campus hence availability is extremely limited, and NU-Q cannot guarantee available rooms at the dorm. There are also some coed buildings with one or more female-only floor, and all public and shared spaces are coed. It should be noted that NU-Q is not involved in the assignment of housing at the main campus and cannot make any guarantee.

Will NU-Q pay for my visa fees?
No. Comm Exchange is not a requirement for graduation. It is an optional and voluntary program. Selected participants are responsible for all costs associated with applying for a U.S. visa. The fees may vary based on nationality. We recommend investigating the costs prior to applying for Comm Exchange.

I already have a valid B2 tourist visa, do I still need to apply for a visa?
Yes. The United States does not allow students from abroad to study on a tourist (B2) visa. All Comm Exchange students must apply for a J1 Student Visa and the State Department must approve the application for a student to go to Evanston for Comm Exchange. Students selected for Comm Exchange will receive a detailed instructions about and guidance regarding the visa application process.

What if my visa application is rejected by the U.S. government?
A student whose J1 visa application is rejected cannot participate in Comm Exchange. That is why the students are highly encouraged to work with the Academic Adviser to enroll in classes in NU-Q, just in case their visa application is denied.

NU-Q will provide the students all the necessary support in the visa application, however approval of the visa is based solely on the discretion of the US government.
Can I stay in the United States for a holiday after the program ends?
The J1 visa is typically valid for 30 days after a study period ends. In principle, it should be possible to stay for up to 30 days after the spring quarter ends in Evanston. Any student choosing to remain in the United States will be solely and personally responsible to pay for all expenses including accommodation, living costs, health insurance, and any difference in flight costs. It should be noted that for those holding a valid Qatar residence permit, who has been outside of Qatar for more than six months, automatically cancels one’s residence permit (QID). This is a firm policy and handled by the Ministry of the Interior. Northwestern University Qatar will not cover the costs associated with applying for a new Qatar Residence Permit upon returning to Doha.