



# Special Activities for Sponsored Students

## OVERVIEW

As part of their scholarships from the U.S. Department of State (USDOS), FLEX and YES students have extra opportunities as well as additional responsibilities. These activities allow students to learn more about the U.S. and become more involved in their local communities.

## ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITIES

Enhancement activities are group events for FLEX and YES students that are planned and paid for by the local coordinator. The goal of these fun and educational activities is to expand student knowledge of America's culture, history, government, and economy. Examples of enhancement activities include visiting the state capital, going on a factory tour, attending local government meetings, and seeing local historical sites. Coordinators have access to grant funds to pay for these activities, which should be of no cost to FLEX and YES students or their host families.

Coordinators usually aim to provide one enhancement activity per quarter. Occasionally, enhancement activities will entail an overnight trip; your coordinator will be in touch with you about any such arrangements.

## INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION WEEK (IEW)

As part of their scholarship responsibilities, FLEX and YES students are required to hold at least one cultural presentation during IEW (in November). Watch your email in October for further PAX-provided details.

## VOLUNTEER SERVICE

As a part of their scholarship responsibilities, FLEX and YES students are required to complete at least 30 hours of volunteer service. Many FLEX and YES students will choose to volunteer more than 30 hours, and any student who volunteers over 100 will receive a USDOS Volunteer Service Certificate. To qualify as volunteer service, an activity should be unpaid and should provide a benefit to the community beyond the student and host family. Examples of qualifying activities are stocking food at a food bank, tutoring a child, or volunteering with a service club, such as Key Club. Students are usually eager volunteers, ready to give back to their host communities. If host families already do some community service, they can think of ways to involve their student in these activities.

## GLOBAL YOUTH SERVICE DAY (GYSD)

As part of their volunteer service, FLEX and YES students are required to volunteer during GYSD, the largest service day in the world. GYSD takes place every year in mid- to late-April and is celebrated in over 100 countries. The GYSD website ([www.gysd.org](http://www.gysd.org)) is a great resource for finding ways to participate, as are coordinators.

## WORKSHOP OPPORTUNITIES

FLEX and YES students can apply to participate in three weeklong workshops every spring in the Washington, D.C. area (if circumstances permit the meetings to be held in person this program year), with all expenses paid. Participants in the Civic Education Workshop learn about the U.S. federal system of government and civil society through seminars, briefings, and meetings on Capitol Hill. Through the Workshop for Youth Leaders in Teaching English, students learn classroom teaching and leadership skills to develop their ability to teach English to other youth. The Better Understanding for a Better World Conference focuses on cultural and religious diversity, leadership skills, and good management.



# Volunteer Service Requirement

## OVERVIEW

As part of your scholarship responsibilities, FLEX and YES students are required to perform at least 30 hours of volunteer service. Volunteer service is a vital part of American society and culture. Whether done on your own initiative or through PAX, your school, your host family, or a community organization, volunteering provides an important way to learn about your host community and increase mutual understanding. As a volunteer in your community, you will also develop leadership and organizational skills. After your program ends, you'll be able to use the skills that you have learned to give back to your home community.

## WHAT IS VOLUNTEER SERVICE?

To qualify as volunteer service, an activity should be unpaid and should provide a benefit to the community beyond you and your host family. A few examples of qualifying activities are:

- Stocking and distributing food at a food bank
- Mentoring or tutoring a child
- Volunteering with or fundraising for any nonprofit organization or charitable cause
- Participating in a community service project through a school club (Honor Society, Key Club, etc.)
- Assisting a teacher before or after school
- Shoveling snow for a neighbor in need
- Volunteering with a parent/teacher organization within the school or school district
- Time in service club meetings spent planning or organizing volunteer activities (but not for other club business)
- Making country presentations beyond your one mandatory presentation during International Education Week (IEW)
- Volunteering at outreach events, such as community fairs with your placement organization (only 10 such hours will count toward the U.S. Department of State-issued certificate)
- Selling tickets, working concession stands, or ushering at sporting events, concerts, or theater productions (if not required for a class)

## WHAT IS NOT VOLUNTEER SERVICE?

Examples of activities that do not qualify as volunteer service include:

- Doing chores for the host family
- Making one required IEW presentation
- Attending classes, workshops, or events
- Raising funds for personal benefit, such as for a trip, field trip, or dance
- Participating in clubs, student council, sports teams, including as team manager, and school plays. (These are not volunteer activities but typical extracurricular activities in American school systems).

For help identifying volunteer opportunities in your area, you should talk with your coordinator, host family, or school counselor.

**TRACKING & SUBMITTING HOURS**

You can log in to [pax.org/volunteers](https://pax.org/volunteers) using your PAX ID (YES30120, for example) and date of birth. Once logged in, you can easily submit and track your volunteer activities. Review the PAX Volunteers help page ([pax.org/volunteers/help/students](https://pax.org/volunteers/help/students)) for a complete guide.

**APRIL 15 DEADLINE**

The final deadline to submit your hours is April 15. Please be sure to start early and allow enough time. Once completed, let your coordinator know, so s/he can approve your logged volunteer work on time.

**USDOS CERTIFICATE (100+ HOURS)**

Many FLEX and YES students set a goal to complete more than 100 volunteer hours. For those who achieve this goal, the U.S. Department of State (USDOS) offers a volunteer service certificate of appreciation. At the end of the program year, PAX mails this certificate to students who have submitted the proper documentation of their 100+ hours by April 15.

If in early springtime, you find yourself very close to your goal of 100 hours but think you may need a few more hours to reach 100 by April 15, please write to [sponsored@pax.org](mailto:sponsored@pax.org) ahead of time to receive further instruction.

Please note that although all FLEX and YES students are required to complete 30 hours of volunteer service by April 15 (including YES Malaysian students), only students who submit 100+ hours will receive a volunteer service certificate.



# Student of the Month

## OVERVIEW

The Student of the Month program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State (USDOS) to recognize the contributions of FLEX and YES scholars and share their stories with a broader audience. Throughout the academic year, PAX selects one candidate per program (one FLEX; one YES), per month for nomination to the USDOS.

PAX staff, community coordinators, or host families may nominate a FLEX or YES student. Winners receive a certificate and small prize in addition to the honor of being featured on USDOS websites and social media platforms.

## SELECTION CRITERIA

In selecting the Student of the Month, the USDOS considers such factors as:

- The impact of a student's activities in the community and/or at school
- How well the student represents his or her home country
- Whether the student has shown a positive and thoughtful spirit within the host family and community
- Evidence of personal growth and development on program

Additional factors may include:

- Total community service hours
- Number of presentations about a student's home country held
- Specific awards or recognitions received

The USDOS also considers diversity of gender, home country, placement organization, and disability status in granting awards. Before submitting entries to the USDOS, PAX must verify that candidates are in good standing.

## SUBMITTING NOMINATIONS

- Nomination form: Fill out the nomination form at [www.pax.org/som](http://www.pax.org/som), and describe the qualifications and achievements of the candidate in the written narrative field (300 words or fewer).
- Photos: Remember, a picture says a thousand words! For this reason, be sure to upload several photos (300ppi) at [www.pax.org/som](http://www.pax.org/som). Photos should show the student in action with their host family, in school, or out in the community!

Nominations should be submitted no later than the 10th of each month. Please do not send nominations directly to the USDOS.

## QUESTIONS?

For further questions, please email the PAX sponsored programs team at [sponsored@pax.org](mailto:sponsored@pax.org).



# FLEX & YES Calendar 2024/25

## August/September

- Student orientation with Community Coordinator
- ReliaCard (reloadable prepaid debit card) mailed according to arrival date and loaded with \$200 for August (if August arrival) or \$200 for September (if September arrival)
- Students email [sponsored@pax.org](mailto:sponsored@pax.org) to provide own email address (must not change during year)
- Students invited to attend PAX webinar on FLEX and YES programs (watch email for instructions)
- With the help of coordinator, students identify local resources for volunteering opportunities
- Students complete first volunteer service project and record hours (watch email for instructions)
- Students join a school club or sport by end of September
- Students receive Civic Education Week (CEW) and Workshop for Youth Leaders in English Teaching (WYLET) contest announcements from American Councils (AC)

## October

- Stipend for October (\$200) loaded onto ReliaCard on October 1 or earlier
- Students attend Money Matters and International Education Week (IEW) webinars (watch email)
- Students begin preparations for IEW presentations and related PAX contest (watch email)

## November

- Stipend for November (\$200) loaded onto ReliaCard on November 1 or earlier
- Students make mandatory IEW cultural presentations and participate in optional PAX contest
- Students submit CEW and WYLET applications to AC by deadline
- Students submit IEW report to AC (via survey), documenting mandatory participation (watch email)

## December

- Stipend for December (\$200) loaded onto ReliaCard on December 1 or earlier
- FLEX students fill out return date request forms (watch email) from AC (continues into January)
- YES students informed of return dates (by country)
- Students begin preparing "Virtual Exchange" projects (watch email for PAX student contest)
- Eligible students begin receiving IEW certificates (this activity continues through January)

## January

- Stipend for January (\$200) loaded onto ReliaCard on January 1 or earlier
- Mid-year meeting with Community Coordinator and evaluation of first semester
- "Virtual Exchange" projects due for PAX contest

### EVERY MONTH

Submit forms/receipts for reimbursable Incidental Fund expenses: [pax.org/scholarship-reimbursement](https://pax.org/scholarship-reimbursement)

Student of the Month nominations due 10th of each month (September to May): [pax.org/som](https://pax.org/som)

Submit monthly student survey via SurveyMonkey

Record service hours soon after volunteering

## February

- Stipend for February (\$200) loaded onto ReliaCard on February 1 or earlier
- FLEX students begin to be notified (by PAX) of their individually assigned return dates
- Students participate in CEW workshops in Washington, D.C. (if selected)

## March

- Stipend for March (\$200) loaded onto ReliaCard on March 1 or earlier
- Students participate in CEW workshops in Washington, D.C. (if selected)
- Students participate in CSIET art contest
- Students continue to volunteer and ensure minimum 30 hours of volunteer service logged

## April

- Stipend for April (\$200) loaded onto ReliaCard on April 1 or earlier
- FLEX/YES students receive return itineraries from AC (PAX also sends info to host families)
- Students participate in CEW and WYLET workshops in Washington, D.C. (if selected)
- Select students from PAX "Virtual Exchange" contest participate in BUBW conference
- Volunteer hours logged and coordinator approved at [pax.org/volunteers](http://pax.org/volunteers) by April 15
- Students participate (obligatory) in Global Youth Service Day (GYSD) and optional PAX contest
- Students submit Leadership and Mentorship projects by April 15
- Re-entry orientation with Community Coordinator (April or May)
- Students register on USDOS alumni website (watch email from AC for instructions)

## May

- Last stipend and return travel allowance loaded onto ReliaCard on May 1 or earlier (students departing in June receive both May and June stipends)
- Students submit GYSD report to ECA (watch email to submit via survey)
- GYSD projects due for PAX contest
- Students demonstrate appreciation to school administrators and host community through letters to-the-editor and thank you notes
- Last chance to submit reimbursement forms and receipts for Incidental Fund expenses
- Students receive certificates of completion, USDOS volunteer certificates for 100+ hours (if earned) along with the PAX Distinguished Leaders Award for 5+ leadership activities (if earned)
- FLEX students begin returning home
- Select FLEX students attend year-end events in Washington, D.C.

## June

- YES and some FLEX students attend year-end events in Washington, D.C.
- YES students depart
- Remaining FLEX students return home
- Students complete final survey

### IMPORTANT WEB ADDRESSES

Reimbursement Form

[pax.org/scholarship-reimbursement](http://pax.org/scholarship-reimbursement)

Volunteer Service Hours Form

[pax.org/volunteers](http://pax.org/volunteers)

PAX Distinguished Leader Award Report

[pax.org/distinguished-leader-award](http://pax.org/distinguished-leader-award)

Enhancement Activity Reflection Form

[pax.org/enhancement-reflection](http://pax.org/enhancement-reflection)

Student of the Month Nomination Form

[pax.org/som](http://pax.org/som)

USDOS Alumni Website

[alumni.state.gov/user/register](http://alumni.state.gov/user/register)



# 2019-2020 YES DC ORIENTATION

## Dealing with Religious and Cultural Issues

### Welcome to America: A Place Where Religious Diversity is Celebrated!

Dear YES students,

Welcome to America: where people not only can practice their religion freely, but it is also protected by the law. One of the characteristics of America today is its multi-religious, multi-cultural society. You will find that in America diversity is discussed and celebrated.

Part of the YES mission is to foster cooperation and better understanding among people of diverse backgrounds. Through various types of exchanges, people of this millennium can benefit from lessons of the past in a world literally changing to a global village. The YES Program encourages you to embrace your religious identity and engage in constructive dialogue with others.

*This pamphlet is only intended to be a brief reference guide for YES students.*

### Practicing Religious Activities While in the U.S.

Host families and your placement organization would like to make sure that your religious needs are met. Please share your needs with others. For example:

**Prayer:** Let your host family, the school or your friends know that you need to pray. Explain that prayer requires washing and a clean area.

**Wudu/Ablution:** Let them know how you make wudu and how long you normally take in the bathroom. Be considerate. Do not stay for a long time, and minimize the amount of water you use. You will find many bathrooms in America with wooden cabinets, carpet and no drain on the floor; you want to use the tub. You must be careful and avoid splashing water unnecessarily. You may want to keep a small towel in the bathroom to place under your feet when you are making ablution.

**Use of Water in Bathrooms:** Bathrooms in the U.S. are not equipped with washlets or bidets around the toilet. Toilet paper is used. Muslims in America use either a small bucket or bottle of water and leave it near the toilet. You may wish to explain this to your host family.

**Dogs and the Saliva:** Most Americans have pets and many of those pets are dogs. For those of you, who are not used to having dogs in the house, it might take some time to get used to it.

The Prophetic instruction: If the "saliva" of the dog touches the clothes or the hand, it is to be washed "not showered" seven times and one of them with "dirt."

Muslim scholars approved the use of soap or any detergent (not available at the time of the Prophet) for cleaning the affected area. Showering has never been associated with the touching a dog.

You can request that the dog be prevented from entering the bedroom where you pray regularly.

**Mosques:** Some host families may live close to a mosque, while others may be far away. To find the closest mosque to you, go to [www.islamicfinder.org](http://www.islamicfinder.org) and enter your zip code.

**Friday Service (Jumu'ah):** Friday is a school and work day in America so it may be difficult for students to attend Jumu'ah at the mosque. An option is to gather a few Muslims together in your school to pray Jumu'ah. If there is a Muslim Students Association in your school, participate in the Jumu'ah service. If not, you can pray Thuhr prayer of 4 units (raka'at).

**No Pork or Alcohol:** Let others know that you do not eat pork, pork products, or drink alcohol. Many kinds of meat have pork, but are called something else like "sausage, pepperoni, ham, bologna, etc..." Please ask your host family to help you identify foods which may contain elements that are forbidden by your religion.

**Halal/Zabiha Meat:** Depending upon where you are living in America, halal/zabiha meat might be available and affordable or it may be less convenient and very expensive. Host families circumstances vary and they are never required to provide it.

In general, if halal/zabiha meat is not available, Muslims are permitted to eat the food of the **People of the Book** (Christians and Jews). The food includes meat, as long as it is not pork and was not cooked with alcohol.

The Jewish communities in America slaughter meat in a very similar way to zabiha. This is known as "**Kosher**".

In Surah Al Maidah of the Qur'an, Ayat 5, it states:

*"This day are (all) things good and pure made lawful unto you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful unto you and yours is lawful unto them."*

Some students are comfortable with this and accept the "permission," while others are not and prefer to eat as a vegetarian during their time in the U.S, but be flexible if you are eating vegetarian for the first time. Either way, make sure to be communicative about this with your host family all year long, if necessary.

**Eid Celebrations:** Let your host family know in advance when the Eid is expected to take place in 2019, how it is celebrated in your country and ask them to join you in the celebration. The goals of the YES program (mutual understanding and lasting ties with Americans) directly connect with sharing of your holidays and traditions.

### Introduction to Muslims in America and Islamic Practices

American Muslims have diverse backgrounds and live in a society structured differently than many countries where exchange students come from. You may notice American Muslims addressing issues in a variety of ways that are not necessarily practiced in the country of some exchange students.

**Interfaith:** Due to the tragic events on September 11, 2001, the American Muslim community increased its interfaith activities by inviting members of diverse faith communities to visit their mosques.

These "Open Houses" have become a normal practice in big Islamic Centers. They welcome neighbors, friends, students, and interested members of society for a tour inside the masjid/mosque and explain to them the true teachings of Islam, which includes peace, mercy, cooperation and outreach. Members of the Muslim Community also accept invitations to visit churches, synagogues and temples to better understand those faith traditions.

It has become common, in the face of national tragedies, to see religious leaders of assorted faith traditions offer shared prayers from their sacred texts and share their faith's perspective. During national holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas, you will see clergy projecting a strong statement of America's interfaith collaboration and partnership. We do not have to agree on everything, but we do have a big margin of common ground for all of us to collaborate on issues that are relevant to all of us.

**Women:** In some countries, Muslim women may not be seen in leadership positions. In America, it is customary to see Muslim women as decision makers in families, as well as serving on boards of mosques and holding positions of authority in Islamic national organizations. There is a difference between the teachings of the Qur'an, which empower women to be equal with men, and the traditions and cultures of some predominately Muslim countries, which often do not. If you encounter any issues as a Muslim girl due to the head scarf, clothing or other matters, please let your LC or PO know.

**Sunnah & Shia:** Mosques in America welcome everyone, regardless of their religious affiliation to any school of thought. People are free and entitled to their religious views and respectfully agree to disagree with the person next to them.

### America's Interfaith Connections

**Interfaith collaboration and understanding** is an idea that is becoming a necessity as each day passes, not only in America, but all over the world. It helps to create peace and harmony among the human family, and counters hatred and discord, which fuels many conflicts locally and globally.

You will notice in America that a mosque is often located next to a temple, church, synagogue or other house of worship. We not only value the freedom that was given to us by God, but we also see each other as decedents of one family, the family of Adam and Eve.

Some YES Alumni who return home find it difficult to share this message with members of their communities. Despite the fact that this message is part of the teachings of Prophets Moses (Musa), Jesus (Isa), and Muhammad (pbuh), cultural practices of intolerance sometimes take precedent in the region itself.

### Visiting Houses of Worship with Host Families

Some students are invited by their host families to join them for religious services at churches, temples or synagogues. There is nothing wrong in going. You may want to visit these houses of worship to increase the value of the exchange experience and improve your understanding of how people of other religions worship.

Some host families prefer that you not remain at home alone and may wish you to join them regularly. Once you have observed the services a couple of times, there are other aspects of the activities of religious communities to learn about such as community service. You can always request to help with child care, community kitchens, or food drives, or even get involved with special activity groups that focus on the environment, needy families, or assistance for seniors in the community. You can also ask to sit in the library or multipurpose hall to read or do homework during services.

### Being Held to a Higher Standard

You may encounter American students in your school that try to influence you negatively through peer pressure. Remember, as an exchange student of one of the U.S. Department of State programs, you are held to a higher standard of expectations. Be careful and avoid getting in trouble.

Unfortunately, you will find some students involved in activities that are not useful or beneficial to them. They may even be involved in harmful activities. Think before you act! What is culturally acceptable back home might be taboo here in America and vice versa. Please keep in mind that exchange students in the past were returned home earlier than their original return date due to behavioral issues and practices that were against the program rules.

Do your best to excel and have a successful year!

### Engaging in Discussions with Challenging Questions

When you arrive to your host family do not be surprised if they do not know much about your country, culture or religion. You might be the first Muslim they have met, lived with, and interacted with.

You might find yourself in a small community, and people will come to you with their questions. In a complex world such as ours and in an era with social media everywhere, their questions may become intense and sometimes may be challenging for you to answer or deal with.

Discussions in class may also become difficult since your classmates might look to you for all the answers. There is nothing wrong in saying "Let me research that question more and get back to you."

The YES program provides a support structure to help you with difficult issues. In addition to your placement organization, you can get advice from culturally competent consultants and qualified religious scholars through YES. Please let your LC or PO know if you would like to speak with a YES Program Religious Advisor.



### Political Events Back Home, American Foreign Policy and Global Events

YES Students coming from countries that are witnessing instability, turmoil and conflict, which might be interconnected with America in one way or another, may have some difficulty focusing on the program objectives.

Despite the fact that you are in America for academic and cultural exchange reasons, you may find yourself following up too much with what is happening back home. You may be faced with a barrage of questions that you are unable to answer. Before becoming overwhelmed and distracted by what you are feeling and everything taking place, reach out to your LC or PO and they will work to connect you with resources, or let your LC or PO know you would like to speak with a YES Program Religious Advisor.

### Re-Entry Adjustment & Reverse Cultural Shock

Living in a society as open and progressive as the U.S. and being exposed to tolerance, interfaith coexistence and freedom of expression may be difficult for you when you return home to a country that does not embody all of these qualities. You need to be wise when sharing your experiences with your family and friends who may never have traveled.

You will find that the re-entry sessions available to you will help you prepare to address these issues. It may be helpful to write your questions and journal your thoughts throughout the year as you reflect on your life in America and your life back home.

It is always healthy to ask, compare and see how you can move forward once you return home. This exchange experience will be a life-changing experience, not only for you, but also for your host community and your community back home. We always aspire to be better when it comes to cultural and religious differences so we can have prosperity through our diversity.

**\*These materials have been created specifically for YES students by Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat and the Civilizations Exchange and Cooperation Foundation staff.**