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Student Exchange

For a fortunate few, the Grand Tour of Europe used to be an important part of education. More recently, other arrangements, such as the Junior Year Abroad, have allowed selected students to live or study for a few months in another country. One program that is extensively used in Europe and deserves to be more widely known in the U.S. is IAESTE—the International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience.

Under the IAESTE program, each member country offers temporary employment to engineering and science students from other countries and in turn is permitted to select an approximately equal number of its own students for temporary employment in other countries. Most of the exchange students work in industry, but some are placed in government laboratories or universities. Employment is usually for a summer period of 8 to 12 weeks but may run for as long as a year. The employer is expected to pay the student a wage sufficient to cover his living expenses during the working period and pays IAESTE a standard fee to help meet administrative expenses. Placement of foreign students in American industry and selection of American students for foreign assignments are handled by IAESTE-U.S., 866 United Nations Plaza, New York, New York 10017.

From the student's standpoint, the program provides an eagerly sought opportunity to work for several months in another country, to earn most of the expenses necessary for the trip, and to have a happy blend of vocational, professional, and international experience. In Europe, the number of students exchanged has increased steadily from 920 in 1948, the first year of the program, to approximately 10,000 this year.

United States participation has remained fairly small, partly because transatlantic travel is more expensive than travel across a European border, partly because many American students lack fluency in a second language, and chiefly because American employers do not offer enough positions for foreign students to earn as many places abroad as American students would like to fill.

This year 150 U.S. students are leaving American campuses for work in Europe, and a few for other parts of the globe. Twice this number wanted to go, but half could not be accepted because the U.S. did not offer enough positions to students from other countries.

The employer considering this program must balance the cost of a temporary employee against the stimulating effect of temporary association with a bright, inquiring young mind from a different scientific or engineering background. The U.S. companies which have participated in the past appear to be well satisfied, for most continue to take part year after year. And the number of positions they offer is growing; there are about 50 more this year than in 1965. The students who come to the U.S. under this program are advanced undergraduate or graduate students who are highly motivated to get first-hand acquaintance with American industry and who are individually selected to fit the requirements of the positions they fill. It is not surprising that they make good temporary additions to a company or laboratory staff.

Expansion of the program would seem desirable. The students benefit; the employer has a competent temporary addition to his staff; and the nation benefits from the better understanding of another country that the American students bring back to the U.S. and the visitors take to their home countries.—DAEL WOLFLE