

## My year in Baltimore at Johns Hopkins University

A little over a year ago now, the *Direktaustausch* of Freie Uni Berlin confirmed that they would offer me a spot as an exchange student at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, starting with the fall semester 2018. Although I was a little sad to leave Berlin, where I built up an entire life with my friends, university and my work, I was very happy about the possibility and I was really looking forward to my time here. In total, two people of my home institution (including me) were sent to Johns Hopkins, which was very convenient as we could travel together and share an AirBnB during our first days in Baltimore before we could move into our apartment. We arrived in mid-August and back then, it was still incredibly warm in Baltimore, which was very nice.

Baltimore is located on the East Coast of the US, approximately 45 minutes north of Washington, D.C, and a little over three hours south of New York City. After our arrival we had a couple of free days before classes started in the last week of August. This turned out to be very helpful, as we had the chance to get to know the city a bit and really settle in Baltimore before everything started. Immediately after arriving, we got to know the entire staff of Johns Hopkins' International Office that is responsible for the Visiting International Students; in total, we are approximately 30 visiting students (mostly from Europe). All the international students live in a very modern, convenient off-campus building that is just across the street of Johns Hopkins' campus. We are four people sharing an apartment, and the rooms and all facilities are very nice and new and one can reach campus in less than five minutes, so it is not a problem to go home between classes. We are extremely lucky to be able to live so close to campus and in such a nice and modern environment; many other people have to share rooms.

I study Political Science with a focus on International Relations, which is why FU sent me to Johns Hopkins, as the university has a high reputation in the field of International Relations. The US educational system is quite different from universities in Europe; there are constant assignments and tests and studying here is not as independent as it is in Germany. Johns Hopkins is a demanding school and the amount of time one has to dedicate to all the readings and assignments for the courses is much higher than in Germany. My classes are all very interesting though and all my professors are nice and always available for questions and

support. Another difference is that all written assignments are due either during the semester or in the last week of classes, which means that lots of work accumulates at the end of the semester but therefore, one does not have to write anything during intersession. This enabled me to go visit a friend in Brazil in January, a trip that I had in mind for a long time.

The university culture in general is very different; most students' lives revolve around campus because many people live either on or close to campus; there are so many student groups, sport teams and other activities, and one spends plenty of time on campus. Thus, many things happen on campus; people go to group meetings, sports clubs, talks and discussions, they eat on campus and much more. Personally, I attend Johns Hopkins' gym every day which is very convenient because I can go there straight after my classes every night and I don't have to calculate any time for getting there. I even made friends at the gym.

Of course, there is not only on-campus life. Coming from Berlin, Baltimore is a rather small city for me, but it has a lot to offer! It is located very conveniently on the East Coast between DC and New York, and also Philadelphia is only a two-hour bus ride away. Baltimore has a quite nice downtown area with a harbor; this part is also the part with the most tourist attractions. Baltimore has interesting museums, theatres and some nice bars and dance clubs. One advantage of a city that is not that big is that it does not take as long to get somewhere and many places are easily reachable by bike or just walking, which is also a good way to get to know other parts of the city and get out of the campus bubble. I also quite enjoy the option of spending weekends in New York or DC, which are both easily reached by bus.

Another thing I am very happy about are the possibilities to travel in the US I have had so far. I attended the German-American Conference at Harvard University in Boston in October 2018; there were a number of Fulbright grantees and we even had a lunch together, which was very nice. Apart from that, I went to Miami for Thanksgiving, to New Orleans for Christmas and to San Francisco for New Year's. I met nice people everywhere and I got insights in how different some parts of the US are.

I am very happy about the decision to come here and do the exchange year, as it enabled me to get completely new insights and expand my horizon in many ways. I want to thank the

team of the *Direktaustausch* of FU very much for giving me the spot at Johns Hopkins and for nominating me for the Fulbright travel grant; I am so thankful for the opportunities that resulted from this and I can only recommend to all prospective exchange students and grantees to use this amazing possibility that the *Direktaustausch* offers. I want to thank especially Mrs Simon and Mr Schepker for their help and availability during the entire process and I would be very happy to offer my help and advice to prospective future exchange students.