

Erfahrungsbericht Auslandsjahr 2018/19

The preparation for my exchange year was a long process. In order to obtain a visa for the US there is a lot of paperwork that needs to be done. It all seemed overwhelming at first, but by taking it step by step and working together with others who were also planning to go on exchange we got through it. It was definitely worth it. My advice is to just do the paperwork and the other preparation as soon as it is possible. Because when it comes to getting a visa for the US, it is a process that can take a long time, and you wouldn't want to have to postpone the departure because of that.

Another part that was quite challenging was to find housing. We got a lot of e-mails from the University here in Santa Barbara that recommended student housing and on-campus living. The prices for these options were very high. Therefore, I decided to look for housing off-campus, which was significantly cheaper. This took a long time, and it was hard to get replies from people, since I was still in Germany and therefore not able to view the houses in person. Eventually I found a house through a Facebook group called "UCSB Housing" with eleven other people. I shared the room with one other person. The apartment was very social and we cooked and did stuff together. From talking with other exchange students that are living on-campus it seems like I did the right choice in putting in the extra effort to look for some other housing option. It is also easy to get stressed about not finding housing, because of how the housing market is in Berlin at the moment. That is not how it is in Isla Vista, where I was living. The housing is going to be a lot more expensive than what you are used to from Berlin, but you will always be able to find something once you are there. I was lucky to find a house before I came to Santa Barbara, but I talked to friends who did not. They said an easy way of finding something was just to sleep at a hostel for the first weeks, and search for something permanent then. They all found something pretty quickly.

The academic part of my exchange year lived beyond my expectations. At the university back home I study North American Studies, and in the US I was specializing in Chicana/o Studies. By being on exchange here I have had the chance to learn more about what I want to focus on and also to observe the US society from up close rather than just read about it from afar. They offer a lot of courses on what I want to write my bachelor thesis on, namely the Chicana/o experience in the educational system. The first quarter I took courses that were more theory based to lay a foundation for taking an education course with a fieldwork component the second quarter. The third quarter I did not take so many classes directly related to what I want

to specialize in, but rather picked classes that seemed interesting and that I knew little about from before. I really recommend taking some classes that are not directly related to your studies at your home university. This opened up an interest for me in academic fields that I had not thought about before.

Another thing that is important to be aware of is how fast the quarter system passes. It is only ten weeks in the quarter and there are a lot of readings and assignments to do. This can be a bit overwhelming at first, if you are used to the semester system back home. Because I am taking courses that I have a genuine interest in, which are taught by motivating professors it makes it worth the while. The workload is also not necessarily heavier, but it's a lot within a much shorter time frame. There is also a large focus on learning facts in the classes. That's a bit different from what I was used to at the Freie Universität, where it is more about having discussions around something and analysing something critically. My advice to people going on exchange is to listen carefully to the professor and taking good notes, even from the first lecture of the quarter. You will often get asked about specific things from the lectures on the exams.

The way of life here has been very different from my life in Berlin. The University is located in Isla Vista, a two square-kilometer large area, which is mainly inhabited by students. This has made the experience very social, since everyone is maximum a 10-minute bike ride away from each other. From having lived the student life in Berlin where the distances are much larger, this has been an interesting contrast. The weather is mostly sunny and we live five minutes away from the beach. The mountains and national parks are also very close, so we spend a lot of time hiking and camping as well.

Overall, through the process of preparing to come here and the time I spent in Santa Barbara, I have learned a lot, both academically and about how to navigate my way in a new setting. I was there for the full academic year. I would recommend to everyone planning on applying to go for the whole year. It takes a bit of time to settle into the lifestyle of a new place, and it is good to have enough time to get to know the place and the university fully.