

### ***To a future bronco***

Starting off I can only say that my year at western (as most people call it) was a total blast and it probably was one of the best years of my life. I know you are probably having a lot of work with the preparation right now and there is a lot to organize. But let me tell you it is 100% worth putting in the effort and there will always be nice people along the way that can help you with any issues you run into!

I have met so many new friends over the course of this year. I met some of my best friends at WMU and have connections all over the planet now. At western you will probably have a very different life than at home, but it is awesome! Now let's get into the details:

### ***Application process + preparation***

After you successfully applied to the Direktaustausch program you will have to apply to western directly. This process is more of a formality though and you do not need to worry too much about getting rejected. You will have to submit your information along with a few documents but nothing major or difficult. Along with this, I recommend starting on the rest of the preparation, so you have enough time for everything. Especially the visa process can take longer sometimes and the last thing you want is to have to stress about something like that when you are close to leaving the country.

One tip here: Something you can do here to save some money is to apply for a vacation semester at FU. I was able to get back most of the tuition and was able to invest that money in fun activities instead.

### ***Arrival***

For your arrival, there is a lot to think about and a lot to do. If you run into any issues just keep calm, there is always a solution – that is something I learned this year!

To get to Kalamazoo you can either fly into Battle Creek or to Chicago. I personally recommend flying to Chicago and then taking the Amtrak (train) or Greyhound (bus) to Kalamazoo. That was way cheaper. From the Kalamazoo transit center (the train/bus station) you can get a bronco taxi to campus. You will have to pay for that first (\$10), but you can get the money back.

### ***Housing***

As an exchange student, you must live on campus. So, after your arrival, you will get your room key and bronco ID (your ID will give you access to all buildings and provided services). Some people recommend getting there early to have enough time to settle in (that costs extra). I did not deem that necessary because international move-in is prior to other move-in days anyway.

There are different houses you can sign up for. The sign-up for the fall semester (which starts in September) started in April or May so I recommend looking into this early enough. I also recommend using the roommate finder that is provided by the housing portal and actively looking for a roommate that fits your personality. I found my roommate via the platform, and she is now one of my best friends. You also have the option of a single room, but I feel like a roommate gives you the full college experience. I lived in Eicher Hall which is in Valley 2. I personally really liked the valley housing. The valleys are a little further from the gym, library, and class buildings (those were 10 – 15 minutes away by foot) but closest to the main dining hall. Since we were eating there 3 times a day that was the most important way for me. The valleys also have prettier rooms in my personal opinion. The heights are another dorm complex that is closer to the rest of the buildings if you prefer that. Those buildings are newer and therefore have ac which is very nice for the hot days. You can find more living options on the housing portal, so I recommend checking that out to find your personal preference.

### ***Meal plan***

Thanks to the western scholarship you do not have to pay for the meal plan. For this reason, I chose the highest meal plan which allows you to eat in every on-campus dining hall as often as you want to and as much as you want to. So, there is not really a need for you to buy groceries.

### ***Orientation week***

After a few days for move-in, I started directly into fall welcome week. Usually, there are a lot of international and other events that help you get to know your way around and show you all the options on campus. And let me tell you there are a LOT of events, clubs, and things to do. We were put into groups with ambassadors (older students) that helped us with anything we needed. This week is basically your introduction to the western community, and I can only recommend taking part in as much as you can.

### ***Courses***

I used my year abroad to investigate new topics and broaden my knowledge. WMU offers a huge number of courses and I suggest making the most of that offer. I for instance took courses like American sign language and intermediate weightlifting which you probably cannot find at home. I took a mix of lower and higher-level courses. From my experience, higher-level courses are more specific in their topics and can therefore be more interesting but they are usually also more work. In general, prepare for the courses to be more like school. Usually,

you will encounter smaller class sizes and homework assignments as well as multiple exams per course and essays to write. It is a lot to get used to at first since it is different from our system, but you will adapt to it fast and find that there are a lot of benefits to it.

### ***Insurance***

You have two options here. You can either use American health insurance such as the ones that the WMU health center offers, or you can use German health insurance for north America. I used the international insurance by Hanse Merkur which was recommended to me by a lot of people. They offered a plan that was specifically for students studying abroad. The plan covered a lot more than the American ones did and were cheaper. The only thing I did not like as much was the fact that I had to pay my expenses first and then put in an online request to get back the money. The process was a bit of work but otherwise fine. Additionally, I bought travel insurance which was for all travel costs and in case something got canceled. Overall, I was very happy with both of my insurances.

### ***Finances***

In the USA nearly everything can be paid for via credit card. I still recommend having a little cash ready because my credit card got declined sometimes. Throughout the semester I never really needed cash though. I chose to not open an American bank account and use my DKB credit card. Since I have their active customer status that worked out perfectly fine and I had no additional costs for the transfer of currencies plus I could pay and draw money from an atm anywhere I wanted to.

### ***Phone plan***

I used a mint mobile plan that cost me \$15 dollars per month for 9 months in total. They have a plan for 3 and 6 months so I combined those two and it fits perfectly. I had 4GB a month and the plan was run with the T mobile net which mostly has good coverage on the east coast and Midwest. 4 GB for me was enough because you have Wi-Fi everywhere on campus anyways. I was very happy with the plan and paid a lot less than most of my friends so I can only recommend mint. I ordered the sim card to my dorm room so I only had to insert it and was set but the international office also has mint sim cards in their office which you can take for free and then buy a plan online.

### ***Leisure time***

Kalamazoo is a small town, but I was never bored. There are a lot of restaurants and fun stores downtown which can be easily reached by bus. Additionally, there are a lot of fun things to do in portage like escape rooms for example. Other than that, there are always events on

campus and in the dorms that you can take part in. Sport is also a very big thing in this country. If it is on tv, in the gym (called rec center), or in teams/clubs it was a lot of fun getting involved with this part of the culture! I had the time of my life as part of the western Michigan cheer team. Sports teams often travel to away games at other universities, so this also gave me the opportunity to see more parts of the country. Other day trips you could do are going to grand rapids or Lansing (the capital), going skiing, visiting the sleeping bear dunes, going to the upper peninsula, or enjoying the beach in south haven. If you have a bit more time like over fall break, thanksgiving, winter break, or after the spring semester I suggest traveling to other parts of the country. I for example flew to Toronto, Niagara Falls, and New York over winter break and did a road trip along the west coast after the second semester. There are endless opportunities here!

### ***Additional tips***

For traveling, I always had all my important documents with me plus a copy of them in a different place in case something gets stolen or lost.

I got an international license before I left. It only cost me 16€ and I had no issues driving in Michigan. If you consider driving, I recommend checking for differences in traffic rules. Most things are like our traffic but there are a few differences that are important. Rules also vary by state.

Pack for every type of weather but you will mostly need warm clothing. It can get very cold in winter and very humid in the summer.

I hope my experiences and tips could help you a bit! I had a really great time over there and I am sure you will as well.