

I've always wanted to study in the USA and when I found out that there was an opportunity for me to go and spend a semester there, I just knew I had to go. There are several universities all over the country that you can choose from here: <https://www.frankfurt-university.de/international/wege-ins-ausland/semester-weltweit/nordamerika.html> . I chose CSUMB because the other universities are located in Massachusetts and Wisconsin (I don't like very cold places) and 4 months in California sounded really awesome 😊

I started preparing my *Auslandssemester* 1 year prior my departure (taking the IELTS test, getting nominated, applying to the CSUMB, applying visa, etc.). So it's really important to know the important due dates for the application of your choice of college (you can find the due dates here: https://www.frankfurt-university.de/fileadmin/de/International/Broschüren/Bewerbungsfristen_Übersee.2016_2.pdf) before you start.

Overall there are 3 aspects I could tell you about my *Auslandssemestererfahrung*:

1. Application Process

1.1. Application for the Language Test & Preparation for IELTS Test

If you are going to go to spend a semester in the USA, you are most likely required to pass a language test (mostly you get to choose either IELTS/TOEFL) with some certain minimum scores. The actual minimum scores are 6.5 for IELTS and 79 for TOEFL (Stand: 20.01.2017).

There's no easier or harder test. It actually depends on yourself, which type of questions you are more comfortable with. You can read more about the differences between IELTS and TOEFL here: <http://consultus.org/toefl-und-ielts-was-sind-die-unterschiede/> . I personally find that IELTS' type of questions fit better for me.

The authorized institution for the IELTS Examination is the British Council. You can find all information about the locations, the price, and the available dates here: <https://www.britishcouncil.de/pruefung/ielts> . I paid 217€ for the IELTS test (in August 2015) and I took it in Frankfurt am Main. I submitted the application 8 weeks before the test. **My tip:** register as early as possible if you want to take the test in FFM, since there are only limited seats available and FFM is one of the busiest location for the IELTS test.

The preparation for the IELTS test is different for everyone. Since I still had to take my finals at FRA UAS until the end of July 2015, I only had one month to prepare myself for the test. It was possible though. I bought some preparation books and took a conversation class for some couple of hours at the ELOQUIA GmbH <https://www.eloquia.com/> . One book I have to recommend to you is this book called *Target Band 7* https://www.amazon.de/gp/product/0987300962/ref=oh_aui_detailpage_o01_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1 . It really helped me to picture how the test was going to be and the book describes really well what to expect during the exam day.

My English language was average before I did the test preparation. Another thing that really helped me was watching as many TV shows/movies in English without subtitles as possible. It helped me to better understand what people are saying (by listening – not reading!) and also to know how they really pronounce the words and talk in daily basis (since there'll be an oral test in IELTS test). The examiner doesn't really care about our accents – it's all about how you pronounce it. So don't worry about it ;-)

After you took the test, the result will be posted online within a couple of weeks. British Council only sends out the result to a legal institution, so you have to tell them to send it to the International Office FRA UAS.

1.2. Application for the Nomination From the FRA UAS

Before you actually get to apply to the CSUMB (or other colleges in the US), you have to be nominated by the FRA UAS first and there's a selection process for it. You have to submit several documents (you can find the list of the document here: <https://www.frankfurt-university.de/international/wege-ins-ausland/bewerbungsunterlagen.html>)

in a portal called Mobility Online (<https://www.service4mobility.com/europe/LoginServlet>). **My tip:** complete all the documents needed before uploading it, because the website works step-by-step and you can't skip a step before you finish the current one.

You have to fill out a list of courses you wish to enroll in here, BUT it's not a learning agreement. You may check it with your advisor, whether this and that course is going to be recognized at the FRA UAS, but it's not really necessary since the real learning agreement is first needed when you're applying to the college.

If you don't feel comfortable yet about your English skills to write a motivation letter and CV, there's an opportunity for a consult with an English professor (Mr. Bramwell – markb@fsz.fra-uas.de). You can find more information about it here under "*Beratung für englische Motivationsschreiben und CVs*": <https://www.frankfurt-university.de/international/wege-ins-ausland/bewerbungsunterlagen.html> .

The last thing is to get a recommendation letter from one of your professors. **My tip:** ask for a recommendation letter from a professor that you know personally well or the one, whose class you've been in (much better: if you've taken the exam in his/her class and got a good score), since it has a quite big role for the decision whether you are going to be nominated or not.

Once you've completed the application process, you will be invited to an interview with the staffs of the international office. The interview could be done both in English and Deutsch (mine was in both languages). **My tip:** don't stress yourself out about it! They only want to know more about yourself and why you want to go oversea (in this case: USA) for the *Auslandssemester* 😊

It took about one month until I received my acceptance letter from the International Office. If you already get it: congratulations! You are already being nominated. After that, the International Office will proceed your nomination and send it to the university you are being nominated for.

1.3. Application for the Admission at the CSUMB

After the FRA UAS International Office has finished your nomination, they will send you a link for the application at the CSUMB. You'll need to create an account there to fill out the form and submit your documents. The documents are mostly similar to the ones you have prepared for the nomination process.

You will be asked for the financial affidavit of support there; the financial statement of how you are going to pay for your *Auslandssemester*. You can ask for it at the bank, where you have an account at. It's important that your account has the adequate amount of money needed during your stay there (enough to pay housing, meal plan, etc.).

You will also be asked about your housing preferences. There are 3 housings where international students are living in; North Quad, Promontory and East Campus. Both North Quad and Promontory are located on campus (10-20 min walking to the campus buildings). East Campus is located a little bit far from the campus (5 min driving), but there are busses that go from there to the campus almost every 30 min (about 10 min bus ride). CSUMB student can ride with all MST transportations with the student card for free – so it shouldn't be a problem. I lived in a single room in Promontory. It's a little bit pricey, but it's a brand new building and a really well equipped one. I would've chosen another housing though because of the price, since I spent most of my time outside anyway and was barely at

home :-p You can find more information about the housings here: <https://csumb.edu/housing/housing-options> .

After you have completed your application there, you will have to wait for a couple of weeks. They will send you an e-mail regarding your acceptance. After that, they'll send an acceptance package consists of the required document for your visa application and some important information regarding your moving to the FRA UAS International Office. **My tip:** You're going to have to be patient in this step because in my case it took forever until the letter came :-p But don't worry about it.

1.4. Application for Housing

In my case, they also sent me the acceptance package to my e-mail so I could start applying for the housing earlier. They're going to give you your Otter ID in that package, so you can log in to the dashboard with that. You will be asked to fill out an application about your housing preferences, roommate requests (if applicable) and you're going to have to pay for the security deposit as well. You can pay it very easy via Flywire. More information about the application process: <https://csumb.edu/housing/applying-csumb-housing> . More information about Flywire: <https://csumb.edu/international/making-payments-internationalnse-student?search=flywire> .

The housing assignment (to which housing you are assigned) is going to be sent out a little bit late. I got mine 2 weeks prior my departure – but it's normal. The semester time in the USA goes differently than Germany, that's why it won't appear in your account until really late. Don't forget to pay the rent after you get your housing assignment via Flywire!

1.5. Application for Visa

Once the acceptance package has arrived, you can start your visa application. They'll send you the I-20 form, which is required for visa F-1 application. You can find the other required documents for the visa application here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/study-exchange/student.html> .

You have to complete the Form DS-160 online and upload your photo at the end. USA has different criteria for biometrical photos, so it's important to get the right picture. More information about the Form DS-160: <https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/forms/ds-160--online-nonimmigrant-visa-application.html> . You also have to pay for the administration fee online.

Once you have completed your application, you have to schedule an interview with the embassy/the consulate. The appointments are always fully booked really fast – so it's important to plan your application on time. **My tip:** Don't take too many things with you during the interview – bring only the required documents if possible, so it'll be easier during the security check. I honestly forget, whether it's allowed to bring a mobile phone inside or not and whether I brought mine or not. You might have to check it with the embassy/consulate you're going to have the interview at.

During my interview, I was asked about my study in Germany and what I'm going to do in the US (where, what, what major, etc.) **My tip:** Just in case, bring all the documents that you prepared for the previous applications (for the nomination & CSUMB). You might need them! If your application is approved, they'll take your passport and send it back within the next couple of work days to your home.

1.6. Application for Scholarships (if applicable)

There are many options for the scholarships for *Auslandssemester*. You can see your options here: <https://www.frankfurt-university.de/international/wege-ins-ausland/foerderprogramme.html> .

I applied for a scholarship from DAAD PROMOS, which is also intended for semester overseas. As you know, students of FRA UAS that are going to spend a semester at the partner university are mostly exempt from the tuition. However, to be able to support as many students as possible, DAAD could

only provide you approx. 300-500€/month (Stand: 24.01.2017). Still, this money was really helpful for me to pay for my moving expenses.

You have to pay attention about the due dates for the application. You can find all the required documents, the due dates and the criteria for getting the scholarship here: <https://www.frankfurt-university.de/international/wege-ins-ausland/foerderprogramme/daad-promos.html> . Later, you have to submit the original documents directly to the FRA UAS International Office.

My tip: The rate of your scholarship and the chance for you getting it are both much higher if you are involved in many intercultural activities – especially the buddy program at FRA UAS!

2. Departure Preparation

2.1. Flight & Connections to Monterey Bay

It's totally up to you, when you are going to book your flight ticket: I preferred to book it after my visa was approved – just in case, even though it was pretty close to my departure. I was flying to San Francisco (SFO) from FFM (FRA) using Condor Airlines. It was a one-way flight ticket, because I was planning to fly back home from New York City (JFK). I flew back from JFK to FRA using Singapore Airlines. After I took my final, I flew from SFO to Washington Dulles (IAD) to visit my aunt, then later took the bus from DC to NYC. In total, it cost me about \$1200 for 3 flight tickets, 1 bus ticket & overweight baggage :-p

There are 3 airports located near to the CSUMB; San Francisco (SFO), San Jose (SJC) and Monterey Regional Airport (MRJ). **My tip:** Flights that go to the smaller airports are usually way more expensive than the ones that go to the big airports. I would recommend you to book the flight to either SFO/SJC and then take the shuttle bus to the CSUMB. I booked the shuttle bus ticket online before my departure (pay attention on am/pm!). You can find more information about the booking here: <http://www.montereyairbus.com/reservations> <http://montereyairbus.hudsonltd.net/res?USERIDENTRY=MB1&LOGON=GO> . Don't worry about the pickup locations, there's a video provided by the company that shows where the bus is going to stop in each terminal at each airport here <https://youtu.be/5XmIhuXcGZM> .

There are also car rentals available at the airport if you prefer driving than taking the bus. Sometimes they run out of cars though, make sure you make a reservation early enough to get one. You can find all information about planning your arrival here: <https://csumb.edu/international/plan-your-arrival> .

2.2. Things to Bring

My tip (especially for girls): DON'T BRING TOO MANY SHOES & CLOTHES OR YOU'D REGRET IT LIKE ME! ☺ Bring only one for each type and bring the really comfortable ones. You'll never know how many stuffs you're going to buy there. Monterey's weather is colder than what you probably think. It gets warmer during October and November. I'd recommend you to bring both of your summer & fall clothes (at the appropriate amount of course). It doesn't get below 0 degree Celsius, so I wouldn't recommend you to bring your dick winter coat. Bring a light jacket and some sweaters and you'll be fine. CSUMB is pretty big, and it'll get tiring to walk, especially if you have classes in different buildings. If you don't feel really comfortable using heels – don't bring them. You won't use them anyway (I used mine only when I was going out).

You can buy all the school stuffs (notebooks, maps, etc.) you need there with a reasonable price as well, so don't worry about it. The same thing is also for housing & bathroom utilities. There is a Target pretty close to the campus and you can also take the bus to there so don't waste your luggage allowance for that!

Bring only the documents that you really need (you don't have to bring your stuffs from the elementary school for example) and put it in your carry on because you might need it during the immigration check.

This is optional, but I had bought an American sim card online in Germany, so I could use the service already after I landed. I bought it here:

<http://www.sim-auf-reisen.de/usa.html?gclid=COXOlqaG4tECFesp0wodHqoPEQ> . It is a little bit pricey because of the administration & shipment costs, but I got a pretty good deal from T-Mobile there (\$30 for 5 GB, which was more than enough for me).

The last thing is money! Don't forget to exchange some of your money in USD before your departure, in case you have to buy some food or pay for taxi after you landed. **My tip:** I'd recommend you to exchange your money in Exchange AG: It usually has higher rates than other banks or money changers. More info about Exchange AG: <http://www.exchange-ag.de/> .

3. Arriving at the CSUMB

3.1. Orientation Program

The CSUMB International Office is really good with organizing stuffs. They've prepared the orientation program for us to make the student card, go shopping, some intercultural workshops, buying sim cards, opening a bank account, buying school books, etc. During the first days, there will be some mandatory events you will have to attend, but after that you're free. At the end of the week there'll usually be some music or/and social events you can go to.

3.2. Meal Plan & Cooking

Meal plan is different packages for your meal throughout the semester. For example you're paying for 100 meals in advance, which you can use in Dining Commons. It is a buffet so you can take all the food you can eat there (not to go though). It comes sometimes with flex-cash, which you can use like normal money in other dining places. If you live in North Quad (except Strawberry Apartments), you will be required to purchase a meal plan, because there will be no kitchen in your room. Other housings don't require you to purchase a meal plan, but you may also get one just in case. More information about meal plan: <https://csumb.sodexomyway.com/dining-plans/index.html>

I personally never cooked there. I usually ate in Otter Express or bought some frozen food in Target. I knew a lot of people who always cooked though and it was probably cheaper than always eating outside, but again it is all up to you. The cooking utilities are pretty expensive there, so it's a good idea if you can pitch in with your other roommates for that.

3.3. Class, Teachers & Examinations

The class started exactly a week after the orientation program. If you get a homework on your first day – me too. It's totally normal there for the professor to give the students A LOT OF homework, quizzes, assignments, etc. **My tip:** don't be too hard on yourself. At the beginning, I was still on my *German mode* (planned everything and wanted everything to be perfect). Eventually, I got exhausted and decided to just follow the learning culture there – which worked really well for me.

All teachers have an iLearn course. You'll find the syllabus (the teaching material for the semester), quizzes, and assignments, basically everything you're going to need for your class there. Really pay attention for the announcements there, sometimes they also post some changes about the class or deadlines there.

You will be (mostly) required to buy some books for your class. **My tip:** check the online price first before you buy it in the bookstore. It'll even get way cheaper if you rent it. I rented almost all of my books on Amazon and it's up to 75% cheaper than buying the new one (I'm not going to need the book later anyways).

I didn't have problems with understanding the professors at my classes. They are very open minded and kind. If you have any question, don't be afraid to speak up and ask. They're expecting you to do

that. They even encourage the students to come to their office hours just to talk about your progress, etc. **My tip:** Do it. You might get extra points for participation by doing that.

Overall the difficulty level over there is not as high as it is in Germany. Most of them have at least 2 exams (1 midterm and 1 final). Sometimes the final is cumulated (from chapter 1 until the end), but sometimes it'll be divided by the chapters (e.g.: Midterm chapter 1-6, finals chapter 7-12). As long as you're doing all the quizzes and the assignments and attend all the classes, you'll be fine.

All of my classes had a final project with a paper and presentation. They are usually a group work so you won't be alone. Americans have some troubles when it comes to a group work. There are always people who just can't be working in a group. If you ever have a problem with your teammate; talk with your professor. They won't punish you or lower your grade, they'll help you to find the solution or even assign you to another group if there's nothing else that could be done.

If you don't feel comfortable with the class or the schedule, you may drop or change the class up to 2 weeks after the class started. Talk to the advisor at the International Office if you want to make any changes with your schedule.