

MY AFRICAN DREAM: Exchange Semester at UWC, Cape Town

FB4 – BASA: Transnational



Photo taken at the Lion's Head

The Beginnings

I was the first student to do the exchange semester from Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences with the University of Western Cape (UWC). And thanks to the contact given by Dr. Beatrix Schwarzer, I had Dr. Anja Human-Hendricks from Department of Social Work as a contact person in UWC. As different from the other students who choose an existing partner university from the Erasmus mobility portal of the Frankfurt university, I had to go through every step myself – starting with finding the registration links as an international exchange student (student.uwc.ac.za) to connecting with the international office in both the universities with multiple Emails and long waiting periods to make sure that all the necessary documents arrive me on time before the visa interview. It was also a challenge to find the courses which an exchange student was permitted to choose as the UWC Website do not provide any help regarding this matter and this is a concern as many modules at UWC runs through the whole year and it was difficult to find out courses that through only one semester. Another matter of concern in the beginning was that, as a BASA: Transnational student I needed 30 ECTS as part of the Semester Abroad program and it was first considered that 3 Credit Points equals 1 ECTS in European System, which forced me to take 90 Credit courses in UWC. This was a difficult number to reach as the social work students were limited to certain courses offered by the

department and again the options were limited since the selected courses should end in the first semester itself. But this was made a reality with the help of the international office and the professors by both the universities after reaching the University, and I ended up taking 60 Credits in UWC which was officially agreed on as the 30 ECTS according to the European standards.



During a road trip along the famous Garden Route

The Visa application for South Africa is a long process and one should present a lot of documents to meet requirements, but the I had good experience with the staff of the Embassy in Berlin. Since the Visa and university regulations demand a medical insurance registered under South Africa and not an international travel insurance, I took a local student health insurance with “Momentum” Students medical Scheme and the process was quite easy, as you could reach them over WhatsApp and the policy got activated in less than 48 hours. For the purpose of Visa, one had to already have return flight tickets and hence it is practical to book a ticket with options for at least one change of schedule. Unfortunately, the South African Embassy in Berlin gives only visa for the semester



St. James Walk, Muizenberg

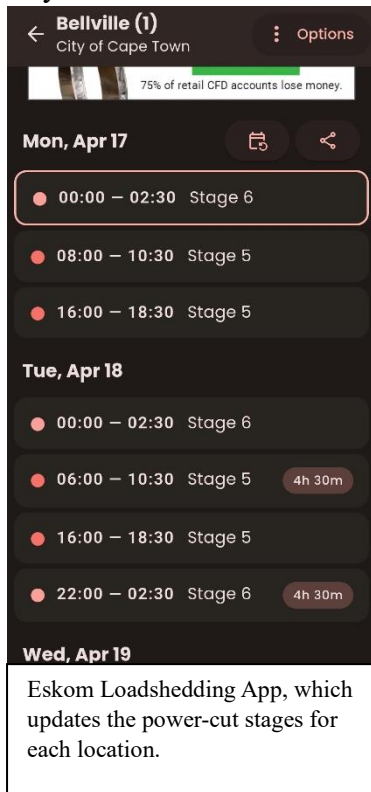
times mentioned in the letter of the Registrar from the UWC and in case one needs more time to travel around this wonderful county, the visa has to be extended in SA through VFS (<https://visa.vfsglobal.com/zaf/en/dha>).

For all the transportation needs in Cape Town one could use the Uber/Bolt app, starting from the ride home to your accommodation from Airport. In South Africa, you get pre activated Sim Cards sold on the streets and one could start using it when you buy Airtime either in the shop or online through <https://myairtime.co.za/> (One should say, the data is costly in SA. But as a student, you can register your Number by writing an Email to – covid-faqs@uwc.ac.za and then 10 GBs will be freely loaded into your mobile number every month. Most of the payments could be done in the country

with Credit Card and you will find a Card Readers in most of the kiosks, shops, and restaurants. In case cash is in need, the university has few ATM counters in Campus.

Life in Cape Town

Regarding the search for residences, in case one is not planning to rent a car, it is advisable to stay in KOVACS Student Village (<https://www.kovacsuwc.co.za>) considering various factors



like safety (the residences directly outside campus are areas where one could be victim of robbery unless one stay at Observatory or such places near the Town). UWC is quite far from the Cape Town city centre (in a location called Bellville), since this University was built during Apartheid times to mainly cater the Blacks and Coloured people. This fact also makes it a very interesting place to study in the remembrance of various student movements and political initiatives that arose in its grounds.

The morning traffic to the University can get a bit tricky. The demerit of staying in the campus is especially on weekends as

the town is quite far and due to lack of public transportation one has to rely on Uber or Bolt Apps, but they are super cheap when calculated in Euros. They also do food delivery at the gates near KOVACS. When living in the Campus, one can get most groceries by taking an Uber/Bolt to Tygervalley Shopping Centre (Pick n' Pay, Woolworth, Spar, Checkers are the usual Supermarkets). The groceries cost almost 2/3 of the price of products in Germany. In contrast, the eat outs or restaurants costs only half the price in comparison with the German price. The Checkers and Pick n' Pay have their own grocery delivery apps too and delivers the order in few hours for a very marginal delivery fee. But one should not forget the hard reality of Loadshedding in South Africa, which moves from phase 1 to 8 and even in the phase 6 one can expect upto 14 hours of power cuts. Since the herd or microwave and even WiFi do not function during the Loadshedding, it would not always be possible to cook a meal when we need it. Thankfully, many restaurants have a back up power plan. There are various local delicacies that one should not forget to try – Gatsby,



Vetkoek at Livema Take Away near Unibell Exit at UWC Campus

Bunny Chow, Tripe, Vetkoek with Russians, Koeksisters, Tripe, Smilie, Walkie-Talkies, Mopane worms etc.



Muizenberg, Cape Town

One cannot deny the fact of crime in Cape Town, but there are various places one can safely get around, go to beaches, go for shopping or hiking. There is always presence of security at the usual

gathering areas, shops and restaurants and one can roam around peacefully in these areas. When exploring the other areas, one just needs an awakened sixth sense and can be careful not to exhibit the valuables and especially mobile phones. However, one should be really careful about walking especially alone in not so well-lit areas even in the town at night. UWC has exchanges with many foreign universities and one has opportunities to hang out together with other exchange students from around the world. Further, the people of South Africa, in my experience, are very open and one feels at home with them soon and they will join you for any adventure. They are

interested in getting to know people and if they think one is alone, they open their circle to include you. The “heart” of the university is at “BARN” which is an in-campus bar, where the



Chapman's Peak Drive

campus meets in the evening. This place is particularly interesting because, in campus and for that matter anywhere in South Africa alcohol is prohibited to be consumed in public places. The evening atmosphere of the BARN has got therapeutic vibes, especially when you are academically challenged ;)

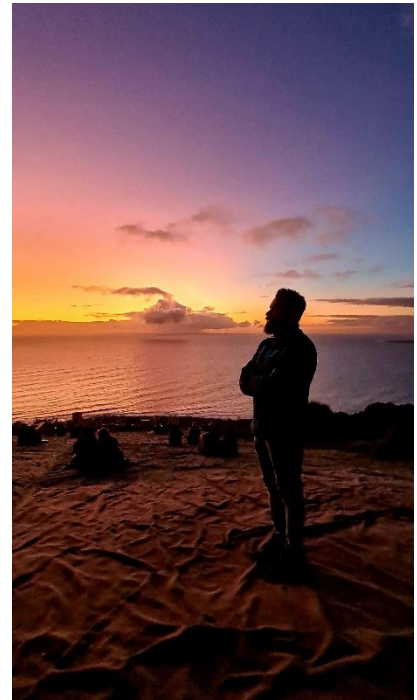
Academic Experience

During the orientation of the International Students, one has to go through various offices to get the Student Number, Student ID, to get the Email and WiFi activated in the Mobile phone and Laptops, logging into study platform *iKamva*, finding out the timetable of the courses and the venues (which is very flexible in the first weeks) and again the long line at the Campus Security Office to get the Laptops declared.

The modules that I chose for the course in UWC was highly demanding and required many submissions and assignments which engaged me throughout the exchange semester. As different from German system, there are two terms during one semester and each term ends with an exam or an assignment, presentation or group work submission. One gets qualified for the final exams

only when one gets satisfactory results for both the Term requirements. Since 50 % of the marks are added to the final exam results from these two Terms, they are compulsory to attend. The attendance in the classrooms as well as tutorials (supported by master students at the university)

are also taken seriously to count the qualification for the final exam. But it is wonderful learning experience at the campus especially as I could see a lot of students using library facilities and other open study areas (even open 24 hours for the students). In the field of social work and across many modules, one subject – critical reflections on colonialism – was a very prominent theme and sometimes discussed to the shame of all coloniser countries. Even if apartheid ended before more than 20 years, one could even now see how the society has been divided between the various races in the country.



Sunset at Signal Hill, Cape Town



Hiking Lion's Head

Personal reflections

I would count this wonderful exchange semester and the experiences under the name “My African Dream.” I was never considered as a foreigner here. I could make friends out of many



Evening Sky at the UWC

random meetings and had a lot of occasions to hang around with them. I also did some extra activities at the university like visiting Confucius Institute in the campus to attend a course on Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), or the campus gym. Another wonderful enrichment was for me to attend a 6 Week intensive course called “Entrepreneurship and Empowerment in South Africa – EESA” with visiting students from three universities in the USA. This program was focused on enabling the young Entrepreneurs living in the Townships around Cape Town to be successful businessmen and thus enable the development of the communities around them. Moreover, I had a wonderful chance to do some internships with the youth and children of the townships and also learn from the social workers active in supporting the working families of the Clothing Industries around the Cape Town. Additionally, I took sufficient time in exploring the neighbouring countries and other major towns in SA. I visited Windhoek in Namibia, Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe, other cities in the SA like Joburg, Pretoria and Durban and did two road trips along the south coast and garden route and again along the west coast of South Africa. All in all, I feel proud that I could grow academically as well as in intercultural communications and to have received a personal experience of the social and economic challenges faced by the country.



Hiking up the Table Mountain



Evening Views of the Cape Town from Signal Hill



Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden



Wine Tasting at Peter Falke Wines, Stellenbosch