

What did you have to consider in the run-up to the organization? As an expert, what would you give subsequent students?

Ans. Study abroad is one of the best opportunities to get exposure around the world. It helps you grow personally and professionally. Also, when it comes to study in the US, you would one of the best education system and highly developed infrastructure.

Do select the courses after the consultation with the professors because as an exchange student you don't have to study the pre requisites attached to a particular course of your choice, but it can get difficult if you don't have the basic knowledge to study a advance course. So it's always a better option to talk to the professor and take his advice whether based upon your knowledge it will be a good fit or not.

If you are coming in winter, be prepared for extreme weather and heavy winds. Usually Germany experience a cold weather but it is not windy so you don't feel much cold, but here especially in Massachusetts, it gets really windy and extreme cold.

Don't be shy to spend some money to get health insurance, because health care is very expensive in the US. It is said that in US you are just a treatment away from bankruptcy.

What did you like? What wasn't so good?

Likes

- A very welcoming country with diverse culture and people from all around the world.
- American sports are interesting and typically played in the US only. US football is different than the European football.
- Best education system with lots of support to students with extracurricular activities and high facilities
- Very beautiful cities with modern infrastructure
- Every state is different from the other state
- Diverse weather. In the East coast temperature drops heavily while West coast is pretty warm in the fall.
- American cuisine is good, but mostly sweet. Americans consume a lot of sugar. I found very delicious pancakes in US. New York is well known for its typical style pizza.
- Cheap iPhone with a lot of discounted offers and better financing plans
- Making a driving license in US is very cheap, it depends upon state to state, but mostly around 200 dollars which is accepted world wide
- Huge technical job market.

Dislikes

- Security is big concern here. It's not advisable to roam around at night and in the shady areas.
- Public Transportation is not that good
- Due to less public transportation, there are massive traffic jams and sometimes it can get too crowded
- Work Life balance is not that great as compared to Germany. Sometimes it gets really hectic to make all the deadlines meet
- Winters in East coast gets extreme.
- Very high health care costs and expensive network plans.

Which courses did you take? What were the differences to the lectures at FRA-UAS? How were the exams at the host university?

As a computer science major I took three courses namely Artificial Intelligence, Data visualization and Advance Machine Learning. All the three courses are Master level courses and have 3 credits each. Usually the 3 credit course in US is equivalent to a 6 credit course in Germany. The lectures and the course organization is completely different in the US. The courses here are much more practical and the grading criteria is completely different than Germany. For my Artificial Intelligence course, there were 3 projects, a paper, mid-term exam and a final exam. All of these contribute to some percentage towards your final score. For the Data visualization course, 50 percent of the final score was dependent upon the weekly assignments, then there was a mid-term exam, final project and a final exam. For the Adv Machine Learning course, we had 5 assignments throughout the semester, a mid-term exam and a final project and all of the scores contribute towards the finals. The fall semester usually runs for 3.5 months and all of these assignments and everything you have to do in the mentioned deadline so you can see the course load is too much if you want to have a good final score. For a Master student, it is necessary to take 3 master level courses and for an undergrad student there is a requirement to enroll in 4 undergrad courses. The exams and assignments are mostly open book. There are just testing your concepts around the topic and only a fraction for the score will contribute towards the final, so if you don't perform good in finals and performed well in previous assignments and project, still you can get a good overall grade which I believe is a better judgement of your studies.

How well were you linguistically prepared for the stay abroad? Did you follow the lectures well?

Since I am a Pakistani national and the official language is English in Pakistan, I have been studying English since my childhood, so there was no problem for me to communicate in English. However, American accent is a little different from the British and Americans like to speak fast. So it can take some time to adjust to their accent. However, most of the professors I found were foreigners from China, Iran, India and Pakistan, so it's comparatively easier to communicate with them in English.

Also, I have taken IELTS and GRE previously so that also helped me improve my English, but all in all you can just fine with moderate level of English.

What were your expectations and have they been met?

To be honest, USA is one of the best when it comes to quality education. You can find huge campuses with a lot of facilities. At University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth there are separate buildings for different departments, well equipped labs, high performance computer centers. Then we have a very big dining hall where you have buffet 3 times a day. Then there is a gym and fitness center. Also, there are separate grounds for football, tennis, badminton, baseball etc. A 5 floor library where you can book separate rooms for combine study. Then there are very beautiful residential halls, different shops to buy necessary stuff. I came here with two goals one was to gain quality education and other one was to get American exposure in terms of life, culture and beautiful cities. USA is much open to adopting technology, hardly will you see people using paper money, and the campus is completely cash free. You can upload money to your card call UMass Dollars to buy food and everything, even to pay tuition fees. Also, cloud platforms are most widely used to store data where I found Germans more reluctant due to privacy concerns. Also, the university often arranges trips freshen up your mind and there are so many societies to join and exchange thoughts with people from different walks of life. Furthermore, job market in the US is exceptional and computer science professionals are well in demand. One of the things I really liked about is most of the professors have funds from the state department to carry different projects and they are always in need of motivated students. This is also elevate your exposure in the practical field. I find many students pursuing PhD degrees after their masters and there are big firms like Amazon, Google, and Microsoft who employ PhDs to carry out research work for them. Last but not the least different states have different vibes, the architecture, facilities and infrastructure is very much different. It seems like you travelled to a different country between the states. The cities are built very beautiful mostly with the tall glamorous buildings with glass architecture and lightning all the way across the streets. Mostly people prefer to use cars for travelling and because of that public transportation is not up to the mark.

What should subsequent students absolutely know / avoid / do?

The US is not the safest country of the world, we usually hear news to mass shootings and killings on the streets since keeping arms and ammunition is permitted in the US, so it's advisable to avoid moving in the late hours of the night. Also, over speeding is a big thing here in the US. You need to abide by the rules otherwise, traffic police is always on patrolling and they can penalize you for that. Its also suggested that you do not travel alone on the lonely streets otherwise its common to get robbed. Take care of your belongings, if lost, it is almost impossible to get it back. Professors are very friendly but they are strict with their assignment deadlines so you need to follow their deadlines or at least inform them in advance if you have some issues. Then there are different rules for alcohol age in different states and you can get a hefty charge for drinking underage. Also, there are a lot of scams in the US, recently, there was news shared by the university that some students receive a call from someone saying that he is calling from the state department and ask them for their credit card numbers to verify the data or something and later the students found out that their money was deducted from their accounts. So credit card scams are very common and university will themselves provide you awareness for this. If you have any legal or administrative issues just inform the international department of the university and they will assist you with that.

What did the semester abroad bring for you personally, professionally and for your later professional life?

The semester abroad opens up to a lot of exposure and opportunities. Personally I feel like I am much more comfortable now in socializing and speaking to different people, also I feel my English vocabulary and accent has become better which can be beneficial since English is a global language. I also worked voluntarily in organizing Frankfurt exchange program where I introduced my University a Frankfurt and convince the American students to come to Germany for similar exchange semester. This boosted up my confidence and help me curb social hesitation in conveying my thoughts and ideas to others or on a platform where there are many people. Professionally, I found that if I want to pursue academics in future, USA can be a good option. What are the hot topics in the US, for example there is a lot of research going on in Medical industry. The government is spending billions of dollars for in research and development to how Artificial intelligence can be used in medical domain to lower the overall cost of healthcare. Also, if I want to do job with any US company, which job profiles are high in demand and are highly paid, what US employers are looking while hiring an international candidate. Also, according to the statistics, people with diverse exposure are more likely to attract international employers and much easier to occupy decision making and managerial roles. This also helps you to stand out among your peers and puts you in a better bargaining position. I personally witnessed, now when I am applying for internships in Germany with my updated resume, I am getting shortlisted my many companies than before. Furthermore, US is much updated in terms of technology and hence, professors regularly update their course curriculum to equip the

students with more skills that are being used in the companies. Hence, with the latest skills, I am much more exposed to a lot of opportunities for future that I never thought about before.