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International Program/Exchange Evaluation Report

Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich, Germany
Winter Semester and Summer Semester

1. Arrival Overseas/On-Site Orientation

- a. I have family in the Frankfurt area of Germany, so I stayed with them and then visited Munich, staying in a hotel, with an apartment I had found online in mind (at wg-gesucht.de). The apartment ended up being good enough, so I then moved in. I would suggest a student find a hostel or a cheap hotel, which is not too expensive except during the Oktoberfest (end of September to the first week of October usually). I also am pretty sure if students come in as international students, the university helps them find immediate accommodation, but as I was a regular German student, because of my German citizenship, I did not receive that.
- b. I did an orientation called "O-Phase" for all the first semester students. It was one intensive day, then reoccurring events throughout the first month of the semester. I did not find it particularly helpful academically because I was not entering my first semester of Economics classes, although I was a first semester student, as I had taken some economics courses at UW. I had many conflicts with my schedule because of this. But it was a great way to meet people, my two best friends were the first two girls I met in O-Phase.

2. Academics

- a. The instruction in Germany is very different. This was the most difficult part of studying abroad for me. The classrooms were similar to the larger lectures at UW, with many students and one professor usually with a powerpoint presentation. Classes consist of once a week lecture, and once a week quiz section/recitation type thing. Lecture is usually very theoretical (this is specific to the Econ department, other majors are VERY different, some haven't even taken on the bachelor system and don't get grades). Quiz section is simply writing down math that a TA does in front of you with little explanation. It is your task then to figure out what the TA has done mathematically before the exam. A student should not contact a professor; they are not very helpful towards students. Students can contact the TA, but they are also not very helpful. I found the greatest help in fellow students, who were willing to take a lot of time to help me get used to the system and learn the German ways of economics.

There are no grades and homework assignments, just one exam at the end of the semester, lasting usually 1 or 2 hours, depending on the course. The grades are much different than UW, hardly anyone gets a perfect score, maybe 5 people out of a class of 500, and the average score is much lower than at UW. The administration is hard to get in contact with, they have weekly office hours, where one must wait in line for an hour or two. I did find one "counselor" who would respond promptly to emails, however. Each major has its own library, and there is also the state library. The Econ library has computers, rooms where no talking is permitted, and also economics books. The state library is very intense, during the semester, one must arrive when it opens at 8 am to get a spot at a desk. There are also computers here. UW expects a student to take 30 ECTS points a semester, which is much, much, much more than a German student takes. I had to take 6 exams my second semester, while most of my friends took 2 to 4 exams. I would highly recommend doing courses for American students, as the 6 economics courses I took demanded that I study 50 hours a week for the last month and a half I was in Germany.

- b. The quality of instruction was less hands-on as in America, it was more of a sink-or-swim type of system, expecting students to figure out their tasks alone. The content was much more in depth and mathematical than in the US. I tended to do well in classes that were more similar to UW classes, where they were less mathematical and more intuitive, while I struggled with the traditional lecture/quiz section, math-based final type of class. The amount I learned, however, was tremendous, especially in comparison to the UW.
- c. The one professor I really enjoyed was from Chicago, and lectured in English. He left after my first semester, however, and then I had to take 5 out of 6 courses in German, which made my course-load much higher.
- d. I am a Germanics/Economics double major, so my economics courses fit into my major. Because I was a normal German econ student, I had no option but to take economics courses, so I took more economics courses than I would have, normally.

3. Housing

- a. There are 2 student areas where one can live in private one-room tiny apartments, near many other students. They are a little bit more outside of the city, and many international students live there. I wanted the full Munich experience, without the influence of other Americans, so I chose to get an apartment where I could get to know Munich a little better and also cook easier. Apartments are hard to find in Munich, but I got lucky. A lot of people rent an apartment for a month or so, temporarily renting it, until they find a more suitable living arrangement. Wg-gesucht.de was the website I used, however it was hard to find an apartment on there when I wasn't in Munich, because most people wanted to meet me, understandably.

- b. As mentioned before, I chose to live in an apartment for more of the Munich experience.
- c. For an international student not very good at German, I would recommend living in the dorms. The apartment was great for me because being a German heritage speaker and having been in Germany yearly visiting family, I know how to live there and can interact with people if I need plumbing done, lease signing and all that.

4. Program/Exchange Site:

- a. Campus is in the middle of the city, two subway stops away from the main part of Munich. Munich is tiny and very walkable. It is on a main street, with the English Gardens behind it, which are similar to Central Park. It has a cute neighborhood behind it, with many bars and boutiques and little restaurants. That area "Schwabing" used to be the art neighborhood of the city.

5. Health and Safety

- a. I did need knee surgery while abroad, but I strongly preferred to go home for this surgery. I could have done it abroad but it was a personal preference, as I know my surgeon in the US and we had been planning on a knee surgery for when I got back. The health care in Germany is very good, although I did have to take some care in finding doctors, as some are less high tech and I did not feel confident, but changing around doctors is very easy in Germany. Munich is incredibly safe, the only area where one should be cautious is near the central train station (Hauptbahnhof), because there is usually some drug dealing and homeless people. Munich is called "Toytown" because of how safe it is. The police have a reputation for being strict, so I would suggest being careful of your interactions with them.

6. Cultural Aspects

- a. I knew two students who had done a year at UW the year before, they were both very helpful in having me meet people. I immediately befriended a group of econ students, then found more friends during the orientation. Meeting people was very easy, everyone is very friendly. My conversational German is nearly perfect, and I am treated as a German, but I know my roommate, who was from Australia, had problems befriending Germans because his German was not at the same conversational level as mine was and the Germans treated him therefore differently.
- b. One culture aspect that I hadn't thought about was the fact in the US, meeting up with people is usually pretty casual, one can say "oh ya let's get coffee next week," then not do anything about that. In Germany, however, that's an obligation and my friends were usually very offended when I would do that, so I had to quickly change that. Germans are very reliable and punctual, and take offense when you are not. Even if you are going to be only 10 minutes late, a text message or a phone call is common courtesy. I did experience a lot of

chivalry, men would offer to carry my books or buy me drinks, to an extent that I have never found in the US. It frustrated me somewhat because I was not used to it, but I got used to it. The American stereotypes are huge, I was lucky because my accent is not very strong and also different than normal Americans, so people would not pinpoint me as American, usually after a few minute conversation they could tell I had an accent, and then believed I came from France or Spain or something like that. I was told many times I was not like normal Americans, as they imagined Americans to be superficial and not very smart and not very intelligent.

7. Financial

- a. I set up a German bank account and transferred a good amount of money into it, then had an EC card where I could withdraw money whenever I needed it. Most ATMs and stores only accept the EC card and not the normal credit card, so I would encourage students to get an EC card or to only use cash.
- b. During exam months I would spend about 90 euro a month, not very much, mainly on groceries, public transportation (it cost me 32 euro a month to ride the public transportation within the inner part of the city). During my free months, I would tend to spend much more, due to having dinner parties and going to parties and bringing some beer along, and also going to the clubs, which usually have a 4 to 15 euro cover.
- c. Munich was a very expensive city, I was not expecting everything to be overall that expensive, eating out was ridiculous, so I nearly never ate out, but instead cooked.
- d. I did not use financial aid, I got concurrent enrollment for a year and paid German tuition.

8. Program/Exchange Administration

- a. IP&E was great, they would answer my emails within a couple of days and phone calls were helpful.

9. Program/Student Type

- a. I did my own study abroad, choosing my university and going there independently, as a German student. This was VERY DIFFICULT, I would not suggest someone to do this unless they are German. I needed a lot of help from my father, friends, and family abroad. Any task is very complicated in Germany, as a lot of paperwork is required. The German language is very two-tiered, with professional German, such as the German found in contracts and administration-type things, very very very much harder than conversational German. My first two weeks in Germany were difficult, because I had to legally change my residence, apply for health care, find a cell phone provider, transfer grades from UW to LMU, etc. I look back and honestly wonder how I accomplished everything, and would not suggest someone who does not speak near fluent German to attempt this. For me, it was great, I had only one American friend abroad, then mostly German and

international friends, which is what I wanted. LMU is a great university, and any student who goes as an international student to this university will have a much different experience than I had, since they will be around international and Erasmus students much more than I am, and the German government does not require as much paperwork for international students as for German citizens moving and getting bank accounts, and so on.

10. Overall Experience

- a. My expectations were pretty realistic, I had thought that the academics would be a bit harder, but doable, and that I would enjoy myself and meet some friends. The academics turned out to be MUCH HARDER than I had thought. I'm a good student, I have never really struggled in classes. Being in Germany was the first time academically where I had problems and needed help to that extent. In one course, my first very mathematical course abroad, I had a friend tutor me once a week for about an hour and a half, I also studied for many, many, many hours, and even with that, an effort I had never put into a course before in the US, never needed to put in, I only got the lowest passing grade, which I am still proud of. My personal life in Munich was better than I had thought, I made some of the best friends I have ever made, I had a great roommate who turned out to be like my brother, I had so much fun and met so many great people. I had a great experience abroad, with of course some issues, but now I'm just hoping I can get a job over there when I've graduated to move back.