

Program Location: University of Tübingen – Germany

Term of Participation: Spring/Summer 2011

1. ARRIVAL OVERSEAS/ON-SITE ORIENTATION:

- a. The University of Tübingen can coordinate housing for foreign students. This housing usually takes the form of a simple dorm room, but occasionally the housing provided is more like a shared apartment. Rent prices for this housing range between about 200-400 euros a month; the applicant states how much they are able to pay when sending in a housing application.
- b. There is no mandatory orientation for foreign students. There is an optional orientation course which costs 15 euro; this course should be mandatory, because the bureaucracy of the German university makes matriculating and registering for classes very difficult and there is very little support from the UW side of the equation. I found this orientation course (called a Beratungskurs) completely by accident, and if I had not found it, I probably would not have been able to sign up for any of the classes I wanted.

2. ACADEMICS:

- a. Generally speaking, the instruction I received at the University of Tübingen was good but was often undermined by peculiarities and backwards aspects of the German education system. The equipment and classroom infrastructure were consistently inferior to that of the UW; technology was utilized only minimally and classroom facilities were not especially impressive. Libraries and student-access computers were adequate but often small and limited in scope. Professors and instructors were competent and often friendly and engaging, but were not expected to provide their own time for students (e.g., office hours) as U.S. students are accustomed to. Assignments and exams were handled the same as at the UW, and grading was usually fair and transparent. However, homework is not emphasized or as explicitly required as it is at the UW: there is usually no syllabus of homework to be followed over the course of the semester, and this can be frustrating to those who are used to having such a syllabus available.
- b. The quality and content of the instruction was usually very good. However, almost all the classes had much more of an emphasis on group work than at the UW: several of my classes had significant group presentations; one had a major presentation from a different group every week that lasted half an hour, representing a significant portion of the instruction for that week. The German instructors also seek to foster more discussion and active group learning than at the UW, and prefer this method of instruction to simple lecturing, sometimes with mixed effects.

c. Given that I was mostly interested in improving my German skills, I mainly took Deutsch als Fremdsprache (German as a foreign language) courses. I would recommend any of these courses.

d. All of my coursework at the University of Tübingen was related to improving my ability to speak German, which is an important part of the Germanics minor which I am seeking at the UW.

3. HOUSING:

a. I could have been provided with housing through the Studentenwerk, a semi-public affiliate of the University, or I could have found my own housing.

b. I was provided with a room by the Studentenwerk, which I rented for 261 euros/month. I chose this option because I believed it to be much simpler and much cheaper than finding my own room.

c. Without question I recommend getting a room from the Studentenwerk. Their German-style bureaucracy is a hassle, but it is cheap, convenient, and puts you in a comfortable, single-occupant room in a dorm.

4. PROGRAM/EXCHANGE SITE:

Tübingen is a small town of about 90,000 people. There is no proper campus for the University; University buildings are scattered throughout the city but are mainly located along a single major road. The city is quiet but is filled with students, and while there is no impressive campus to point to, the city itself is beautiful, with parks, and charming Altstadt (old city) and a river on which students can go boating. Bus lines go all through the town, and you rarely have to wait more than five minutes for a bus to arrive and take you where you're going. The community is extremely student-friendly, and there are many options for students to pursue during their stay. If the student does become bored, the major city of Stuttgart is less than an hour away by train.

5. HEALTH AND SAFETY:

I had no health or safety concerns. The city was very clean and very safe.

6. CULTURAL ASPECTS:

a. Germans are fairly insular, and they don't like to make short-term friends. I did become friends with some Germans who were eager to improve their English, but these Germans were almost all students of American Studies and thus predisposed to friendliness with outsiders and Americans. However, there is a very large international community at the University of Tübingen, so while you may not get drawn

deep into German culture, you will find yourself almost unavoidably as part of a multi-national group of people from all over the world. There are also many, many Americans in Tübingen, a consequence of extensive exchange relationships which the German state of Baden-Württemberg has with Oregon and California.

b. Culturally Germans are quite similar to Americans; there are many differences, but they tend to be subtle. Generally speaking, they tend to have less of a sense of humor, and they tend to make a lot of plans, so be prepared to explain your jokes and don't be surprised if a German says no when you spontaneously ask them out for a drink.

7. FINANCIAL:

a. Bank of America and Deutsche Bank have a partnership; money deposited in Bank of America can be withdrawn from Deutsche Bank ATMs free of charge.

b. Living comfortably without extravagance, about 500-580 euros/month should be enough to pay for rent, food, transportation, etc.

c. All of my expenses were pretty well planned for, though peanut butter costs more than you'd expect.

d. There were no complications when I used Financial Aid to fund my exchange.

8. PROGRAM/EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATION:

a. The IP&E arranged and organized the exchange, and the organization and arrangement stateside was very good; there were no complications before I left. Unfortunately the IP&E had very little knowledge of how things worked on the Tübingen side. Dealing with the German bureaucracy is extremely frustrating, especially when you first arrive and have no internet access; larger US exchange programs from Oregon and California had much better, smoother arrangements made. The IP&E was also not very useful in questions regarding how to register for courses at Tübingen, what courses to take, and how credits work/transfer, which is problematic because there are no advisers to ask these questions to in Germany.

9. PROGRAM/STUDENT TYPE:

This program is suited for a student who is looking for an opportunity to improve their German language skills while meeting a lot of people from all over the world in a large community of international students.

10. OVERALL EXPERIENCE:

Overall, despite significant frustrations in the first several weeks, and despite a rather difficult time connecting with many Germans, I really enjoyed this exchange. Given the opportunity, I would have definitely gone back for a second semester, and I regret that I'm unable to do that because of finances and my need to finish my degree.

APR 19 2011

Tübingen, Germany. Spring, Summer 2010

1. ARRIVAL OVERSEAS/ON-SITE ORIENTATION:

I flew into Frankfurt am Main, where I stayed overnight before taking two trains to Tübingen. We arrived right around the Easter holiday and there was confusion as to whether or not the offices would be open. Fortunately, they were open on the Tuesday before Easter, but it wasn't possible to find information pertaining to the operating hours of the university during the Easter holiday. I recommend erring on the side of caution when holidays are involved. It was always difficult to tell exactly what was open on holidays or which days were officially part of the holiday.

We stayed in a hostel in Frankfurt. In Tübingen, there are a few hostels which I've heard good things about, but we got our room keys right away and did not need accommodations in the city itself.

2. ACADEMICS

The university offers mainly two types of courses: Vorlesungen (lectures) and Seminare (seminars). Vorlesungen have one test at the end that determines your entire grade. In some courses you may be able to write an additional paper. German lectures are not like American lectures. As the German word "Vorlesung" suggests, the professor reads a script she has prepared ahead of time. In Seminare, most instruction is done through the students. Students give presentations (Referate), which make up the bulk of the learning. Some teachers give guidance for preparing for the Referate. Also, some teachers prefer assigning Gruppenreferate (group presentations).

At Tübingen, there is a good German as a Foreign Language program (also known as DaF). While many of the courses are probably too easy for a UW student who has completed German 203, there are some very good offerings and it is worth checking out.

Some teachers, particularly in the DaF department, were very friendly and accessible. Other teachers, particularly the professors in the Vorlesungen, were rather intimidating and even downright difficult to contact. Although I will say, once I overcame my fears about communicating with the sometime austere German professors, I found I got the results from them I wanted.

Grading was mostly fair, although it was impossible to tell what some teachers were looking for. I personally don't have much to comment on this section. However, I will say grades are directly based on performance and not every teacher will consider the linguistic difficulties you might have. They will excuse linguistic problems but not a lack of correct vocabulary and rich and nuanced ideas. Therefore I recommend taking every opportunity available to improve your knowledge of the subject.

Administrators were generally friendly, although sometimes they were a bit short with students who weren't familiar with the proper protocols. Simone Hahne (office on Nauklerstraße, next to the Mensa) is an invaluable resource for getting foreign students on the right path with the complicated German bureaucracy.

German universities emphasize self learning. That means you will be expected to do extra readings because you are interested in the subject. Teachers may not make materials readily available for you and may only provide "suggested reading" as a test preparation.

Instruction was generally good. I found that sometimes teachers were not willing to fully engage with the complexity of ideas or with the students. In one course, the teacher wouldn't teach anything that required stepping outside of the narrow historical period we were studying, although that information would have helped us better understand the period. Her reasoning was not wanting to make the course too complicated, but I was dissatisfied with this. In another course, the professor destroyed students' opinions. A question was an opportunity for him to talk about whatever he wanted, as long as it showed the student how narrow her knowledge was. But I feel I learned a lot of very valuable information.

As for course recommendations, I was told that Seminare would be too hard for an American student; I found many students with worse German than mine were attending Seminare and the professors were working with them to make the course accessible. Therefore, I would recommend an incoming student ignore the advice of some German professors here at UW and take mainly Seminare and few Vorlesungen.

As a German major, the education I received in Tübingen matched my UW education nicely. Tübingen is one of the world leaders in German Studies, so this enriched my German studies here at UW.

3. HOUSING

There were essentially two housing options available to me: housing in the dorms or finding my own place.

I chose the former because I had no idea how one would even try to find housing in a foreign country. Rent was reasonable. Be ready to pay a €400 deposit upon arrival.

I was not entirely happy with my choice. The supervisor for my building spoke thick Swabian and I could hardly understand him. They also took a large amount of my deposit out upon my moving out although I had caused no damage to my room.

4. PROGRAM EXCHANGE SITE

There is no campus; instead, university buildings are scattered around the city. However, most buildings are on Wilhelmstraße. Most German majors will find most of their classes in Brechtbau on one side of Wilhelmstraße and the DaF building on the other side.

The majority of university buildings are right next to the old city, which is very beautiful. There is also the old botanical gardens right there as well.

Unfortunately, most student housing is rather far away. Most students need to take a bus to get to classes.

Despite this, there are all necessary shops and services within walking distance from both the university and the dorms I'm familiar with.

To fully supply myself, though, it was often necessary to take the train to the next city over, Reutlingen. I also made some friends in Reutlingen and there is definitely a real connection between the two towns.

5. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Tübingen is a very safe city. Even walking through dark parts of the city after midnight, I never felt threatened or unsafe. I do recommend traveling in pairs or groups, of course.

South of the Neckar, the town is a bit less wholesome. I cannot say it is less "safe," but I definitely felt less comfortable there.

As for medical concerns, I think Tübingen is a healthier city than Seattle. One should be aware that cigarette smoke is pervasive in bars and at party situations.

6. CULTURAL ASPECTS

Germans can be a bit cold, and it is not an easy task to integrate into their culture. I joined a group for young gay men in Tübingen which allowed me to meet several like-minded individuals. I've become good friends with many of the members, although even there it was not always easy to make a breakthrough. I definitely recommend, however, finding such a group. There are many weekly conversation tables. I know there is one for students studying American studies where students are always willing to meet American students; unfortunately, they speak in English. However, I also met students at the Scandinavian conversation table, where German was spoken, in my dorm, where some students were more willing to speak with me than others, and at parties for foreign students.

There are not a ton of cultural differences that should worry American students. Don't wear hats into buildings and be careful wearing white sneakers. Also, speaking loudly in general is frowned upon.

There is next to no gay scene in Tübingen, which was a problem for me coming from Seattle. I did find a youth group for gays, Tübians, where I did meet many cool students, but gay issues are mostly not out in the open in Tübingen. That is not to say that the people discriminate and have prejudices. In fact, they are quite tolerant. However, small town life was definitely an adjustment for me. The same holds true for other minority groups. Expect to find little room for public expression and discussion of racial issues, class issues or issues related to transgenderism.

7. FINANCIAL

A cash machine is the easiest way to access money. I recommend withdrawing as much money as you can per withdrawal to minimize fees. If you are a Bank of America customer, you can withdraw money without fees at any Deutsche Bank. There are usually fees for wires, although you can transfer more money at once that way.

The amount of money you need per month will depend on your tastes and how much you travel. I probably spent €500-750 per month, more in months where I did extensive travel. Food is very cheap in Germany if you cook it yourself. Transportation is also cheap as one can purchase a Semesterticket (bus pass) for about €50-60 that lasts the entire semester. This also covers train travel to nearby Reutlingen and a few other cities.

I failed to cancel my rent contract in time and had to pay an extra month's rent. Be advised that the dorm offices are very unforgiving.

8. PROGRAM/EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATION:

This program was administered, so far as I could tell, by no one in particular. Although I had hoped to receive some guidance from the German department, I had almost no guidance and wasn't always completely sure who to ask questions to. But this was more of a direct exchange than a program.

9. PROGRAM/STUDENT TYPE

This program is best suited for an independent, intelligent, self-motivated student with very strong German skills. This student must also be willing to seek out what she wants and be prepared for difficult bureaucratic problems.

10. OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Overall, I was pleased with this program. It gave me a great chance to practice my German and learn more about German culture and German literature. I made many good friends and got a bunch of new experiences. I did spend a lot of time alone in my room being bored. The Germans are hard to get to know. It was unrealistic of me to expect that it'd be easy to make friends in a foreign country. But with a little work, I met some great people.

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM/ EXCHANGE EVALUATION REPORT

Program Location: Tübingen, Germany

Term of Participation: Spring and Summer Quarter 2009

Current

E-mail:

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OCT 27 2009

1. ARRIVAL OVERSEASEAS/ON-SITE ORIENTATION:

a. I recommend staying at a hotel or hostel for the first two or three nights in Tübingen. I recommend Hotel Domizil, located in downtown Tübingen.

b. My program orientation covered: How to open bank, library, and cafeteria accounts. It also included a tour of the university and offered social activities at night.

2. ACADEMICS:

a. The classroom structure at the University of Tübingen was more relaxed than that of the University of Washington. Instruction was more lecture based, without many in-class activities. Teacher/ student relations were the same as in America. Grading was based mainly on single exams at the end of the semester. In terms of administration, it was more difficult in Germany simply because I had a limited vocabulary. The library system was very aggravating and it is best to bring a laptop and print out assignments at local printing shops.

b. The quality and content of instruction was very good. Instructors were always eager to help. Assignments were always interesting and engaging.

c. I recommend taking Junge Literatur, Literatur Kreativ, and Massenmedien. These were classes designed for international students.

d. My study abroad course work related to my UW education because the classes improved my German reading and speaking skills. I was also able to take many communication classes, which is my major at UW. These classes gave me a new perspective in communication studies.

3. HOUSING:

a. Dorms were the only available housing to me.

b. I chose living in the dorms because it was a very cheap option.

c. I would recommend living in a dorm.

4. PROGRAM/ EXCHANGE SITE:

a. The campus was spread out throughout the entire town. It was a relatively small town with a great bus system, making it very easy to get around town. The town was also extremely safe.

5. HEALTH AND SAFETY:

a. I did not go to the doctor while I was in Germany. I did buy health insurance and it was very easy to do so. Every section of Tübingen is very safe. I was never a victim of theft.

6. CULTURAL ASPECTS:

a. I met members of the community by meeting other students in classes, meeting my neighbors in the dorm, and being a "regular" at certain restaurants.

b. Sometimes cashiers would try to overcharge me because German was not my first language. I recommend speaking up when you feel something is not right.

7. FINANCIAL:

a. The best way to access/ transfer money from the U.S. is to give your parents your bank account number, or open a joint checking account with one parent to make transferring money very easy. Also, be able to access your bank account online.

b. I recommend 470 Euros per month for spending money.

c. I did not expect insurance to be 70 Euros per month, so try to contact your U.S. insurance company to see if you will be covered while studying abroad.

d. I did not use Financial Aid to fund my program.

8. PROGRAM/ EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATION:

a. The IPE office was very helpful. They helped me before the program began, but I did not need to contact them while I was abroad.

b. The IPE administered my program.

9. PROGRAM/ STUDENT TYPE:

This program is best suited for a student who is serious about their studies and also enjoys traveling on weekends.

10. OVERALL EXPERIENCE:

My academic and personal expectations were very realistic and I am very glad that I studied abroad in Tübingen, Germany.

IP&E Program Evaluation

Tübingen, Germany
Summer semester 2008

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1. Arrival Overseas/On-site Orientation

- a. So long as a student arrives between Monday and Friday, preferably in the morning, there should be no problem with visiting the Studentenwerk in Fichtenweg 5 to receive the keys for student housing (assuming one has previously applied to the Studentenwerk for a room), although be sure to have 400 euros available for the security deposit. Obviously one can stay in a friend's room, or check in at the Jugendherberge in Tübingen.
- b. The IPE's orientation was very general in nature, and was not helpful in navigating upon arrival in Tübingen. My recommendation is for students to visit the Washington University in St. Louis site (<http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/intrel/wustl/wustl-01.html>) for an accurate and detailed account of necessary steps, local travel info from the airport in Stuttgart, what to expect, etc.

2. Academics:

- a. The classroom in Tübingen is much less structured than one is accustomed to from the UW. My own experience was that registration was not necessary for class, with the exception of Seminare and Proseminare which only required signing a form passed around in class declaring intent to complete the course.

Instruction in the Vorlesungen generally consisted of two hours of lecture, with a few questions from the instructor and students, similar to the UW. Proseminare were much smaller, comprised of 10-15 students with much more emphasis on student participation, critical thinking, and analysis, much like a 400 level class at the UW.

Teacher/student relations were fairly typical, with professors generally available to answer questions and discuss matters before and after class.

Exams vary from 2 hour in-class written exams, short 15 minute oral finals, and term papers from 10-30 pages depending upon the class and instructor.

Administration poses a far more daunting challenge than at the UW. A student will need to visit a myriad of offices to receive, complete, and fill in a plethora of documents that must receive official stamps and signatures, particularly for housing, student ID, and matriculation documents. These processes take place at many different offices which are scattered about Tübingen and offer limited hours on select days of the week. Even grades must be picked up from departmental offices. My advice is to plan ahead given the limited hours, work with friends to find offices, times and forms, and set aside plenty of time, over the course of several days in some instances, to ensure everything is completed in good order.

The libraries vary with the particular department, but as a rule, one should not expect to be allowed to bring book bags into the libraries. Computer facilities are available, if initially difficult to find, although there are plenty of private computer facilities available, and the occasional free Wi-fi spot although most require a small fee. Internet in the dorms will take a couple of weeks to be set up after your arrival and is prone to crashing several times a day, so one should plan during their first couple of weeks to use computer cafe's if internet is necessary.

- b. The quality and content of instruction was generally on par with that at the UW.
- c. I highly recommend classes taught by Dr. C. Reinfandt; an exceptional instructor with a very broad and deep knowledge of literature.
- d. My coursework during my time abroad was used to finish out elective credits, and so was aimed primarily at satisfying personal areas of interest that pursuit of my degree requirements and courses in German did not previously allow me to investigate.

3. Housing

- a. The student housing was essentially my only available option.
- b. I secured housing through the Studentenwerk for a reasonable monthly rate out of necessity given lack of other choices, although were others available I still would have chosen the same option due to low cost and the opportunity to meet other students.
- c. I would recommend that students simply be sure to complete their housing forms through the University of Tübingen early.

4. Program/Exchange Site

As is often said, Tübingen *is* the university. Although a majority of the university buildings are located along Wilhelmstraße, there is no centralized campus. Therefore, it is helpful to quickly obtain a semester bus pass as well as learn bus routes and times in order to navigate about Tübingen.

The community consists of a number of private shops, restaurants, movie and play theaters, etc. within the Altstadt. The surrounding area offers public swimming pools, bicycle and walking paths through lightly forested areas, and relatively dense housing.

5. Health and Safety

I had absolutely no health concerns during my time abroad. There are occasional times when safety issues became slightly elevated such as during the May Day protests, soccer games, and when traveling to particular areas. I also had my credit information compromised by a card scanner at a Starbucks in Heathrow airport, so one should be sure to monitor their bank activities while abroad.

6. Cultural Aspects

- a. Integration is largely dependent upon language ability. I found nearly everyone I met to be very polite and hospitable, particularly if you communicate as best you can in German. I was able to meet many persons in my dorm building, at the University gym, at Biergartens, pubs, public swimming

pools, restaurants, cafes, and classrooms. Virtually everywhere you go offers an opportunity to meet, converse, and befriend someone.

b. Of course there are challenges presented in conducting everyday affairs, particularly initially, as it requires one to fill in any gaps in their language. Nevertheless, I found the cultural differences to be rather small and cannot recall anything overly problematic.

7. Financial

a. Certain banks in the U.S. have partner banks in Germany so that one can transfer money into a German bank account with no fees. If I recall correctly, Bank of America is partnered with Deutsche Bank. I stuck to weekly withdrawals from an international ATM, and only deposited into my German account what was necessary for rent. Setting up a bank account may require that one already have a student visa, such as through Deutsche Bank, so I would recommend an account with Kreissparkasse which was much more friendly to exchange students.

b. Spending money is largely dependent upon how much traveling one wants to do while in Germany and the sort of accommodation they will want during their travels. My expenses were slightly higher than most given frequent traveling via both train and planes, and the occasional departure from staying in hostels in favor of hotels with more comfortable accommodations. At the high end I would suggest \$2000-2500 per month, including rent, food, travel funds, necessities, and activities. Nevertheless, it is quite possible to spend as little as \$1000 per month if one limits traveling and eating out, and searches out options such as couchsurfing versus staying in hostels or hotels.

c. British Airways lost all of my checked baggage for 16 days, which required me to purchase some new items in the interim including some toiletries and clothing.

d. I did have financial aid to pay for tuition. The only potential problem has been upon return and waiting for credits to transfer back to the UW in order to show satisfactory progress to clear the hold on the following quarter's aid disbursement.

8. Program Exchange/Administration

a. I am quite sure that the IPE invests a great deal of time and care in coordinating an exchange. Nevertheless, there are a number of issues which I feel can be improved.

First and foremost the IPE needs to improve its communication time. My own experience was that it was often difficult to contact and meet the program coordinator given that they were often out of their office on travel. This meant that even fairly urgent emails were sometimes only answered a week or more after being sent.

Secondly, despite their statement to the contrary, the IPE did not contact nor work with me as my exchange approached. Six other exchange students also shared the same concern with me. The last I heard from the IPE was an email announcing that I had been accepted to the program.

Furthermore, the IPE was unhelpful in determining a reasonable course load. I was instructed to speak with my department advisor who, as I expected, had no knowledge about what to anticipate in terms of course load in Germany.

Lastly, the IPE lost my completed program application the first time around which creates a worrisome attitude for a student that is about to travel overseas and who for better or worse, is highly dependent upon the IPE to soothe worries and ensure a smooth process.

I am sure that the IPE may at times be overburdened by needlessly worried students, although I believe that all of these issues are fairly straight-forward and easy to remedy. My biggest recommendation would be to improve communication with students before and during their exchange. Another recommendation which may help address the above would be to compile a short "survival" guide similar to that put together by Washington University in St. Louis (website listed above). This was far and away the single most helpful resource I found during the exchange process and will likely answer many of the concerns that students will have before their exchange, thereby cutting down on the number and frequency of contacts that a student may make to the IPE office.

To the IPE's credit, the exchange process upon return has proved quite simple and trouble free thus far.

9. Program/Student Type

This program requires that a student be highly organized and capable of self-motivation in order to be sure that all forms are collected, completed, and turned in on time.

10. Overall Experience

My experience, despite a few hiccups, was absolutely amazing and well worth every penny and bit of energy spent. I met and became good friends with exchange students from all over the world, and after calming a bit of initial culture shock, I thoroughly enjoyed every moment of my experience in Germany. The academics did not prove as challenging as I had expected--an experience that I have heard echoed by many other students. Simply said, a student should not be overly worried by what they will encounter in the classroom as instruction is generally on par with that at the UW. Really, my biggest let down was that beer wasn't as good as the hype--a small concession indeed.