



A Guide to International Exchange: One Year in Hamburg

GENE 303
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January 2008

January 11, 2008

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Dear Sir:

This report, entitled "A Guide to International Exchange: One Year in Hamburg" was prepared to satisfy International Option requirements. The purpose of this report is to provide valuable information to future students considering international exchange, in particular to Hamburg, Germany.

I was on exchange to Technical University of Hamburg-Harburg for my 3A and 3B terms. I am an environmental engineering student.

This report was written entirely by me and has not received any previous academic credit at this or any other academic institution.

Sincerely,

Katie Chakhova

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SUMMARY

I spent one year at Technical University of Hamburg-Harburg in Hamburg (TUHH), Germany as an exchange student during my 3A and 3B terms. The report summarizes my experience and useful information I learned along the way. The purpose of the report is to assist future student in preparation for an exchange year.

The report provides information on how to choose international exchange program, what to take into consideration and how to prepare for a year abroad. It provides information on how to incorporate exchange into University of Waterloo schedule and what to do ensure one is well prepared for the experience.

The report also provides information about TUHH, its study system, and how to adjust to life in Hamburg. Information regarding Hamburg itself and surrounding area, as well as general tips for travelling around Europe are included.

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1.0 Introduction

International exchange is an excellent opportunity to travel the world, experience a new culture and make friends from all over the world. Good planning and preparedness are essential to allow for the best experience. This report is a summary of my exchange year, the planning that went into it and the things I learned along the way. I hope it is of help to students considering international exchange, in particular to Hamburg, Germany.

2.0 Destination

Choosing destination is the first step in preparing for an exchange year. One of the main concerns should be language requirements. For example to do an exchange to Germany it is required to have taken about 2 German courses. A lot of universities in Europe offer many courses in English. I took a lot of my courses in English while in Hamburg, but there were some in German as well. While it is not necessary to be fluent in the language of the destination country, basic language skills will definitely come in handy and allow for more freedom in the new home. It will make trips to the shops, banks and any other errand that much less challenging.

Not all the universities will have courses matching all the programs offered at Waterloo. Most universities have their courses listed online, so it is a good idea to research which courses are available and how they will match up with those required at Waterloo.

The next thing to find out is the semester schedule in the country of choice. Some will match nicely with Waterloo system, some are completely off. Depending on the schedule the terms might have to be shifted around, which requires more planning in advance. In Germany the semesters do not match up with Waterloo ones at all. There are two

semesters in a year, winter one starts at the end of October and goes until the end of March, and the summer one starts in April and goes until end of September. It is possible to finish all the exams for the summer semester in August and be back in Waterloo for September.

Any destination will provide an interesting and educational experience, though it is best to choose a destination best suited to ones interests and language skills. It is important to keep an open mind and be ready to immerse oneself in the new culture and learn as much as possible from the experience.

3.0 Application

Once the destination is chosen it is smart to start application process preparations as soon as possible. Applications usually will need to be submitted 6-8 months before planned departure. Though the application process might take a few months, so planning ahead is essential. The first step is to identify which terms will be spent on exchange and if there are any adjustments to be made to co-op terms. Table 1 shows my schedule shift in order to accommodate one year exchange to Hamburg.

It is only required to complete 5 out of 6 co-op terms to graduate so that might be handy for organizing exchange and allow for more flexibility. The course match up will differ depending which academic terms are spent abroad. It is important to try and match up as many courses as possible and identify and courses that will have to be made up upon return to Waterloo. It is necessary to arrange all the co-op terms, courses with the department and to meet with program co-coordinator in order to complete the application process.

Table 1. Schedule Example.

Term	Normal Schedule	Exchange Schedule
Fall 2005	2B Academic	2B Academic
Winter 2006	2B Work	2B Work
Spring 2006	3A Academic	3A Work
Fall 2006	3A Work	Exchange (2 Academic Terms 3A and 3B)
Winter 2007	3B Academic	
Spring 2007	3B Work	
Fall 2007	4A Academic	4A Academic
Winter 2008	4B Academic	4B Academic

Besides the application form to the University of Waterloo, there is an application form to the host university. Residence application is likely to accompany this application. It is usually forwarded to the host institution by program coordinator. It is wise to check on the progress of the application often and make sure it is being processed. The host institution will inform one once the place has been reserved.

4.0 Pre-departure

Once accepted at the host institution, it is time to start preparing for a year abroad and making sure everything is arranged at home. I would highly recommend getting a joint bank account with one of the parents, as that will allow for easiest money transfers, as well allow them to take care of any unexpected financial situations at home. If going to Germany, I would recommend getting an account at Scotia Bank as their debit cards can be used at Deutsche Bank machines at no fees, since the two are partner banks. I had withdrawn money from my Scotia account and then deposited it into Deutsche account at

bank machines to avoid high charges for wiring money overseas. It is good idea to bring at least one thousand Euro cash for the first few days. Another major thing to take care of is taxes, as they will still need to be filed.

I would also recommend emailing the residence and inquiring whether bedding will be provided. The residence I stayed at did provide it, and have I known it I could have saved some space in my luggage by not bringing my own. It is good to remember that airlines charge high fees for excess weight, so the lighter the better. Though it can be expensive to buy a lot of things in Germany, packing enough essentials is good idea too.

TUHH provides mentor service and I would recommend taking advantage of it. Mentors help out a lot in the first few days upon arrival, by meeting at the airport, showing the residence, helping with bank account and insurance, if necessary. They can also show around the university and the city. Emailing the coordinator and arranging for a mentor before departure is essential.

5.0 Finances

The tuition is paid at the host university during the exchange to TUHH. During my exchange, October 2006 to August 2007, the tuition fees at TUHH were 200 Euro per term. The tuition fee includes a public transit pass for that term, which includes all of the Greater Hamburg Area. No courses require text books and all the course notes are usually provided on the course websites. The tuition fee also includes a 5 Euro printing allowance for the term.

The residence cost about 200 Euro per month. The fee includes all utilities and internet access. The only extra cost is the laundry. The food costs are similar to those in Canada. There is a mandatory health insurance, which costs 50 Euro a month.

6.0 Hamburg, Germany (TUHH)

Hamburg is a wonderful city with lots to do and see. There is something for everyone. TUHH is a great school with a wide range of courses and good international community. This section covers essential for survival in Hamburg and TUHH.

6.1 First Days in Hamburg

Upon arriving in Hamburg, the keys to residence can be picked up from the designated person (as provided upon confirmation of residence). If arriving prior to move in dates it is possible to pick up keys in advance and to arrange for luggage to be stored at the residence, while staying at a hostel for the first few days.

One of the first things to take care is to open a bank account. A mentor can assist with this task. The bank will need a proof of home address, such as residence contract and possibly university registration papers. As mentioned before, Deutsche Bank is a good choice of the bank since it has a Canadian bank partner, Scotia Bank, as well as other partners across Europe, allowing use of debit card without fees to access cash.

Secondly, there is a need for health insurance, which is needed in order to register at the university. There are numerous insurance companies to choose from that provide student coverage and prices are very similar. Often the residence will organize one of the companies to come in and assist all of the international students in getting coverage.

Lastly, in order to legally reside in Germany beyond three months it is necessary to get a residence permit. Mentors can provide addresses of visa offices where these can be obtained. The one year permit costs 50 Euros and is sticker in the passport. The offices often have long line ups so it is a good idea to go early in the morning to get a place in line. The application for permit requires proof of ability to support oneself during the entire stay in Germany. The proof can be provided as bank statements or a letter from parents agreeing to provide financial support. The application also requires a passport size photograph. It is a good idea to get a few photographs done before departure from Canada.

6.2 Registering at University

In order to register at university, there needs to be a contract filled out and tuition fees paid. The international coordinator can provide all the necessary documents and instructions. The coordinator will also give the course calendar. There is no need to register for specific courses; any number of course can be attended. At the mid-point through the term there is an exam registration period. During this time the form needs to be filled at the examination office indicating which exams one intends to write.

6.3 Environmental Engineering Courses

Table 2 provides the list of course I took during the winter term, their UW equivalent, and language of instruction.

Table 3 provides the list of course I took during the summer term, their UW equivalent, and language of instruction.

Table 2 Winter Term Courses

TUHH Course	UW Equivalent	Language of Instruction
Wasserbau	CIVE 381	German
Environmental Analysis	ENVE 330	English/ German
Fundamentals of Waste Treatment	Technical Elective	English
Groundwater Engineering	Technical Elective	English/ German
Physico-Chemical Water Treatment	Technical Elective	English
Technology and Innovation Management	CSE	English
International Law	n/a	English
Deutsch B1/B2	German 201	German
Practical Course in Wastewater Treatment	Supplementary lab work	English
Integrated Pollution Control	Technical Elective	English

Table 3 Summer Term Course

TUHH Course	UW Equivalent	Language of Instruction
Bodenmechanik	CIVE 353	German
Sustainable Water Management and Water Supply	ENVE 375	English
Groundwater Modeling	EARTH 456	English/ German
Biological Waste Treatment and Landfilling	Technical Elective	English
Air Pollution	Technical Elective	English
Environmental Geochemical Engineering	Technical Elective	English

I had to make the following courses upon my return to UW:

- ENVE 320, taken as CIVE 332 during 4A;
- ENVE 321, taken as CIVE 331 during 4B; and
- ENVE 391, taken during 4B.

6.4 Exams

The exam period at TUHH is approximately 2 months long. The registration for exam is mid way through the term, and needs to be done at the examination office. The exams are either oral or written and usually one hour in length. There is no official holiday break between the terms but with exams so spaced out there are often multiple weeks off.

The exams usually represent course material well, but due to short time period do require the material to be well known.

6.5 Things to do in Hamburg

Hamburg is a diverse city with lots to do and see. It truly has something for everyone. The city centre is 20 minutes by subway from the TUHH campus. The city centre is picturesque and has a lot of shopping districts, as well as tourist attractions and museums. In the centre of the city is the lake (Alster), with parks all around. There a boat tours around the Alster, as well canoes and pedal boats can be rented.

One of the more famous areas of Hamburg is St. Pauli, which includes the Reeperbahn. Reeperbahn is a red light district, but is also the main destination for bars and clubs in the city. The street is full of people every night of the week with the wide range of bars, clubs, and sex shops and shows. Sternschanze is another popular area with lots of bars, cafes, restaurants and small shops.

The harbour is the port area of the city. Many cargo ships stop by here. Some cruise ships make a stop here as well. Every Sunday morning at the river is the famous fish market. It is a good place to get good deals of fish, as well as fruits and vegetables.

There are a few towns around Hamburg that make for a perfect day trip, such as Bremen, Cuxhaven, Lueneberg, and Luebeck. Bremen has a nice old town and is famous for the tale of Bremen Musicians. Cuxhaven is a small town on the shores of the North Sea, and is nice place for a walk along the shore. Though, it should be mentioned that most of the beaches are not free. Lueneberg has a nice Christmas market.

7.0 Travelling Europe

There are numerous discount airlines operating in Europe, which means flying is usually the cheapest way of getting around. A good website for searching discount airfares around Europe is <http://www.skyscanner.net>. The railway companies often have specials as well, such as group sales or destination specific sales. German railway company lists their specials on their website (www.bahn.de/). A good engine for hostel booking is Hostel World (<http://www.hostelworld.com/>).

8.0 Coming Back to Waterloo

Upon return to Waterloo it is important to make sure all the courses are accounted for. It is likely that the original course plan is to change due to scheduling conflicts or courses not being offered. This may result in more classes needing to be made up upon return. Work reports all need to be completed and accounted for as well.

9.0 Conclusions

The exchange is likely to be an enriching experience. It allows experiencing a new culture, different educational system, and making friends from all over the world. It is necessary to plan well to allow for the best experience. Keeping an open mind and readiness for an adventure will make the experience that much more enjoyable.