

## **Student Exchange Report**

I spent the 4.5 month of the Fall semester of 2022 on a student exchange program at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As an Interior Design major, I took classes such as "Interior Building Systems" and "Environment for Well-Being", which focused on how design can impact mental and physical well-being of individuals and was very enlightening. In our design studio class, I got fresh insights into design approaches and processes, that are taught differently at my home university in Germany. This has been some sort of mind-opener for me, equipping me with many new resources stemming from an entirely different system than what I had been used to.

The application process was fairly long as I had to apply for the semester 9 months in advance. For me though, the most complicated part of the application was to keep everything organized over such a rather long time span. The most preparation was needed for the interview. After the acceptance in January, I had 5 month time to gather all the necessary documents, such as transcripts, bank statements and proof of health insurance, and ensure that they were translated into English. I also had to get all the documents that were required from both the sending as well as the receiving university, which I found a little confusing. In that 5 month time I also had to apply for a scholarship and a student visa, which added an extra layer of complexity to the process.

While the travel had to be organized by myself, the accommodation was taken care of by the university. I had to apply for that two month in advance to the begin of the fall semester. The living conditions in the student dorms were okay, with comfortable rooms and shared common spaces. I got a single room but there were also options for two- or three-person rooms. The social environment was welcoming, I met many new people from different backgrounds and cultures. There were not as many exchange students as I expected or hoped for, only three, but there were many transfer students coming from all over the world.

The classes itself, as mentioned above, were very different from what I was used to but that is what made them exciting in my opinion. Because I had some difficulties with getting enrolled in my pre-chosen courses, I ended up taking courses for second, third and fourth year students, which was an interesting experience as the students in that classes were all on different levels and had different experiences to share.

The campus itself was a bit of a bubble, with a lack of non-academic activities close-by around campus. It was hard to get out of campus on your own and experience life in the United States, which was a bit disappointing. The on-campus activities and events were a good opportunity to connect with the people living together on campus. The university also arranged trips for the international students, going to New York and events and places like museums in Philadelphia, to make it easier for the students to leave campus.

The financial situation during the semester was manageable, although the cost of living in the United States is generally higher than in Germany. I had to pay for my room as well as my meal plan. I also had to factor in other expenses, such as transportation and leisure activities as well as personal things and trips I did in order to get to know the country a little more.

My fixed weekly schedule for the whole semester included classes from Monday to Thursday, with evenings and weekends dedicated to studying and completing assignments. The work load throughout the semester was big but still manageable as there wasn't too much to do besides studying. I also had to attend weekly meetings and practices for the cheerleading team I joined, which was a great way to get involved in extracurricular activities and meet new people.

Overall, my semester abroad was very enjoyable. I gained a lot of valuable experiences and insights, both academically and personally. My everyday life was filled with learning and discovery, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have had this experience.

For future students who may go on exchange at the same host university, my insider tip would be to make the most of your time outside of classes by exploring the city and getting involved in extracurricular activities. This will help you to experience the culture and lifestyle of the United States, and create lasting memories.





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