



UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

M.E. RINKER SCHOOL OF CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT

FALL 2022



Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service



PREPARATION

HOW IT STARTED

TH-OWL

It began in October 2021, when we received the email from International office regarding a thrilling opportunity for an exchange semester with University of Florida. I was ecstatic seeing the mail and followed the application process. The process required me to submit a letter of motivation, latest transcript, Curriculum Vitae, enrollment certificate, portfolio and a language certificate until 1st of December.

Around the second last week of December, I received an invitation for the interview which was scheduled on 10th January 2022. The interview was held in English language and discussed my motivation for the program and portfolio of works. The interview was taken by panelists from TH-OWL and ex-students were also present to give us some insights on their experience.

After 2 weeks from the interview, I got the mail of acceptance. After the acceptance we were nominated from TH-OWL International office to UF for this exchange process. We were then also informed about the further procedure and about the TOEFL exam that is mandatory. Maryse guided us thoroughly in the process and arranged special guidance sessions for the language test.

The selection from UF was a formality after our nomination by TH-OWL, in the month of February we received login credentials from UF to access their portal and apply for the program.

UF

After receiving the credentials from UF we could access their online resources through a non-gator link id. It consisted of three sections:

1. Reading: This section gave general information about the process and requirements for the application.
2. Questionnaires: This section took preferences from the applicants regarding On-Campus Housing, subjects interested in etc

3. Documents: Here we had to submit documents including passport, transcript of grades, proof of financial security and TOEFL results.

(Additional tip: Although ISAP offered a generous amount for the exchange, additional funds had to be shown to fulfill the criteria set by UF)

On this portal we could also reach out and explore which course we are interested in studying during our program.

Visa

After filling the necessary questionnaires and uploading the documents, the application can be submitted. After the deadline, (1st April 2022) in our case, UF started processing the admission process. After a confirmation from UF, they informed us about sending a DS-2019 document form to TH-OWL. This document was necessary for the visa appointment. US embassy is present in Germany in Munich, Frankfurt and Berlin. For me it was least waiting days in Berlin hence I applied through there. After receiving the DS-2019, the process was fairly easy. The embassy took a small interview which was very simple. After the Visa appointment my visa was ready in 3 working days. But it might not always be the case, hence applying as soon as possible is recommended.

Additional Documents

Apart from previously mentioned documents, we had to submit additional documents which are Health insurance and Immunization form. But the deadline for these documents is a bit late.

UF sends a detailed information regarding the health insurance. It is recommended to buy an insurance from one of those options as all other International insurances are not accepted by UF.

PREPARATION

HOW IT STARTED

I bought an insurance from ISP. It is a bit cheaper if the student is under the age of 25 and chooses a higher deductible (1500\$). I chose a 500\$ deductible and was 26 at the time, hence it costed me around 660\$ for whole semester.

Housing

There are two options available:

1. On-Campus housing : UF reserves limited dorm rooms for International exchange students in Weaver hall. These are furnished rooms and are located centrally in the UF campus. There are double and single rooms available. Each floor has a community kitchen and bathrooms. I advise applicants to apply as early as possible because there are allotted on a first come first serve basis.
2. Off-campus Housing: These apartments come with their own challenges like full year leases only, difficult to find through facebook pages and private websites.

These off-campus options are cheaper than on-campus options but could be a bit far from classes. Students have to take a 10-15 minutes bus to get to the campus for free with their gator ID cards. But the buses are not very reliable and less frequent on weekends. I was in waiting list for on-campus so initially I booked an off-campus apartment. After reaching Gainesville, I didn't like the off campus apartment (it was a private landlord) and luckily got an offer from Housing department for the last on-campus single room left in Riker hall. Riker hall was in front of Weaver hall and the room costed around 3000\$ for one semester. It was a simple room, furnished with a bed, desk, a chair and a chest of drawers.



My floor in Riker hall



Riker hall



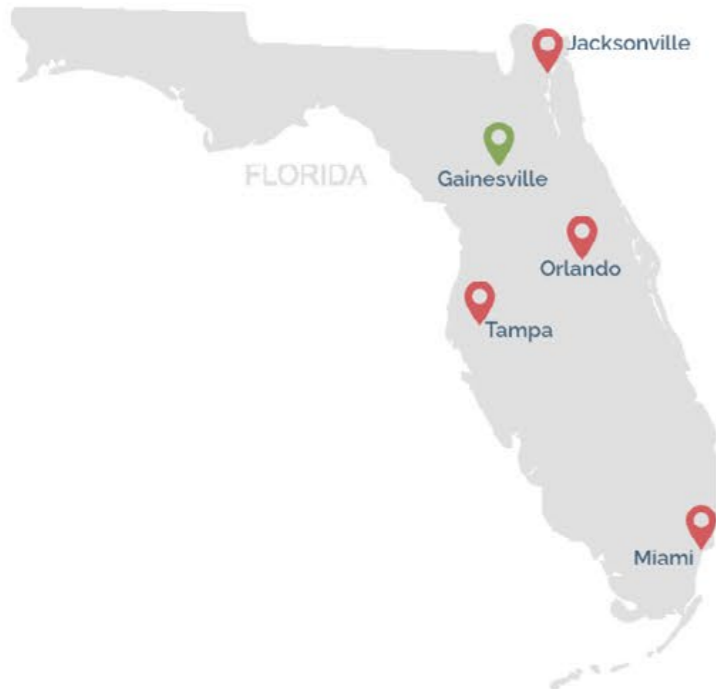
My room in Riker hall

EXPERIENCE

The journey begins!

Travel

On 16th August 2022 I took my flight from Dusseldorf International airport for Tampa, Florida via Zurich, Switzerland. It is recommended to get flights to bigger airports like Tampa, Orlando or Miami because flights to Gainesville could be quite costly. From these big cities there are different bus services like Greyhound, Flixbus and Redcoach to reach Gainesville.



I stayed for a day in Tampa because these bus services are not as frequent. But these are good options to travel around Florida without a personal vehicle.

Finally, I arrived in Gainesville on 18th August 2022 to acclimatize with the University and the city before the classes began. The university campus is enormous and provides various facilities for studies and various extra-curricular activities. The classes began on 24th of August, But I met Professor Robert Ries (M.E. Rinker School of Const. Management) on 22th of August. He was very welcoming and immediately offered me a desk in his Powell Center with other Ph.D students. It was mesmerizing, the campus has its own Football stadium, multiple libraries, sports and gym facilities apart from the Educational buildings.

Introduction week

The initial days were spent meeting new students and attending Orientation from different societies and student organizations existing in the University. Also, there were events where the student members tabled their clubs so the new students are aware of them and can join the clubs as per their interests. I was ecstatic to see clubs which I never heard before or didn't expect them like Underwater hockey, club for Magic, Human Vs Zombie etc. Overall there are more than 900 student organizations with different focuses.



Tabling in SW Rec center



Bear Archery ground.

EXPERIENCE

The journey

Study

First week of the semester is the Add/Drop period. During this time the students are permitted to attend any course in the department to decide which modules suit them the best. By the end of this week students are allowed to drop any subject or swap it with a different one. As a graduate student, we had to complete 9 credits to complete this semester successfully. I studied the following modules:

1. Research Methods in Construction

This module gave an insight on preparing a research project within the Construction discipline. It taught us about how to develop a systematic approach for research and explained about the key concepts like Hypothesis, Literature review etc.

Individual dependent study:

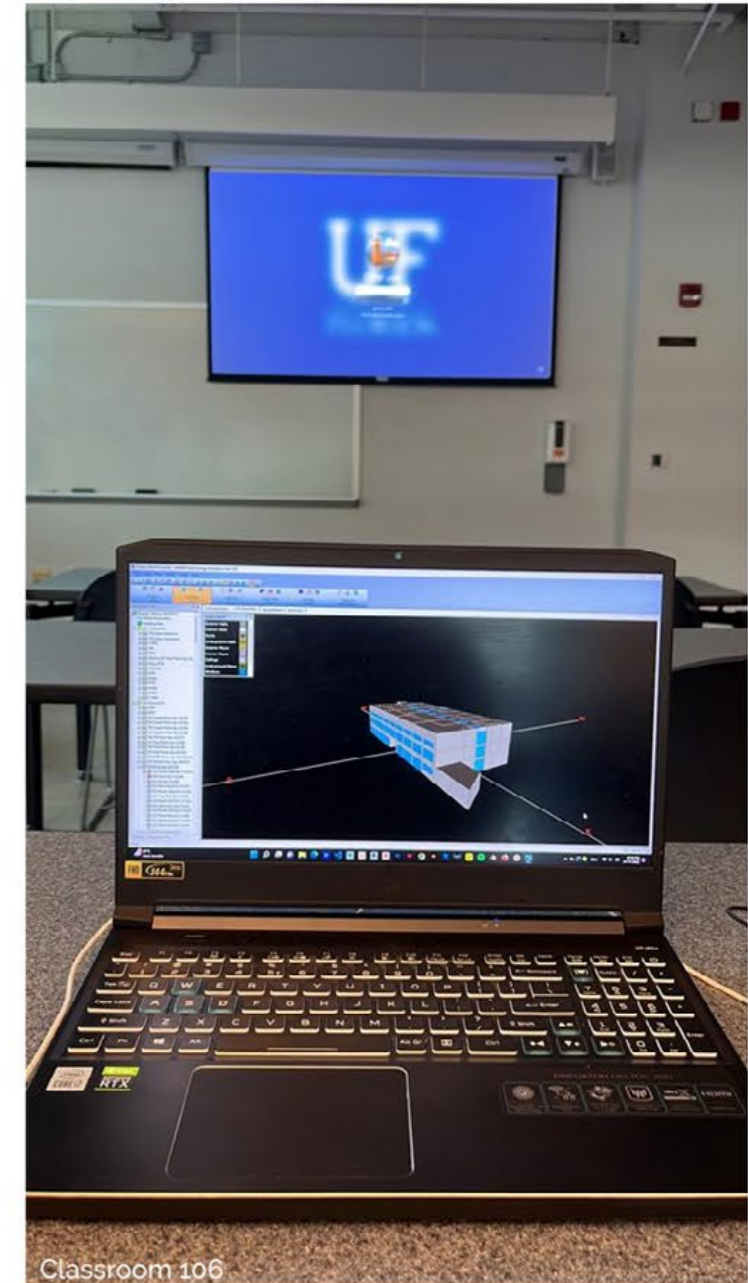
This module was independent study under Prof. Robert Ries. I worked on my research topic and held regular meetings with him. He also gave me a desk with other research scholars in Powell Center for Construction and Environment. This gave me an opportunity to get some insight into current researches that he was undertaking at this centre.



Powell Center for Construction & Environment

3 Building Energy Modelling

In this module we went into depth about Building Energy Calculations. We modelled our own building i.e. the Rinker School of Const. Management. We learnt about different regulations from ASHRAE and DOE. The modelling was so precise, included live loads, equipment loads, and lighting fixtures. We also included Heating, cooling services, hot and cold water supply schedules. At the end, various techniques were proposed to decrease the Building energy consumption.



Classroom 106

EXPERIENCE

Life in UF campus

Life in the UF campus was thrilling. The 2000 acre campus had so much to offer. I thought that only the introduction week was planned with events on everyday, but the frequency of events didn't decrease throughout the semester. There were numerous events to engage the students. Most of the organizations had regular sessions weekly. I got back into playing tennis after so many years. I also participated in couple of sessions for Swing dance, Casino salsa some sessions for Bollywood (Indian film industry) dance group- Lasya as well. The student organizations are very welcoming and inclusive, anyone from a beginner to a pro level could easily join the organization and participate as per their availability.

There were two large sports and fitness facilities available for the students - SW Recreation center and Florida gymnasium. Here students could play indoor sports including basketball, table tennis, squash amongst others and had large gym for exercises. These facilities also held regular classes for yoga, meditation and other fitness activities.



Florida Gym

There were certain organizations like Gator-Nights/ Gator days that regularly had student engagement activities every Friday. The theme for these activities depended on the festivals sometimes (for eg. Halloween, Christmas, Thanksgiving etc) or other times focused on student's growth and fun activities. There were activities like "Bounce back Gators" to understand and discuss obstacles we were facing during the studies. At some events there was a possibility to roller skate or go bowling which was amazing.



Design your pot - Gator Nights



Gator bounce back

EXPERIENCE

Life in UF campus

Most of these events were held in and around Reitz Union. It's a building dedicated to students to gather, collaborate and exchange ideas. It consisted of meeting rooms varying from a capacity of 5 to 500, a game room with a bowling alley, food courts, offices for student legal services and career services.

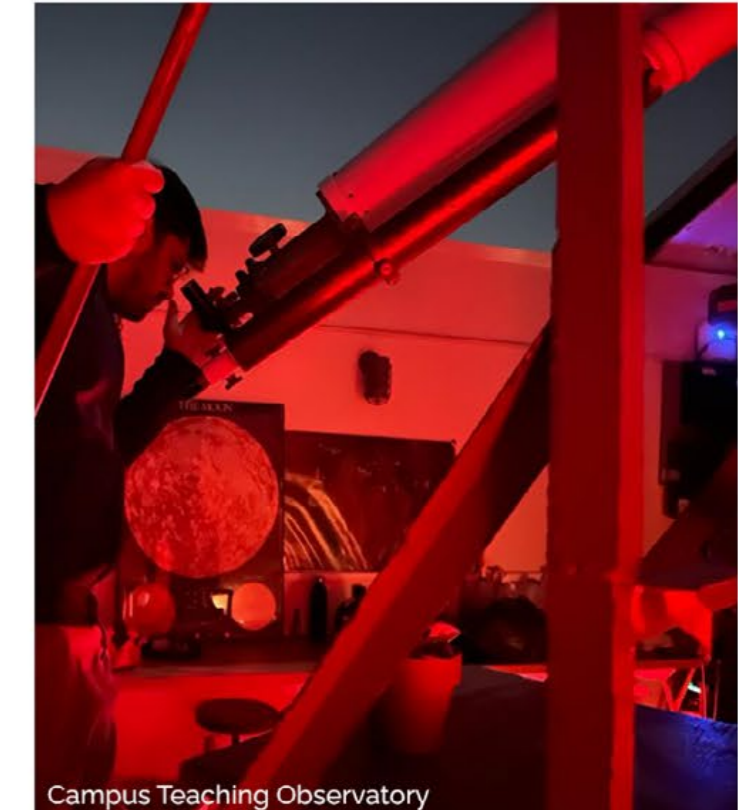


Reitz union



Reitz union

I was also interested in attending social events from departments other than Architecture. For example, the Department of Astronomy operates a Teaching observatory which is open to public for special events. I got a chance to observe the moon, Saturn, star clusters and nebulae through various Cassegrain Telescopes.



Campus Teaching Observatory



Lake Wauburg

UF also encourages students spending time in nature which is beneficial for mental and physical health. UF campus has Lake Alice and also supports fun activities at Lake Wauburg. Here students can do mountain climbing, rent kayaks & paddle boards for free and enjoy the nature.

EXPERIENCE

GO GATORS!

The fall season is considered to be the best for attending UF. This is because it's also the football season. Starting from September, almost every Saturday a game was held. On every game day the whole atmosphere of the University changes. Everything on that day is about football on campus. All students wear the colours of the Gator team (Blue, orange and white) to show their support and tailgate (party) at private houses, university parks and in specially the area enclosing the Ben Hill Griffin stadium. Additional tip: The students can buy the seasonal ticket even before the semester starts. It costs around 140\$ and pass holders can attend all the football games for that season.

They get sold out very quickly. If one misses it (like I did) they can buy individual tickets for the matches. For me, attending three matches was enough to understand the American football culture and experience the ambience of these games. UF students only pay to watch College football, rest all sports and activities are free with gator ID. Even though football is the most popular sport, UF students and Gainesville residents were very supportive for their teams competing in other sports. The Stephen C. O'Connell Center which was 2 minutes away from Riker hall hosted all the volleyball and basketball matches. I tried to attend these games and cheer the gators when I had some free time from studies.



Ben Hill Griffin stadium



Ben Hill Griffin stadium



Stephen C. O'Connell Center



Stephen C. O'Connell Center



Fraternity House, UF Campus

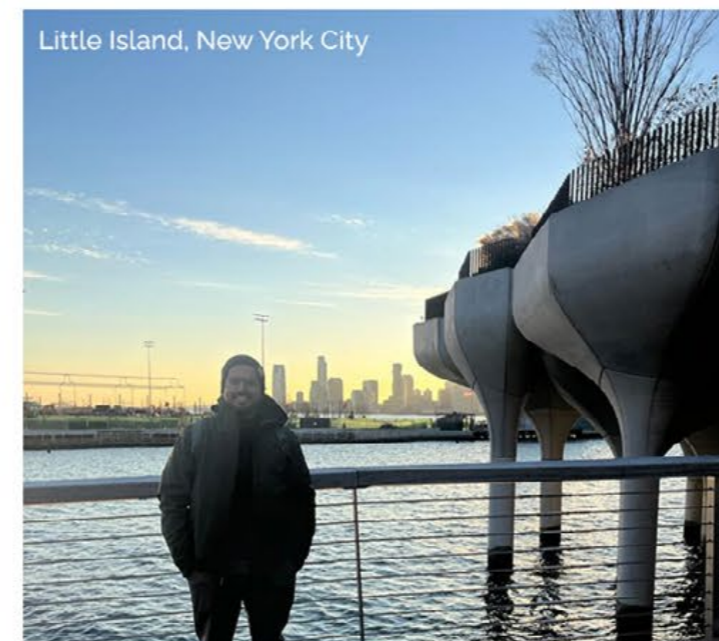
EXPERIENCE

Travelling

The US Visa allows students to enter 30 days before the start date and also exit the country after 30 days of completion date. This gives ample opportunities to travel around the country. I had the opportunity to travel to New York and Washington during the Christmas time which was a great addition to the semester abroad.



New Orleans



Little Island, New York City

There are opportunities during the semester to travel around Florida as well.

Navigators is an organization focussing on International students to provide them with the best experience possible. They work on a mentor /mentee basis, which means each International student gets an American student as a mentor. They regularly plan one day trips and events. We visited St. Augustine, Tampa and a couple of other cities for such trips. They also plan a 3-day trip once every semester which is a bit farther away from Florida. We visited New Orleans for this trip and it was a whole new experience for us. There is also a whole week off during Thanksgiving break (End of November) which could be a good opportunity to take a break from studies and visit other parts of the country.



Disney Springs, Orlando

Thank you.

Finally, I would like to appreciate the amount of support I got from the International Office at TH-OWL and University of Florida. Mrs. Maryse Niemeier was always available and guided me a lot for the preparation, paperwork and any other doubts that emerged during the semester. At UF, Ms. Amila Tica was responsible specifically for Exchange students. She along with her colleagues at the International office were very helpful. They regularly held meetings to inform us about what all to expect, our orientation and other rules and regulations. They also helped exchange students with issues related to visa, on-campus part time jobs, academic training during or after the semester. I would also like to thank DAAD, as the ISAP scholarship made the whole experience a lot more comfortable for me. My time at the exchange program is one of the best times of my student life and I will cherish the memories forever. A big thank you to all the organizations and people who contributed in making this exchange program possible.

