

Professional Experience Program in New York & Internship at Siemens in Princeton



In the summer of 2021, I saw an advert for a new program called Professional Experience Program (PEP) organized by Campus OWL. It encompassed a seminar week in New York City and an internship in one's respective field of study. I didn't hesitate to apply as I always wanted to spend a semester abroad and this was the perfect opportunity for me to fulfill this wish just before the end of my studies. The first interview with Katja Simons (Campus OWL) was quickly followed by an interview with representatives of Siemens USA, which would eventually end up being my host company for my internship. During that interview it became clear that the internship would last six months instead of the previously planned three months – retrospectively, one of the best decisions I made. I was excited when I got positive feedback and an offer letter for an internship in a Siemens subsidiary in Princeton. That, however, started a tedious and time-consuming process: the Visa application.

The application for a US Visa is perhaps one of the most difficult Visa applications. Not only does it require a lot of documents and its own motivation letter, but also involves long questionnaires, a phone interview, and a trip to an US consulate. This process took months, and it was just a few weeks prior to the starting date that I finally got to hold my Visa and was ready to start the journey.

Arriving in New York, however, felt strangely normal. And I wasn't the only one who wasn't immediately overwhelmed by the sheer number of people, the traffic, or the sky-high buildings. I knew, I was in a new city, a new country, and a new continent even, yet adapting was easy. By no means was it underwhelming, though. I was impressed by all of these things and it was a lot to process. It definitely helped finally meeting the other PEP participants on the first evening, so I wasn't the only one trying to grasp all of it when we visited the Times Square altogether that night. The following week was filled with seminars in the mornings, various sightseeing, and exploring New York's possibilities. New York is an immensely diverse city with distinct cultures just a street apart. There is always something new to see or places to go. It's a constant high being in New York, and I never got tired of it throughout the six months, even in the last week of my stay in the US.



Princeton on the other hand is a lot quieter and calmer. It's easy to establish an everyday routine as there aren't too many distractions in that relatively small town. The people, however, are also more open and easier to approach. In contrast to New York and Germany, a car is absolutely a must-have. You can't get anywhere by walking or biking as sidewalks end abruptly or simply don't exist in the first place. I will never complain about German public transportation again. Another aspect different to Germany is the sports club culture. A lot of sports is centered around the college teams, so you don't find clubs as easily as in Germany. Instead, there are pickup groups playing soccer, volleyball, or basketball in one of the many parks after work.

I didn't know any of this when I first got to Princeton. Between all the Visa-related paperwork, applying for a Social Security Number and the first days at Siemens, I first had to find a place to live. Luckily, I wasn't alone as two other PEP participants had the same quest. The two things we quickly noticed, however:

1. The prices are almost as high as in New York.
2. You must check the crime rates of the townships you want to stay in beforehand.

I can't stress the second point enough. After a night in the wrong neighborhood, an extended stay at a hotel and a Covid infection for all of us, we finally found an apartment a few weeks into our internship, which we shared until the end. Now, life and work could finally start.

The Siemens subsidiary in Princeton is research and development focused and mainly works on the next generation of industrial automation products. As an electrical engineer, I fit right into it and found myself quickly in a position with quite a few responsibilities and important tasks. I was treated equal to full-time employees from the beginning and was able to not only discuss but also bring in my own ideas, which ended up being implemented. I worked with very knowledgeable coworkers and a diverse team with members from all over the world – ironically, almost no one originally from the US.

I am glad, I got the opportunity to experience an incredible summer on the east coast of the US. I learned a lot professionally as well as personally, met many people, and made good friends along the way. New York is a fascinating city and I wouldn't rule out returning one day for professional reasons.

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