

SIP Report

Before I explain my semester experience at the HAW Hamburg, I should begin by explaining how I came to study there in the first place and the circumstances surrounding my decision. Upon my coming to the University of Rhode Island in 2005, I started out in their IEP Program studying engineering and German, which guaranteed me an opportunity to study abroad in 2008/2009. After switching my major in mid-2006 to International Business, despite the programs requirements of studying abroad/completing an international internship, I was unsure how I was going to make it to Germany both logistically and financially. I was concerned logistically, as I was not sure of how the course offerings at a German university would help me complete my B.A. & B.S. degrees on time and without overlap to what I had already studied in the US. I was also concerned financially speaking; though I had saved money since the beginning of my studies with the intention of using it abroad, the combination of the (then high) exchange rate with a new life in a foreign place had me somewhat concerned. Could I afford the experience?

It was around this time that URI had just drafted a new relationship with HAW Hamburg for a multinational exchange involving students of Business Administration. This was the first time that the university had set up an exchange with a foreign university for just students of business administration. Previous to this, students had to create custom plans of study while working within the context of other programs. To me this represented a new opportunity and as I take my studies of the German language very seriously, I was encouraged to be among the first to apply. Also at this time I was informed by Dr. Doris Kirchner at URI about scholarships for undergraduate students funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). The award would provide a

recipient with a generous stipend to cover the costs of housing, airfare, health insurance, and the necessary costs of modest living. Now I was almost convinced: not only would I have a chance to participate in a newly founded exchange program, but I could possibly secure a scholarship to cover the costs incurred while being abroad! But it got better still. The DAAD had created a program called the SIP Program, which featured the aforementioned scholarship as one of its cornerstones. If accepted, the recipient would first study for a semester at one of the UAS7 schools (seven German universities of applied sciences, HAW is one of them) and then complete an international internship of a semester in duration (though as I learned, this second part is by no means guaranteed).

I was now dedicated to the idea of participating, as the program featured everything I was looking for rolled up into one complete package. I applied to the program for the fall 2007 semester, but due to complications regarding my coursework, I was not able to gain approval from URI for this timeframe. I decided I would apply once again for the fall 2008 semester and work hard at improving my German in the meantime.

Fast forward in time to October 2007. In a spontaneous decision and with the support of Dr. Stephanie Hann, a DAAD Lecturer at URI, I was nominated for and accepted to the Chicago IHK Transatlantic Program 2008. The program takes 22 US students to Germany for an intensive two-week seminar in Berlin and sets each student up with an internship in his/her field of study. The duration, May-September 2008, was perfectly set up for my plans to apply for the SIP Program starting in September at HAW. Acting quickly, I applied for the SIP Program starting in September 2008. When I was notified of my acceptance in early April 2008, I had just six weeks to get ready for the start of my time in Germany. On September 1 (after moving from Magdeburg where I spent the summer) I relocated to Hamburg to start the semester at HAW. I will now split up my experience into categories relating to what was asked of us for this essay:

Language Course at Colon: I found this three week intensive course and the 6-week one that followed it to be the most important classes I took in Hamburg, even more important than the lectures I took at the university. Though I had worked in a German business all summer, the course gave me the opportunity to brush up on speaking and grammar as well as socialize and get to know some other students that were living in Hamburg as well. From the perspective of a student coming directly to Germany from the US (and not having been there as I had), this course was likely more valuable, as one loses some of their speaking ability and vocabulary when they are not in class over the summer break. In my opinion, the placement test we took before going into these courses was mostly accurate and I found that the course was well-suited to my level of ability.

Once the semester at HAW actually started and the intensive class was over, I enrolled once again at Colon for another 6-week course at the C1 level. This allowed me to take what I had learned in the first course to a new level and work on advanced topics I still have difficulty with. While taking this C1 class every day from 8:45 until 11:15 am happened to fit into my HAW class schedule perfectly, I realize that not every student would be able to/would want to fit this additional class in. However, I think that in the absence of a student taking German lectures at the university, these classes should either be more strongly suggested, or mandatory (provided that the student receives funds for them).

I think that this additional class is most important for the preparation before the international internship. Often, the deciding factor for a company hiring a foreign intern is the level of language ability, as the educational systems between native and international students is usually very similar. As an intern in a business field must be able to read and send emails, answer the phone and field questions, and interact with colleagues and clients on a basic level, in my

personal experience it would be very hard to function day-to-day in such a role without at least B2-level language skills.

Administration/Integration: Between the time of my acceptance to the SIP Program to the time I arrived in Germany, I was always kept informed as to the status of my application, potential problems, and the logistics of being an international student. Ingrid Weatherall and Andrea Naugk of the HAW Hamburg were extremely helpful and absolutely instrumental to my having a successful semester. All my questions, whether large or small, were answered and they guided the other students and myself when it came to issues with insurance, residency permits, and transferring credits. Before arrival, we already had the most important documents in our possession and I never felt as though I had to figure out anything bureaucratic "on the spot".

My only frustration came with the issuance of my residency permit. Students from my university studying in the IEP program receive one permit upon their arrival, valid for their study semester as well as the duration of their internship. On the other hand, we were forced to obtain two separate permits (in my case, three) for the study period and the work period. Although both experiences were pleasant and did not take too much time due to the nice people at the Hamburg Welcome Center, having to pay for (three) permits when I could have received one was inefficient and cost me more money than it should have. Hopefully future students could benefit from a similar implementation of the residency permit setup that the IEP program at URI uses.

Most important were the "buddy" students that were assigned to us at the beginning of the semester. Ingmar and Kristina were beyond helpful and as nice as could be in helping us adjust to Hamburg. From picking us up at the train station to showing us the dorms and the city/nightlife, their help went a long way into feeling like I belonged. Our friendship did not stop at just arrival, either.....even until the end of the semester we would still see each other and they

would invite us to their apartments and social events with other students. I particularly enjoyed our first nights out on the Reeperbahn, kayaking on the Alster, and grilling in the park. Levke and Yeliz also did a great job at getting the international students together for group activities. While I would have liked to have seen more of these activities in the beginning, but they served their purpose by helping us all get to know each other early in the semester. Later on in the semester, fewer students would show up for the activities, but this was due to the fact that they had already established friendships outside/within the group and had other plans.

Classes/Professors/Teaching: For a student coming from the US, the German university system is something completely different in every sense of the word. For starters, your classes meet once a week and there are no tests, quizzes, or homework assignments required of you. I found this system, once I got used to it to be both a benefit and a burden. I liked the setup because, as an exchange student, it gave me more time to focus on my *experience* here and not my *education*. I was able to travel for extended periods of time, get to know other students and stay out later, not be tied down by reports and mid-term tests, and generally feel less stressed out than I would at home during the semester. I place much importance on education, but in the context of being abroad during college....it certainly isn't the only thing that matters.

On the other side of things, I knew that (come the end) I would have a tremendous amount of studying to do to be ready for these tests, as I really had not done anything the entire semester except attend the lectures (which I was pretty faithful about). This knowledge was like a weight as well, because knowing that my entire grade depended on three essay questions taken somewhere from a 300-slide presentation did not make me feel like the odds were at all in my favor.

I was enrolled in five classes, which made for the lightest workload I have ever had during a semester of study at university: International Finance, Logistics, Trade, Organizations/Conventions and Foreign Commercial Law. Finance and Trade were instructed by Christian Decker, who is likely one of the best professors I have ever had in my entire life. Although I found the material in Finance to be somewhat dry (this could have been the 4-hour class starting at 8:15am, or that I do not much care for Finance) but he did a good job at making it palatable and at the very least understandable. Trade was my favorite class of the semester (a close race with Logistics) because he brought a certain enthusiasm and knowledge to class every Wednesday that just made me want to be there. Mr. Decker was great at explanation through diagrams, which were right home in his Trade class. Even going back to my notes months later to study for the final exam, I was able to remember how a certain topic functioned just by looking back at his diagram and my numbered sequences within it. Logistics, instructed by Heino Hüttner, was also a very interesting (if somewhat repetitive) class dealing with international aspects of commerce and the networks that supply us with the goods that we use every day. I liked his use of class presentations and case studies on BMW and IBM to illustrate his points. His teaching style is very heavily reliant on straight dictation (he knows his slides like the back of his hand) and overhead notes.

Organizations/Conventions with Michael Gille, was my least favorite class of the semester based on content. Though Mr. Gille is a very nice guy and is obviously very informed about his subject, I found the thickly-worded topics in EU law to be just too hard to digest. Although everything came together nicely in the end for the test (after a great many hours of reading), all of the primary source and case materials during the semester were written in "legalese" only familiar to lawyers and judges. Though not the fault at all of Mr. Gille, I would have been much more interested in the class if there was a "translated" version of all these laws and regulations at

hand and able to be understood by an ordinary person. Foreign Commercial Law fell somewhere between enjoyable and disappointing, as I felt that we could have learned so much more (his two month absence played a part here) than we actually did. Although Dr. Pißler communicated his material well, it was hard to understand where he was coming from when he wasn't talking in a theoretical sense. His class could have benefitted greatly from a few case studies demonstrating real foreign business operations trying to take root in China.

In terms of the final examination, each of my professors gave us a rough outline as to what we could expect on the final test. Some were more specific than others; Professor Hüttner gave us a pre-test and told us that we could expect something very similar on the final examination. Professor Decker gave both his Trade and Finance class example problems and said that three similar problems would appear on the test. Regarding the law classes, we were told what to expect in rough terms, but the complexity of the material coupled with the amount we had to read made solid preparation difficult. In all, I found the final examinations very reasonable with regard to content in that they were well-formatted and actually tested us on what we learned. Yet, I can understand the stress many students face when their grade depends on three random essay questions having to be answered in a span of 90 minutes. Lastly in regard to teaching style I found that each professor varied as much as those professors I have in the US, making it hard to comment on what worked and what did not.

The selection of courses at HAW Hamburg I think depends on two factors: namely how far along one is in their studies and their willingness to take classes in German. HAW had plenty of courses for me to choose from (though not all of them served a purpose for me back home) and I liked how the major courses in international affairs had interlinking themes. As far as the German courses were concerned, the way my course requirements were set up, it was not

necessary for me to take any courses taught in German. Had it been necessary, I am sure that I would have understood them without too much of a problem.

Life in Hamburg: I found Hamburg to be a wonderful city (minus the all-too-familiar presence of rain and clouds) and a great contradiction to my time spent in Magdeburg during the summer. In retrospect I wish that I had more time to explore the city, though I know that most of this was due to the weather and the season I was there. There is really something for everyone in Hamburg, I think. The nightlife in Hamburg is surely world-class, and for students interested in bars and nightclubs, the Reeperbahn is a great place to party until the early morning. Museums, galleries, restaurants, walking paths...the list goes on and on. Admittedly (from the perspective of a student who has lived in other German cities) Hamburg is a pretty expensive place to live. Though the housing costs (EUR 250 per month) in the Gustav-Radbruch-Haus (GRH) were reasonable for a student accommodation, and the semester ticket for the U-Bahn (only EUR 130 as part of the semester fee) is a great value, the prices for food and entertainment were definitely more expensive than elsewhere and constitute a significant part of a student's budget. I found the GRH a great place to live, as I liked having roommates from other countries and the communal atmosphere of living with other international students of a similar age group.

The only thing about living in the GRH that I did not like was that each student is assessed a EUR 40 fee every month on top of the EUR 210 rent to access the internet and cable television. Normally, this would be perfectly okay acceptable, except the **internet use is limited to 3 gb/month per student, which is in this day and age for a student dorm in a large city such as Hamburg is a blatant rip-off.** I can understand the reasons as to why a limited connection is necessary, but 3gb is not enough bandwidth for the role the internet plays in our lives today. A private connection (8x faster) with unlimited access was 42% cheaper than paying the EUR 40 for

internet every month! Even if you choose to purchase a private connection, you are still forced to pay the 40 EUR per month on top of your private bill!

These minor gripes aside, I can only wish I had the chance to see more of Hamburg. One does not fully appreciate the size of the city until you realize how little of the city map you have seen during your semester there! You can find some pictures taken during the semester below:







