

»Study abroad has made us more well-rounded students«



Connor MacNeal, Kevin Girvan, Corey Johnson, Nathan Caballero
Virginia Tech students in Aeronautical Engineering in the HCAT Cabin/Fuselage mock-up

For Connor, Kevin, Corey and Nathan, engineering students from Virginia Tech in the USA, the idea for a study abroad semester in Hamburg came in the shape of a presentation made by the HAW Hamburg during a visit to their classes. Corey had been looking into studying abroad options in Germany for some time but hadn't found the right programme that would get him credit for his degree at home, while Connor, Kevin and Nathan hadn't been thinking about it all. Excited by the idea of being able to study in English in the city that is home to the main German Airbus production plant and the possibility of spending a semester in Europe and getting credit for it, they put their plan into action. "My parents wanted to be sure that it was a serious study option and that it wasn't going to be more expensive than studying at Tech", Kevin explains, "but once they got that information, they were very eager to support me."

Nathan was born and lived in Germany for three years, so he thought of coming to Hamburg as a great opportunity to revisit his birth country, while Kevin, Corey and

Connor didn't know anything about the city. When they came in March they had no expectations but just wanted to take it for what it was. "The start of the programme was very warm. We were thrown into a Hamburg Welcome Week with events and other exchange students from all over the world", Connor remembers, "and it was amazing. We also had a great German buddy, who looked after us from the moment we arrived and he has become a very good friend."

The interview for this article takes place at the end of a long day. The students have had two classes from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. The classes focus on the Hamburg speciality »Architecture of the Aircraft Cabin« and »Mechanical Cabin Systems«. "The structure of the classes is very different to our classes at home. In Hamburg you have classes once a week but for three to four hours at a time", Corey explains, "and there is only one exam at the end of the semester. Our Hamburg professors have all worked for Airbus, so they tell you a lot about what it is like to work in the aviation industry and we are visiting Airbus next week for a tour."

The cabin classes take place in the Hamburg Centre of Aviation Training (HCAT), where the HAW Hamburg also does research in the field of cabin systems and cabin architecture. Hamburg is the Cabin Competence Centre for Airbus and its A380. Nathan and Connor are doing their research project here with the title »Flow Quantity Calibration related to aircraft air conditioning systems«. "The research project was one of the reasons I wanted to come to Hamburg", Connor says. "We work on our project two days a week and have to make our own schedule, but we touch base with the professor regularly." Kevin and Corey are designing and building a quadcopter and say they are learning a lot, in particular in electronics and electrical engineering.

All agree that the classes in Hamburg are giving them a different insight into designing and building aircraft. "At Virginia Tech we concentrate on aerodynamics and propulsion and we know the equations, but here we are learning about what it takes to build an aircraft, about the different components, the systems and interiors. We are getting ideas about the different kind of careers you can have." Not that they all see themselves working in the aviation industry. Kevin is thinking more about aerospace and a career with NASA, Lockheed Martin or Space X, while Corey is really interested in renewable energies. "Living in Hamburg and seeing what Germany is doing in this

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field is giving me a better understanding of renewable energies. Hamburg is a very clean city and the people are very environmentally aware.”

Corey and Kevin are also taking German evening classes and find the language structured and relatively easy to learn. They can already understand quite a lot of what they read and hear, but need a bit more confidence to feel comfortable speaking. Their plan is to stay in Germany after the study semester and they are looking for an internship for five months to get some work experience.

And how are they finding life in Germany? “Hamburg is a really great city. It’s very green with lots of parks and I go there a lot for recreation. Wherever you go you see something pretty”, is Nathan’s verdict. “And it has an amazing nightlife, especially compared to small-town Blacksburg. In Germany I am over the legal drinking age, so it has been fun enjoying the German beer.”

Corey feels really comfortable in the city and already considers himself a »citizen of Hamburg«. And they all love the efficient German public transportation system and the *Döner* because “it is greasy and there is lots of it”. Connor describes the people of Hamburg as politely reserved, but very willing to speak English and to help. “And compared to us Americans the Europeans like to stay up late. We are leaving the party and our Spanish friends are just arriving,” he adds laughing. But they are always part of the group when it comes to going to events and festivals in Hamburg and their fingers and hair are still purple from the Holi Festival of Colours at the weekend.

And the fun doesn’t stop in Hamburg. The students are making the most of Hamburg’s central location with its international airport and fast trains. Between them they have been to Amsterdam, Austria, Copenhagen, Ireland, Prague, Switzerland and Poland as well as various cities in Germany – and more trips are planned. “What makes study abroad really special is meeting so many people from so many different countries and getting to visit different countries and experience different cultures. Study abroad in Hamburg has made us more well-rounded students.”

Aeronautical classes in English at the HAW Hamburg:

- Aircraft Design
- Strength in Lightweight Structures
- Architecture of the Aircraft Cabin
- Mechanical Cabin Systems
- Aeronautical Research Project

More information:

www.haw-hamburg.de/english/international-guest-students/programmes-in-english/aeronautical-engineering.html

