

# Study Experiences

*An Eye-Opening Semester*

*In Hamburg at*

**Hamburg University of Applied Sciences**

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When I got on my flight from San Diego California to Hamburg Germany, I tried to imagine the course my life was going to take during this upcoming semester at HAW. Looking back I realize how dull these predictions were adjacent to the vivid memories that now encompass my semester abroad. I could never have expected the amount of personal growth I have achieved not only as a student, but as a businesswoman operating in a globalised world. From start to finish my experience at Hamburg University of Applied Sciences was enriched by the vast array of programs activities resources and events planned by the International Program.

In the months preceding my flight into Hamburg I had the opportunity of setting up some of the basics with the help of the international advisors at HAW. With their help, I was able to secure low-cost student housing that was a short walk from campus, a scholarship to help with financial needs, as well as perhaps the most valuable tool of all, my “buddy.” Every incoming exchange student has the option of being assigned a current HAW student that is familiar with the school and the city to be mentor and friend who makes the transition into a foreign land easier in all respects. My buddy Jannik took the time to email me beforehand and help me to prepare for both the flight and the approaching winter that as a California girl, I could never have been prepared for. The scholarship that HAW provided me with was also sorted out before my arrival, and was actually a deciding factor in my decision to study abroad. Without the generous financial support from the international office, this chapter in my life and my education would not have been possible. The low-cost student housing was the final aspect I was able to prepare before my arrival. As I have seen many friends that are continuing a second semester at HAW who have found it extremely difficult and time consuming to find a reasonable private residence here in Hamburg, I am extremely grateful for the assistance of the international advisors in this matter.

Even after a 16 hour flight, my arrival in Hamburg was pleasant. After already picking up my key from the landlord, my buddy Jannik met me at the airport and helped me with all of my luggage to the apartment that would be my home for the next six months. I was assigned to the 10<sup>th</sup> floor of Gustav-Radbrauch Haus where I met my four new flat mates and fellow students. GRH although it clearly looks like a building built for mass amounts short-term residents, it went beyond my expectations in the area of facilities and planned activities. I was very impressed to see that the entire building interacted through a fitness room, music room, movie room, bar, dancing classes, game nights, and many more weekly activities. I even was selected as one of the 10 students to be part of the bar team, which enabled me to earn money while having fun, and getting to know the other students. One of my favorite monthly rituals was when they opened the “free room.”

Obviously packing to go back home restricts the amount of stuff we can bring back, so GRH stores all of the items that would be better served helping

another student than being thrown in the trash. Once a month they open this room to all the current residents to walk through and take any items that they may need. I acquired from this amazing service a functioning printer, black rain boots that saved my life in the rainy weeks, a couple of thick knitted scarves, decorations for my room, puzzles, various kitchen items, and even art supplies. This housing placement is an ingenious way to keep students connected to each other, keep the costs of living as low as possible and provide a secure residence for the duration of the stay in Hamburg.



After settling into my new residence I was shown around Hamburg in the attempt to set up all the necessities such as a German bank account, cell phone, Visa, and health insurance. Thankfully Jannik offered to help because many of the services were only offered in German and even harder than that was navigating Hamburg's U-bahn system to get to the right building. In this respect I don't think I would have succeeded in getting all that was required done without the help of someone familiar with Hamburg and willing to help. With the stress of arrival and the extent of paperwork that becomes due even in the first week, The most valuable asset that HAW prepared me with proved to be my buddy. He started out as my assigned friend, and turned out to be more than just an enormous help with many different issues that arose, but a true friend that I intend to keep long after my stay here in Germany.

Although not required for by the buddy program, Jannik truly went above and beyond during the holiday season. Up until a couple weeks before Christmas I had intended to spend the upcoming holidays in Gustav Radbrauch Haus pretty much alone since the

majority of students went home during the break. Jannik asked me to accompany him home and celebrate Christmas and New Years with his family. I was elated at the opportunity to not only experience a new city, but one which was a small town about three hours away by train and completely different from the big cities of Hamburg and Berlin that I had previously experienced. This trip turned out to be one of the



most beneficial in my entire stay in Hamburg. I learned not only to improve my German but I saw a whole other side to German culture. Jannik's rather large family spoke only German

which was a blessing to me, because receiving all of my lessons in English and living with four other English speakers, it turned out that I didn't really receive the intensive German language experience I had hoped for. The dose of culture I received was also wonderful; through this experience I noticed many cultural similarities and differences that make our relative cultures so unique. Thanks to not only the Buddy Program, but the absolutely amazing selection of extremely compassionate friendly and helpful domestic buddies a time that could have been rather depressing and lonely was turned into one of the most exhilarating and eye-opening experiences of my life. In the small town of Löhne I attended my first authentic German family meal complete with a raclette style dinner and some of the most delicious treats only a real German housewife could create. I was astounded by how important sharing time, fun stories, and great food with family was and how welcoming and inviting a family could be to a foreigner over the holidays. It was at this point that I really felt embraced and accepted by the German culture and felt immense gratitude for the generosity of such a wonderful ethnicity of people.

During the first month I really got to know the other four flat mates whom I shared bathrooms, a living room, and a kitchen with. The two other girls were both from the U.S. as well, one studying at the University of Rhode Island, and the other from California State University Long Beach. The boys were from colleges back in Turkey and the U.K. The fact that we all spoke English was good because there were no problems communicating, and I assume the school or student residence arranged this as to make it easier for us. However as my minor is



German, I had anticipated a complete immersion into German language and culture and to actually learn and use German on a daily basis, so unfortunately this aspect of my living situation hindered that goal as we all spoke our native language with each other.

Roommates prove to be a sticky situation no matter what country you are living in. We had our squabbles over the normal stuff like dishes, loud music, bathroom schedules but we always seemed to work it out. I noticed that being thrust into a new environment my patience levels, most likely out of necessity, rose greatly and this proved to be a helpful factor when dealing with roommate troubles. In the end although I didn't receive as much German language practice on an everyday basis like I had hoped for, but I think the lack of a language barrier helped to sooth some problems that would have been difficult to reach a compromise in had we not spoken the same language, so I am grateful for that.

During this first month I also completed the intensive German language course at Colon Language School. This course although it was only for a short amount of time, two weeks, really helped me get acclimated and get used to responding everyday in German. I was placed in a class with one of my roommates which was helpful in many respects because we would incentivize each other to go to class on-time, complete the homework, and we even shared the cost of the required book and materials. I found the teachers helpful, the variety of students interesting, and the overall experience worth the cost of joining the class. I would definitely recommend this language school to the future potential students because I feel that I benefitted from not only the academic side from the teachers but also the social side from the students. It was interesting to witness so many people from all around the world living in Germany and trying to learn the language, some for business, some out of necessity and some just for fun.

When my studies began at Hamburg University of Applied Sciences I was impressed by my new teachers' knowledge in both the subjects they were teaching me but also their knowledge of the English language. For every one of my teachers English was not their

native language and I could see them trying to provide the best education they could to their students, so they could be great business people in the global environment.

I was especially impressed by my marketing teacher who was so set on giving the best quality teaching that she could in English, she actually asked me to provide her with corrections on her speech and slides at the end of each class. I felt honored to do this and respected by her although her English was nearly perfect and didn't need much improvement. The class itself was also extremely helpful, the subject matter was international marketing and we learned a great deal about how companies go international and how the field of marketing is affected in turn by these companies. As a marketing major I found professor Shikarski's real world experience extremely helpful in relating the theoretical concepts of the class to the actual real world applications that she presented in our class. Perhaps one of my favorite aspects of this class was her explanation of brand loyalty and how the perception of marketing can create strong bonds between a customer and a specific product. She proved to us singlehandedly with this lecture the power of marketing.

I also attended International Trade with Jan Philip Apking. Although the subject matter to many is not the most interesting stuff to study, I ended up learning more in this class than I did in any of the others. It may not be the most compelling subject but no matter what area you are planning on doing business in it will definitely serve you well to know and understand how and why international trade takes place. I feel like I will apply the knowledge I took away from this class almost on a daily basis when I embark on my career as a business woman operating in the global environment. As with Professor Shikarski's expertise in marketing I was impressed by Professor Apking's experience in his field. He currently works at Price Waterhouse Cooper, a German ECA, and was able to enrich the subject matter with firsthand experience and current examples of how country and political risk affected not only the global business environment but his job directly as well. I was surprised to learn near the end of the semester that I was a member of his first

ever class he taught at HAW, this was impressive not only for him to do such a great job at his new profession but for HAW in their selection of qualified teachers.

International Economics with Professor Boll, was without a doubt the most challenging class I faced during the entire semester. The subject matter was tough but the structure of the class was also challenging because we faced not only a 3,000 word scientific research paper, but a 30 minute presentation as well as a fully comprehensive final exam. Boll always encouraged students to ask questions and set-up exam reviews and other means to help students out with the curriculum, but the some of the subject matter was still extremely difficult to understand because many of the graphs and visual aids were still in German which added a considerable amount of study time for non-native German speakers. I did learn a considerable amount from this class but for the most part I'm just glad it is completed.

During the last month of school while I was preparing for finals I realized the biggest differences between my studies back home in San Diego and the semester in Hamburg. It is obvious in many aspects of German culture that personal responsibility is expected of German youths, and became extremely evident through the coursework. I am used to having at least three tests per class per semester with projects assignments or papers placed intermittently throughout the semester. I was surprised and relieved to hear that in most of my German classes we would have little to no homework and usually only one test. That was until it was time to start studying for finals. The vast amount of material we were expected to understand and apply by the end of the semester proved a daunting task, but served to instill in me a healthy gratitude for the "babysitting-like" tactics used by American professors to ensure their students stay on task. I completely respect German students for succeeding in a educational system structured like this and commend German teachers for the high expectations they have placed on their students. I am confident that my endurance for personal responsibility has greatly increased as a result of this semester and that I will be better equipped to face the challenges of my next semester at home.

On the whole I was very impressed by the quality of education I received at HAW and I left with a healthy respect for the teachers, the supporting staff such as the international coordinators, the domestic and foreign students and the structure of the German education system. Although education was my main priority during this semester abroad I feel like I gained something much more substantial through the unique opportunities offered to me through the International Program. I have already enumerated the many benefits I received from having my assigned buddy, but I have not yet gone into the myriad of activities planned by the student Tutors to help us international students get to know each other and the city of Hamburg. One of the first activities was the scavenger hunt. We got into groups and we're given a list of questions to answer about Hamburg, pictures to take at landmarks around the city, and told we would receive extra point for creativity and speed of completion. This was such a great introduction to the city and my peers, we ended up the first team to arrive at the Hochbrau Haus, and although we did not end up winning the contest in the end, I am confident that everyone had fun and was grateful for such a well planned activity.



The scavenger hunt was only the beginning; another of my favorite activities was the international dinner. This was a truly unique experience where we got to mingle with other students from all over the world as well as our German buddies while enjoying home cooked foods from each participant's native country. As a student away from home I was really starting to miss those home cooked meals, and this event made me feel right at home with delicious exotic foods, and the opportunity to share my cultural foods with everyone else. Banana Pancakes proved to be a hit with more than just the Americans! More activities planned by the buddy program tutors that I enjoyed were both the trip to miniature wunderland where we got to tour amazingly detailed mini reproductions of

major cities all around the world, as well as the canoeing on the Alster trip. During the first few weeks we were able to take advantage of the pre-winter weather and enjoy the Alster close up. These activities were such a benefit adding fun and variety to a first month that could have been stressful and lonely.

Perhaps my favorite of the activities were the weekend excursions. I was able to participate in both the three-day trip to Amsterdam and the three-day trip to Berlin. With special thanks to the tutor Sebastian Rösch who was able to secure me a spot on the Amsterdam trip on very short notice. As a group of about 20 students we travelled to Amsterdam by bus and arrived at our hostel after a short U-bahn trip through the city. Being able to purchase group ticket saved each of us a considerable amount of money and allowed us more

freedom to really experience the city. The hostel was also taken care of by our magnificent tutors, they managed to find us a really nice place to stay and arranged for us to be in private rooms that we shared



with other HAW students. This trip was without a doubt the easiest, safest and most cost efficient way to experience one Europe's beautiful cities not to mention it was amazing fun too. On the way back to Hamburg I think we were all exhausted from the travelling but we seemed to all agreed that it was trips like these that really shaped our experience and cultured us as individuals.

The Berlin trip was really amazing and definitely my favorite of the two. The city itself is so rich in history, and has an indescribable vibe that stays with you long after you

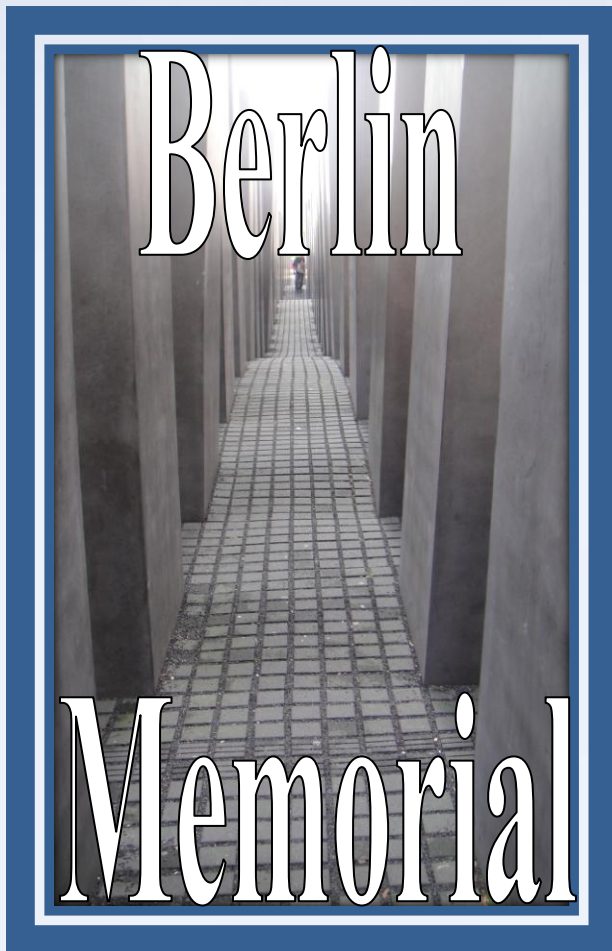
leave the city. Apart from securing the transportation and accommodations for the weekend I was particularly impressed by the Kate and Sebastian's in-depth knowledge of Berlin and their extremely well planned itinerary for the entire weekend. On our first day we received a tour from a well-informed and hilarious tour guide, this truly made my experience come alive and I learned so many fun facts and quirky historical details. This was an excellent introduction to such a beautiful city. Another great experience in Berlin was the DDR museum. This really stood out in my mind because it was so interactive, you could really use all five senses and it made a lasting impression for a historical museum. You we're invited to feel and smell the difference between the coffee beans you were allowed to use in East Germany, watch movies that were playing at the time in actual seats that were in an East German theater, as well as feel and hold clothing that was worn at that time. One part of the museum was a recreation of what a typical flat was like including the kitchen, living room and all such accompanying items such as kitchenware books, and phones and more. You were invited to open drawers and cabinets, try out different artifacts and really get a feel for what life was like in East Germany during that period of time.

The other museum that made an impact on me in Berlin was the Checkpoint Charlie museum. The part that impacted me the most was to see how the German people got so creative in their struggles to escape an unjust government. I remember seeing a car that the passenger seat had been removed but the leather intact with a zipper so that another person could be smuggled through the border as the passenger seat of a vehicle. I also saw the cable that one man



devised to slide down a wire in a sort of zip line that transported that man and his family to the other side of the wall from his work building, and how he hid his wife and young son in

a bathroom he marked out of order until the dead of night where he could escape without being seen. Another part of the museum that intrigued me was the extent of the graffiti art



that covered the Berlin wall and spread throughout the city and eventually throughout Europe as a trend. The whole trip served as a wonderful way to make history that I've read about on the pages of books come alive and really impact me as a person and a student. It was exhilarating to walk under such a well recognized historical monument as the Brandenburg Tor and to walk along the city streets marked with the memory of the Berlin wall. The feeling I experienced while walking through the memorial dedicated to all those who lost their lives in such a tragic time in world history was truly unique and a compelling reminder of our duty of humans to respect the value of life. I gained so much culturally and educationally from this trip that I planned a second trip back on my own time during winter break, and I can safely say that

Berlin is definitely my favorite city in Germany that I have experienced thus far.

Towards the end of my stay in Hamburg the nostalgia set in, and I began to realize how truly unique this experience really was in shaping me as a student, businesswoman, wife, mother and person in all of my future endeavors. I am extremely grateful for all those who made this study experience possible for me and for those continue to ensure that it is available for future students. HAW is an exemplary university not only for academics but for an all-around unforgettable study abroad experience.

THANK YOU SO MUCH!!