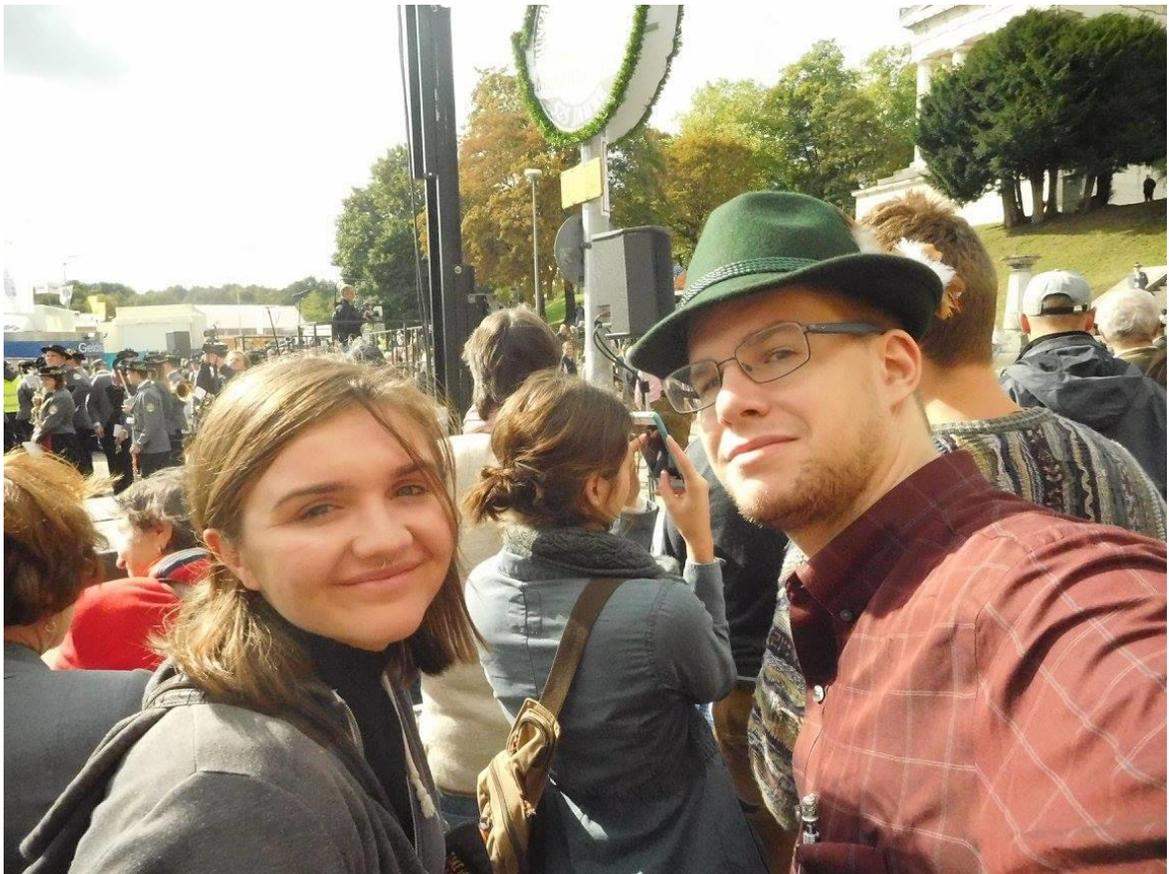


July
2017

Testimonial

EXCHANGE PROGRAM JUNIOR YEAR IN MUNICH



Name/Age: Julia, 21

University/City: Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich



Home University/City: Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan

Timeframe: September 2016 – July 2017

„Every day was a new adventure...”

INTRODUCTION

Julia's family heritage and interest in the German language motivated her to spend the junior year of her Bachelor degree in Germany. During her time at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich, she came to recognize many cultural differences between the US and Germany and learned a lot about navigating a culture and university different from what she knew. Read on to hear about what struck her and how her study abroad program impacted her.

APPLICATION

What made you decide to apply for your study abroad program?

A series of small factors led me to make the big decision to study abroad in Germany, number one being that I had been studying the German language for several years and found great joy in it. Another reason is that my great-grandfather had emigrated from Germany to the US; growing up knowing that left a great fascination for Germany within me. Additionally, I had never traveled outside of the US and wanted to see Europe through my own eyes.

What made you select this university and this program?

I studied through the Junior Year in Munich program (JYM). JYM is run through my home university, Wayne State, so from day one in my German language courses I had heard many good things about the program from my professors. After looking at the website myself, I knew it was the choice for me. LMU is a great school with fantastic class options and JYM is not only America's oldest study abroad program in Germany, but it is one of the few study abroad programs that conducts itself + all of its courses fully in German!

How long did the total application process take?

It took about a month or so.

What were the requirements in order to apply?

There were a few. I needed to have completed at least 2 years of college-level German courses with a "B" average, to have maintained a GPA above a 3.0, to turn in a letter of recommendation, and, of course, to be a Junior, class-rank wise.



What was the most difficult part of the application process?

Organization! Letters had to be written, essays completed, transcripts sent - the list goes on. There were many steps to applying, and it could have been easy to accidentally forget one. It was important to take my time and to not put anything off until the last minute.

STUDIES

What university did you attend in Germany? Which courses did you attend?

I attended Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (while also taking some German language courses with my program). The courses I took at LMU ranged from historical studies to linguistics. I was able to visit incredible lectures about themes such as Old English literature, language and culture, inspiring seminars focusing on topics like the relationship between "The Sister Arts" poetry and painting, and I even took a drawing course - in German!

How did the courses compare to those at your university in den USA? What about the professors?

There are some stark contrasts between universities in Germany compared to the US, but in the end I think everything balances out. For example, in the US, you receive way more course work than in Germany. However, even though you receive so much work, it guarantees that you are practicing the material and generally heightens your grade in the course. And that is the second difference - grading. At the end of the semester in Germany one final exam or paper determines your whole grade!



So, even though you get more course work in the US, it lessens the importance of each individual grade - and vice versa in Germany, where you may have less work, though that final grade means quite a bit more. The difference seems to lie in the fact that in Germany there is an assumed personal responsibility that a student will learn the material, while in the US it is assumed that students need extra guidance/instruction, resulting in the extra labor. So it makes sense that professors in the US go far out of their way to consul students, where as in Germany I found it a little more

difficult to get a hold of professors. Only slightly though, I think it really depends on the individual instructor more than the country.

How did you find campus life in Germany?

Liberating but less eventful - and I loved it. Like how it was in class, there was a greater sense of personal responsibility on campus. There seemed to be less rules and routines than at home and instead a reliance on the initiative of the individual student to get involved. Back in the US, campus life is an incredibly big deal, and universities go to great lengths to entertain students. At first, it seemed almost lonesome on my German campus, but after a while I caught on. I had to put in more of an effort to find opportunities,

but I enjoyed the sense of personal freedom that came from being on my own and treasured how calm and self-sufficient the campus was at LMU! I miss it.

Where did you live? How did you find your room?

I lived in the *Studentenstadt*. My housing was arranged for me through my study abroad program!

CULTURE AND FREE TIME

What kind of cultural differences did you encounter? How did you deal with them?

First, I must say that the US and Germany had more in common than I expected! It was not tough to feel at home. Though there were of course cultural differences, and it was important to acknowledge them as soon as they became apparent. The majority that I encountered were in terms of social interaction, the one that comes to mind first is "directness." Americans tend to sugar-coat everything they say, so to be spoken to so bluntly was intimidating at first. However, I eventually realized that what I considered hurtful was really just honesty. I think a lot of cultural differences come off negatively just because they are unfamiliar, not because they are actually worse.

For me, the best way to deal with cultural differences was to be objective and remain patient. It is too easy to let the preconceived notions of one's past culture blur the appreciation of that in the present! My advice would be, at times when it is hard to find a positive side to a cultural difference, you can always at least try to understand it better. Broadening the mind has a funny way of opening the heart.



What did you do in your free time?

Coming from Detroit, a post-industrial city, I was eager to spend as much time with nature as possible. I spent many days in the *Englischer Garten*, hiking small slopes, trekking through farms and forests, and just generally visiting parks and gardens.

PERSONAL OPINIONS

What were the absolute highlights of your time abroad? What parts of the experience didn't you enjoy?

Being abroad was so great because of the constant stimulation. Every day was a new adventure, whether it was a physical escapade into the mountains, an intellectual exploration of the rich history and landmarks

of Europe, or all of the emotional discoveries along the road of being a foreigner. Not to mention being surrounded with German language! It was a learning experience at levels that could not be compared to any day at home! It could get tiring, and at times it even became overwhelming, though being honest with oneself and reaching out to friends and family always turned things around. There really weren't any major disappointments, I had a great time abroad.

What conclusions can you draw about your time abroad? What tips can you give someone considering applying?

There are many things in life that you can only learn through experience and being an exchange student is full of lessons such as those. Studying abroad led me to understand many concepts that before I just "knew" from books or class. When I came to Germany, the world was suddenly new and exhilarating, but, also challenging in that constant unfamiliarity. My advice? Be prepared for a challenge, in the best sense of the word. It is easy to begin to feel separated from one's self while you study abroad because you are dedicating your time to understanding the lives of so many others. It is enlightening and exciting - however it is essential to acknowledge that it can be alienating, too. If you do not prepare for that, it can damage your experience. Make sure to always take some time for yourself, spend time sharing memories with friends about home, and to keep in touch with family! Above all, be proud of all you are accomplishing!

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information on how you can organize your own study abroad experience in the US or Canada, please visit our website: <http://www.amerikahaus.de/service/fuer-studierende/studieren-in-den-usa-kanada/>.

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