

Medienkulturwissenschaft (HF) und
Anglistik und Amerikanistik (NF) (B.A.)
USA
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Michigan State University
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Michigan State University – Abschlussbericht



General experience and tips

I'm studying media and cultural studies with a minor in English and I just finished my exchange year at Michigan State University. I had wanted to study in the US for a while so I looked up possibilities to do an exchange year through the University of Freiburg early on. I'd been in the US four times before my year and I was 100% sure that I wanted to study abroad in the US.

Besides my personal interest in the country, I also was really excited about all the great courses that are offered in the field of media and communication studies. A lot of media developments originate from the US, so I thought it'd be very interesting to learn more about the US perspective on developments in media first-hand. Learning more about American literature for my minor in the country it was written in and about of course also was very intriguing. In addition to that, I wanted to take some classes about media topics that aren't offered in Freiburg, such as Advanced Filmmaking, PR and Journalism.

The application process definitely took a lot of time and dedication but it was worth it. All the paperwork seems overwhelming at first, but having a tuition waiver really is amazing. I was insured through HanseMerkur which offered a fitting insurance option. Regarding my flights, I waited until the date I wanted to fly back became available for booking because it was cheaper to buy both flights at the same time rather than just one. On my arrival day everything went pretty smoothly: I had a direct flight from Frankfurt to Detroit, took the Michigan Flyer Bus to East Lansing (which I had booked in advance), got picked up by a coordinator from the American Semester Program & Exchanges (ASP) and then they drove me to my dorm. I arrived on the designated arrival day and then we had an orientation week with a campus tour, lots of information meetings and plenty of opportunities to get to know the other exchange students.

I lived in West McDonel Hall and had an American roommate and I became really good friends with her. After hearing from other exchange students it seemed to me that I was very lucky to get along so well with mine because that wasn't the case for most of the others. Still, I would recommend signing up for a room with a roommate. If you're lucky, you can develop a great friendship! And if it doesn't work out for you at all, you can still talk to housing coordinators there and see if you can change your room after the first semester. McDonel Hall was also great because a lot of other exchange students lived nearby on East campus, some of them even on my floor and we became really good friends. We often hung out and got dinner at the dining halls together, and it was really nice that we all lived close together. I think that even though living in the dorms is very different from how German students usually live, it is a great opportunity to make friends and take advantage of everything that is offered on campus. One of these offers being the dining plan. You don't have a choice whether you want to buy it or not because it is compulsory and linked to the

room, but it makes your life a lot easier because you have unlimited access to the dining halls (you could technically enter the dining halls 99 times a week) and they have all kinds of food. The ones close to East Campus are good (definitely try Snyder-Phillips), but I also recommend going to Brody, Case and Landon when you have a little more time. Also try out the “late night” food at the MSU Union!

The MSU campus in East Lansing is next to Lansing, the capital of Michigan. Cities like Ann Arbor, Detroit and Grand Rapids are within about an hour’s reach by car. Chicago, Illinois is a longer trip of about four hours. Michigan is called “the Mitten” because that’s what the shape of the lower peninsula resembles. Most Michiganders will hold up their hand and point to where they’re from using their hand as a map. Another nickname for Michigan is “the Great Lakes state” since it has so many lakes.



The CATA-bus system in East Lansing is pretty good and the busses on campus are free, so it’s easy to get from one place on campus to the other. Outside of East Lansing public transportation is limited, because in the US most people drive their car to go places. There is an Amtrak train to Chicago and the Michigan Flyer bus to Detroit and Ann Arbor though.

University life is a lot different here in the US. MSU has 45,000 students and the MSU campus is huge and makes up a big part of the college town East Lansing. In addition to taking classes at MSU, being an MSU student means going to the sports events, wearing university apparel with the Spartan logo and really identifying with the university and being a “Spartan”. It’s really impressive how excited and proud Americans are of their Alma Mater

and it's something you have to see for yourself in order to really understand it! It's definitely fun to become part of the university culture as an exchange student, and Americans are very happy to welcome you as a new Spartan.

When it comes to cultural differences between the US and Germany, I think I already had an idea of how it was going to be because I had been before, but of course, spending a whole year there I got to know the culture a lot better. I was greeted with a lot of hospitality from the friends and families I got to meet and my roommate even took me to family events like a Christmas party and Easter. It was great to learn more about American points of view and different approaches to many things, which is of course what's so amazing about an exchange like this. I went to one of the meetings for MSU students wanting to go to Freiburg to help answer their questions and I actually ended up making a friend who is now coming to Freiburg this upcoming fall. The whole idea of there being an exchange worked out very well for me, and it is really fun to talk to someone about cultural differences who is interested in Germany and wants to go there.

Even though some stereotypes about America prove to be partly true and there are definitely a few funny things that are normal in the US, like for example going to class in pajama pants, I would say I didn't have a culture shock. The American culture is always heavily represented and judged in the media, which is why I think it is really important to go into the exchange with an open mind and see what you think for yourself.

One specific thing I'd like to mention about cultural differences is how to make conversation. I've noticed that there's a difference in how Americans do small talk and express excitement. It took me a long time to figure out how to be very friendly while doing small talk. Germans talk differently: Answers are a lot more plain and shorter and emotions don't necessarily reflect through the voice pitch as much, but other Germans still know when someone is excited or how a sentence is meant. Whereas in the US giving "plain German answers" can come off as uninterested. You sort of have to imagine it like you're being a lot more excited and adding a lot more exclamation marks to your sentences in order to show that you're interested in the conversation.

MSU has many great resources for its students and there is always a lot going on on campus. The different colleges often have posters about current events and activities that students can partake in. The UAB (University Activities Board) plans events, the OISS (Office for

International Students and Scholars) is there to help international students and most importantly, the ASP-team (short for American Semester Program and Exchanges) helps exchange students with their arrival and any questions and they also organize events throughout the year. They offer trips to Chicago and Detroit and host a football tailgate, a Christmas party, a thanksgiving dinner and more. The ASP-team has always been very helpful and friendly and I think if you experience any issues, they will make sure to find a solution for you.

Clubs are a big thing in American universities and there is a club for basically anything. They all showcase what they're about and how you can join at the "Spartification"-event in the beginning of the semester. There were many great media related clubs and I wanted to take advantage of that and decided to join "VIM", which is a club with more than 200 members that creates and publishes a fashion magazine every semester. VIM had meetings every other week and organized many fun events to get to know other members, such as a Hayride, a launch party for the magazine and even a fashion show. I also became part of the photo team in the second semester and really enjoyed helping with the photo shoots for the magazine. Joining a club is great for meeting Americans and VIM has definitely been one of the many factors that made my year so great, so I'd highly recommend anyone to join a club.

Another big part of the free time activities were the sporting events and it never gets boring, especially during football season. I'm usually not really a sports fan so I was unsure about buying a season ticket at first but I can now say I'd recommend every exchange student to do so! Football Saturdays and tailgates are a lot of fun and it's an amazing feeling to be dressed up in all green and white, sing the MSU fight song and cheer the team on in the student section at the Spartan Stadium. I really enjoyed going to basketball and ice hockey games, too.



Making the priority list for the application was a challenge for me. To get a good overview and look through all the course catalogues of the partner universities to figure out an order for the list was very hard for me. I am very happy that I got to go to Michigan State University (MSU) which was the perfect fit for me. For an exchange year a big university is great – there are endless fun activities for students to do and get involved in the campus and college culture. Therefore, I definitely think one thing to keep in mind while making the priority list for the application is the amount of great resources and events that a big university like MSU has to offer. If you want to have an All American college experience at a Big10 university, MSU is the perfect place for that!

A big topic about going abroad is making new friends. I was very lucky to be really close friends with my American roommate. In addition to that, in the first semester my group of friends consisted of eight other exchange students. We all lived on the same floor and we had an amazing semester together. But almost all of them went home after the fall semester because their exchange was over. It felt a bit like starting new again in the beginning of the second semester, but I also made some good friends in the club I was in and in my classes.

A typical day for me started with getting a quick breakfast at the nearest dining hall. Then I went to my classes, had lunch, read texts, did assignments and went to the editing labs in the communication building to work on projects. After that I occasionally went to Grand River to buy things I needed or to get a coffee. At night I got dinner with my roommate or my friends from my floor and did some more homework, went to a club meeting, watched a movie with friends or just hung out with my roommate.

Regarding travelling, I went on both ASP trips and would recommend those because they're very affordable and a great way to explore Chicago and Detroit with the other internationals. In October some friends and I rented a car and went on a weekend roadtrip to the Niagara Falls and Toronto, which was a lot of fun and is something a lot of exchange students do because Canada is pretty close. I also got to see some other cities in Michigan: My roommate showed me around her hometown Grand Rapids, I took two day trips to Ann Arbor and I went on a weekend trip with other internationals to the Manistee National Forest and the Sleeping Bear Dunes. During Thanksgiving break and winter break I visited family friends in Virginia and I spent spring break in Chicago. After the second semester was officially over, I spent two weeks travelling through California with a group of exchange students and then explored NYC with my roommate.

Academics at MSU

In the beginning, picking courses from all the great options seemed a bit overwhelming. It was also hard to find ten courses that didn't collide. But once I got there, finalizing the course schedule worked great. The ASP team provided academic advisors at a meeting during orientation week and it was possible for many exchange students to switch some classes and adjust their schedules. It is important to do so during the Add-Drop-period though in order to avoid any late fees.

When I was figuring out my class schedule for the second semester, I went to the advisors in the College of Communication Arts and Sciences. They explained what the classes I was considering were about, which was very helpful because some class descriptions online are very short. So going to the advisor's office of your college is a tip if you need some information while planning for your second semester.

One of my personal highlights about MSU definitely was the College of Communication Arts and Sciences. It offered so many different media related majors and minors, interesting classes, amazing equipment and many possibilities to further specialize in your field of interest in your free time. There are classes about video production, journalism, advertising, communication, PR, digital media and pretty much anything else a media student could wish for.



I took four classes each semester and they were very time intensive. Classes usually take place twice a week and there are a lot of assignments due each class. The homework takes a lot of time and dedication, but it is definitely possible to get good grades since the level of difficulty overall is a bit easier than in Germany. I didn't feel over-challenged or unchallenged, it was just right. Quizzes take place regularly and exams are during midterms and finals week. Once finals week is over, you usually don't have to write any more papers or exams and are done with the semester. Class sizes vary, but I mostly took junior level classes, which were smaller and more focused on a certain topic. The way students interact with professors is a lot more informal and personal than in Germany. Most professors were very dedicated to help every student individually and asked us for our opinion. Some professors gave out their personal phone numbers to help with problems at all times. Sometimes classes even started with the professor asking about how everyone's weekend was and then listening to the answers for a while, much like it teachers do in high school. This can all be a bit irritating at first but also has the advantage that you can always ask any questions you might have and that classes are more of a discussion rather than a presentation.

Most classes I took were for Media and Information majors, since that was closest to my major in Freiburg, but I also wanted to take advantage of the diverse course offering and took classes about PR and journalism. In the fall semester, I had the classes Media Psychology (MI491), Digital Communications and Society (MI401), Advanced Filmmaking (MI3441) and Visual Storytelling for Journalists (JRN203). I particularly enjoyed the discussions about current media topics and issues in the US in “Digital Communication and society”. We read a lot of American research papers in that class and it was very interesting to see how those differ from the texts I read for my major at the University of Freiburg and to hear everyone’s opinion on the topics. I also really liked the Journalism class. It helped me understand the perspective of Journalists on making media, which will be very helpful in the future.

In the spring semester, I took Principles of Public Relations (ADV260), Multi-Camera Production for Television (MI342), Topics in North American Literature (ENG204) and Advanced Video Editing (MI440). The literature class was very fitting for my English minor and the PR class was a great way for me to explore a possible field of work I’m interested in. The Multi-Camera class gave me insight into how live tv works which was really unique. Both “Advanced Filmmaking” in the fall and “Advanced Editing” in the spring were practical classes which I really enjoyed and which allowed me to build valuable skills in the field of video production and learn more about the movie and tv industry.

The equipment that MSU provides media students really is amazing and helps students to continually practice for their jobs later-on. They can also get involved in film projects and clubs after class, help with research projects, go on trips to experience the industry hands-on and overall just really specialize in the topic they want. It really is an environment for students to get inspired and excited about their field of study and work, which is why I enjoyed the College of Communication Arts so much. I’m very glad that I took so many different interesting classes and that I got a peek into the different sides of the media thanks to MSU’s amazing course offering. It has helped me figure out which parts of the media I could see myself working in and I’ve definitely built valuable skills and learned a lot for my studies and my future. And of course, talking and writing in English has also helped me improve my language skills, which is very beneficial for my studies and will be a valuable skill for future jobs.

In addition to all the things I've learned in my classes, going abroad for two semesters definitely has also taught me many things on a personal level. I learned a lot about communication due to constantly speaking in another language, and also about different cultures. It was great to get to understand the way Americans socialize a bit better and to meet so many internationals from different countries and of course I also became a lot more independent.

I would definitely recommend MSU to anyone who wants to apply for the global exchange program. It's a really great university with endless academic possibilities and great free time activities and it's also conveniently located for travelling.

I couldn't be more grateful for the amazing year that I've had at MSU and all the amazing memories, experiences and friends I've made. It has been one of the best years yet and I would do it again in a heartbeat. Go green!





