

# Abschlussbericht

Psychologie, B.Sc. / USA / August till December 2019 / University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill / USA-2019-1234b-w

## a) general impression of UNC

### classes I took

A normal course load would have been four classes (which is also required for the Visa), I took five. I was only allowed to take two psychology classes, but was actually offered a business class as well, which usually doesn't happen, so I ended up with five classes. Below you can see my schedule for reference. As I said, I had two psychology classes, Abnormal Psychology and Psychology and Law. The latter one was especially interesting, as the topics covered aren't covered by any class in Germany. In addition, I took two Sociology classes, one about Criminology, and one about Mental Health and Illness. I liked the first one better, even though I already had a similar class in Germany. The last class I took was a business class on Leading and Management, which ended up being mostly psychology as well. However, I highly recommend taking a class at the business school if possible, simply because they offer another interesting perspective outside of the main campus. You just have to be aware that those classes are usually curved, which means no matter how well you do, only the best 30% or so will get an A, and they might rely heavily on participation. So, if you need a good grade and don't like speaking up a lot, that might not be a good fit.

Something else to be aware of is that not all classes advertised on a university's homepage actually happen in one specific semester or year at all. Also, most people get enrolled in more classes than they need and pick the ones they like the most during the first week. I would recommend doing the same, as classes vary widely in how much effort they require.

Another thing that is different is how much reading classes require, although that varies widely as well. But it was definitely more than I was used to in Germany.

They also require more homework and written assignments than I was used to in my major, but often times the standards are lower. By that I mean that for example, one class required among other things an essay that was worth 15% of my grade, but it was only three pages, double spaced, and only asked for my opinion on a reading, not extensive research.

|       | Monday                                                     | Tuesday                                                                                            | Wednesday                                                  | Thursday                                                                                           | Friday                                                     |  |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| 8am   |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 10:15 | <i>i</i> SOCI-123<br>Manning - Rm 0307<br>David Rigby      |                                                                                                    | <i>i</i> SOCI-123<br>Manning - Rm 0307<br>David Rigby      |                                                                                                    | <i>i</i> SOCI-123<br>Manning - Rm 0307<br>David Rigby      |  |
| 10:30 |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 10:45 |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 11am  | <i>i</i> PSYC-601<br>Genome Sciences Bldg -<br>Rm 1374     |                                                                                                    | <i>i</i> PSYC-601<br>Genome Sciences Bldg -<br>Rm 1374     |                                                                                                    | <i>i</i> PSYC-601<br>Genome Sciences Bldg -<br>Rm 1374     |  |
| 11:15 |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 11:30 |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 11:45 |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 12pm  |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 12:15 |                                                            | <i>i</i> BUSI-405<br>McColl Building - Rm<br>3500<br>Elad Sherf                                    |                                                            | <i>i</i> BUSI-405<br>McColl Building - Rm<br>3500<br>Elad Sherf                                    |                                                            |  |
| 12:30 |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 12:45 |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 1pm   |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 1:15  |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 1:30  |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 1:45  |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 2pm   |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 2:15  |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 2:30  | <i>i</i> SOCI-422<br>Peabody - Rm 0311<br>Katrina Branecky |                                                                                                    | <i>i</i> SOCI-422<br>Peabody - Rm 0311<br>Katrina Branecky |                                                                                                    | <i>i</i> SOCI-422<br>Peabody - Rm 0311<br>Katrina Branecky |  |
| 2:45  |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 3pm   |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 3:15  |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 3:30  |                                                            | <i>i</i> PSYC-245<br>Fetzer Hall - Rm 0109<br>Elizabeth Reese, Jessica<br>Goldblum, Jon Abramowitz |                                                            | <i>i</i> PSYC-245<br>Fetzer Hall - Rm 0109<br>Elizabeth Reese, Jessica<br>Goldblum, Jon Abramowitz |                                                            |  |
| 3:45  |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 4pm   |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 4:15  |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |
| 4:30  |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                    |                                                            |  |

### support and people to talk to

I didn't have any issues that required support, so I barely hold any longer conversations with officials. However, there was an introductory event and it was always made clear who we could talk to in case of issues or even just in general. The university takes very good care of its students in that matter. They also have a hospital and mental health resources and stuff like that. They even have free tutoring where people help you write essays etc. if you are struggling in class.

### relationship to students, professors

I found that most of my fellow students were very welcoming and curious. There is a mentor program called EASE, you can find them on Facebook. They assigned me a mentor, a girl that previously studied in Germany. I asked her a lot of things before I flew out, and she even picked me up from the airport, which was very nice of her. We did several things together, like go to soccer games or go hiking.

Three out of my five professors were very good teachers, and the other two were still good. In general, the university is more focused on teaching than in Germany, where it is very clear that research comes first, students come second. At least that is usually the way in psychology. But in the US, all professors have office hours and make clear that anybody can come and visit, whether someone has an issue, questions or just wants to talk. They are very accommodating and welcoming. Students with disabilities may receive all kinds of accommodations, and most

professors are very forthcoming. Another thing that surprised me is how much professors value or seem to value their student's opinions. Many times, they would ask for our thoughts on a specific topic and spend several minutes discussing them.

### **additional activities**

I only went to an additional lecture once, but there are lots of activities offered by the university. Especially the abundance of clubs was surprising. At the beginning of each year, at Fall Fest, the clubs present themselves and look for new members. I became part of two clubs, which I can recommend, but there were many more. I was part of Helping Paws, an organization that works with a local shelter to adopt dogs to people and to raise money for their animals. I also went to Quidditch, although I wasn't an official player. Even if you are not a sport person (I'm not either, which is why I didn't play officially), the people were very nice and welcoming, and it is a great way to make new friends. They also took me to a game in Boone, a town in the mountains about three hours from Chapel Hill, which was nice to see more of the country.

I also participated in most events organized by the International Office at UNC, which was a great way to meet other exchange students.

Not sure if that counts as activity, but they also have kind of a VR station in one of the libraries, where you can play games, which is very entertaining. They also have a Makerspace, where people can take lessons and build things and stuff like that. For example, I printed something in a 3D printer.

## **b) content of my stay at UNC**

### **did I feel prepared**

Actually, I did. Of course, it was a lot in the beginning, but nothing I couldn't handle. Preparation is key, so try to stay ahead of choosing classes and finding a place to live etc. You'll also get a syllabus for each class during the first week, which details expectations and grading for that class as well as the readings.

### **what did I learn**

I learned a lot. Partially my classes repeated what I already learned in Germany, but from a different perspective, which was interesting and why I chose them. I especially enjoyed my class in Psychology and Law, because it was tailored to American Law. A class like that is usually not offered in Germany by nature, so I really learned something I otherwise wouldn't have known about. But apart from academics, I learned so many things: how things work in

America, but also how it is to live in a different country all by myself. But I also learned that no matter how difficult something might seem in the beginning, I could handle it.

### **was my stay useful**

My English skills were already good I guess, but it still helps to actually be speaking English nonstop for such a long time. I'm not sure yet if my stay will help for my studies or my work later on, as I'm still indecisive on how to proceed. Although, I'm pretty sure no matter what work I might have in the future, English skills and contacts to the US will always be useful, just as speaking English is important for studying psychology, since lots of literature is in English. But apart from that, it was useful for myself and to grow from my experience.

## **c) critique and recommendation**

### **personal critique**

I really liked my stay at UNC and in the USA. Lots of people in Freiburg and Germany are concerned about Trump etc., but UNC is to a large degree white and democratic, so opinions don't really clash. It isn't the typical "melting pot" someone might imagine when thinking of the USA. Even if some opinions differ (there are also Republicans on campus etc.), it happens in a civilized way in my experience. After all, people are more than political opinions and you can still talk to people even if their views differ from your own.

But apart from politics, I really liked the American idea of being a part of something bigger than yourself, being a part of a university. People are proud of their country and their university and they show that pride by wearing university colors and logos and singing the alma mater, and I think it is very refreshing to experience that sense of pride and community, since we usually don't really do that in Germany for good reasons.

### **take-away-values**

I learned to improvise and be spontaneous. It is impossible to pack everything you need for a four month stay into one suitcase, so you will have to improvise and ask for help sooner or later. Also, things don't always go as planned. My schedule was way fuller than it was in Germany, as classes happen more regularly, but I could always make time for spontaneous things, whether it was driving out to the country to go and eat ice cream on a farm with my roommates or go camping over Labor Day Weekend with a friend I met in class.

**fears that I had**

I'm not quite sure what I was afraid of before, because I was mostly excited and happy. But I was probably afraid I couldn't handle the change or wouldn't be able to keep up in class, but none of that came true.

Apart from academics, I was slightly scared about moving into an apartment with three strangers that I had never met before and whose names I didn't even know (I subleased from a girl I met on Facebook, she also went abroad for one semester). But after all, my roommates became dear friends and I was really glad that I lived with them. They are great.

**would I recommend to stay abroad**

Yes, yes and yes.

**what would I change**

Don't book the flights too early. Suddenly there will be a website where you have to enter flight details, which lead to me panicking and booking a flight as fast as possible. It turned out fine, but someone I knew that went to the same university booked her flights months later when they were cheaper and it was fine, so don't panic. And, not to be advertising or something, but I flew with Delta and it was fine and they don't have weight restrictions for carry on luggage, which is nice, especially for the way back home.

Also, don't panic if they decline your insurance. I had the one from Hanse Merkur, exactly the same as the other person I knew, just shorter as I went for a shorter time. UNC declined it saying they can't accept international insurance, which wasn't exactly great, as the insurance they wanted me to buy would have been three or probably four times as much for less value. I ended up simply uploading my insurance data again and they accepted without a comment, so they probably declined at first to see if I would buy theirs. You have to keep in mind that American universities are basically companies that want to make money. They cost more, but usually their service is also better once you are in (except for health care maybe).