

Liberal Arts and Sciences (University College Freiburg)
USA (August 2019 – May 2020)
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
USA-2019-AL123-w

The arrival and first weeks in the US and at my host university were exciting. Prior to arrival, we had the possibility to partner with a student who is permanently studying at UNC. In my case, it was a really nice girl that picked me up from the airport and showed me around campus. I also met a couple of other people online already while I was searching for housing that wanted to show me around. With me, another girl from Freiburg came to UNC for an exchange, and we decided to go grocery shopping together and went to the introductory events together. The introduction day that UNC held for us was super helpful to get a first insight into university life and life here in general. The first two weeks were also a little bit hard since I was still working on Essays that I had to write for courses in Freiburg, which meant I was still busy with the old semester while starting the new one here. But it worked out fine and it was manageable. The first weekend here was already a holiday, and my housemates and I decided to visit Charleston in South Carolina, which is a beautiful city.

Prior to arrival, there was a lot of organizational work for the year abroad. The application process and English proficiency test as well as filling out the Visa papers and going to the consulate in Frankfurt was a little exhausting, but definitely worth it. I also had to select courses for the new semester very early, but I knew my interests and there were so many opportunities. The only negative thing was, that finding the courses that were actually taught in Fall 2019 was confusing and I ended up with a list of 50 courses whereas only 8 or 9 were finally taught. For housing, I found a Facebook group where people posted roommate searches and subleases. There, I found my three roommates and we share a small house off campus, which was the best decision after I have seen the student housing on campus. For insurances, I also found it to be cheaper to have one in Germany. You can waive the insurance that the university suggests and STA travel, Hansemerkur and ADAC seem to cover all the waiver requirements at a very reasonable price point.

As mentioned, the first weeks here were quite exciting and there was so much to explore. I cannot even pick one highlight because there were so many of them! Definitely college sports, the Duke football game was fire! (You will understand why as soon as you get here). Also, basketball games here are amazing and you will learn the choreographies and just feel like a big family. The UNC campus is beautiful and there is a lot to do, especially when you find friends with cars. Also visit the cities around! Asheville in fall is beautiful, as is Washington DC and there are cheap buses to get there. The bar scene in Chapel Hill is also quite funny, it is similar to Freiburg with many small places where you can have craft beer and play board games with friends. And don't miss the EASE events to meet fellow exchange students from different countries! You will find friends all over the world.

What I definitely found weird was how superficial most people here are. And don't get me wrong, you will find amazing characters and you will have inspiring conversations all the time! But there is this thing that, for example, sorority girls will mainly date frat boys because "You gotta be rich to be in a Frat and they're cool!". Or whenever the basketballers go somewhere, they have girls following them like baby ducks. It is quite entertaining, yet a little bit sad. Also, I figured that sustainability has not reached the US as much yet and there have been times where I came to my "Principles of Sustainability" class (10/10 recommend by the way) and I would find half of my classmates sitting there with one-way Starbucks cups discussing about how much better it is to use paper bags when grocery shopping. What I have to say though is that Harris Teeter in Carrboro has a great selection of organic food and a nice buffet section! Also, Carrboro is very LGBTQ+ friendly and there are multiple thrift shops where I found nice clothes for cheap, I keep advertising them all the time.

A typical day in the week would not start too early, I would get up around 9 and then either do some readings before class or directly go to one of my early classes. I only took 4 classes last semester and ended up having only one hour of school on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. On Tuesdays and Thursdays I had classes from 11am to 5pm with a 1.5 hour lunch break where I would go to the undergraduate library and do some readings. I also liked printing my readings as hard copies (you get 40\$ free printing for each semester) and read on the lawn in front of Wilson library in the sun, which I did after classes on Mondays and Wednesdays. After classes, I like doing sports, and there are many sports clubs you can join and the gym is free. The first weeks are the most exciting, since all clubs have try-outs (Do not miss Fall Fest for the infos!), and we got to try out sailing and Latin dance. After workout, I would normally do some more readings and prepare for classes I have the next day. The way of studying is pretty much the same as in LAS, there are many readings and usually 2 to 3 Exams (tests) and some short Essays every now and then. For some classes, I had to take short three question quizzes about the readings every time before class. They also take regular attendance, which is probably unusual for most classes in Germany.

One amazing experience here was Asheville in October. The city is about a 4 hour car ride from Chapel Hill and we gathered together a small group of people and rented out a house for a weekend. Asheville is beautiful for hiking, especially when the leaves turn red! Also, what is a MUST, are the basketball games. Since Michael Jordan went to UNC, people here go crazy about sports and games in general, but especially basketball. The arena is huge, everyone wears Carolina Blue and we chant and cheer together and have our own dances during the game. It is as you would imagine it, the basketballers are celebrated as stars here and there's cheerleaders and stadium cameras that put you on the spot if you dance during the games. It is a fun experience and.. wait for it.. free with a student ID! So make sure to not miss out on this experience.

"As foreigners you should avoid.." expecting that everything is like at home or like in the movies about College in the US. You will have an idea about how life might be in the US, and some of it may be true, but most of it isn't. And despite being a developed nation, the US is completely different than Germany and it was still a little cultural shock to live here as opposed to only staying for some weeks and traveling.

"The most important vocabulary is.." Fook Dook (Fuck Duke) and describes the rivalry and hatred against Duke University, which is a private school and good at basketball and.. whatever, they just suck (not really, but you will get the spirit once you're here).

„The thing I miss the most is.." definitely family and friends, but besides the obvious it is German bread (what a basic answer) and getting honest opinions in your face. People here are very polite, but there is a certain superficiality amongst it, where you never know how people actually feel about you. In Germany, whenever you have a problem, you would say it out loud. I miss being criticized, you could say.

Other things I would personally like to recommend: After seeing the housing on campus, be smart. Off-campus housing can be less expensive and way nicer and you can choose your roommates. For me, this turned out perfect and my two roommates became my best friends here, my rent is lower and my walk to campus is around 20 minutes. I bought a bike here and can cook and do my laundry whenever I want. It gives me a lot of freedom and my daily path is not only between housing, library and dining hall. The only downside is that you might have to buy furniture, but there are some retail stores and Walmart has good deals on beds.

Also, since the presidential elections are coming up, go to a rally if you get the chance to! Bernie Sanders was here in October and we flooded the place, 2.000 people did not get in and it was amazing to see him speak. As elections are coming soon, there will be more events.

