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Junior Spring 2024 Semester in Hamburg, Germany



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I chose to study abroad because I knew it would be a great opportunity for my personal and academic growth. I have always admired people who had the chance to study in another country but assumed it would be very expensive and involve a complicated process. When the opportunity to study in Hamburg came around, I decided it was worth exploring, and I am grateful for doing so because the experience was unforgettable.

Application Process

The application process was pretty straightforward. Although there were several steps, they were well-organized, easy to follow, and came in phases. Each phase of the process only took a few minutes to complete. First, I filled out an online form with my personal and academic information. Then, I uploaded transcripts and wrote a short statement of purpose explaining why I wanted to study abroad and how I thought it would benefit me. I emphasized my interest in experiencing a different culture, learning from a new academic environment, and gaining a broader perspective on social work.

After submitting my application, there was a waiting period. Once I was accepted, I had to complete more forms to arrange accommodation and sign up for health insurance. I also had to send my deposit for accommodation and pay student fees. Once again, these forms only took a few minutes to complete.

The next phase involved selecting my classes. Initially, I found the registration process for classes and getting a schedule a bit confusing. Unlike CSULB, there was no specific registration date. The Student Exchange Coordinator, Lea Andres, simply provided a list of available courses in English. Since there were not many, this part was easy to get through. I then emailed her my choices and got into all the classes I wanted.

Classes Taken in Hamburg

It is important to note that the number of units is not the same as CSULB. The units are called ECTS. One ECTS is equivalent to half a unit, so I made sure to enroll in at least 18 ECTS to transfer back a full 9 units. The classes I selected gave me credit for SW331, SW340, and SW350.

I took six classes at HAW Hamburg and completed an 80-hour practicum:

- **Diversity Training (3 ECTS or 1.5 units)**

This class was scheduled during block week before the official start of the semester. Block week classes are short courses similar to the accelerated summer and winter courses at CSULB. This particular course lasted four days, with eight-hour sessions each day, including generous breaks. I loved the block seminars because they allow you to complete a class quickly. The course was designed to provide a deep understanding of diversity, covering various aspects such as age,

religion, socioeconomic status, and disabilities. I loved the teaching style of this professor because she was not just lecturing through PowerPoint. Instead, the professor used creative teaching methods, like bringing in wheelchairs and giving us the option to use one during our lunch hour to help us understand the experiences of people with disabilities. The workload was not heavy at all and mainly consisted of group interaction. The only graded assignment was to write a reflection journal for each day of the class. I highly recommend this class. It was one of the most impactful courses I have ever taken.



Jumping rope during Diversity Training class with students from South Korea.

- **Human Rights/Children Rights (3 ECTS or 1.5 units)**

This block seminar was spread over three non-consecutive days as part of the HAW Hamburg/CSULB summer school, with each session lasting two hours. The course focused on human and children's rights, and we discussed topics such as child labor, bullying, and educational inequities. There was a mix of students from three universities, HAW Hamburg, CSULB MSW and BASW cohorts, and ASH Berlin, which made this class particularly interesting. The teaching style included lectures from professors at each university. They each brought their own perspectives and helped me understand the topics on a global level. For the graded assignment, the class was divided into small groups and required to do a 10-minute presentation on the final meeting day, with the option to select our own topic related to the class.

- **Strength-Based Interventions with Children and Families (3 ECTS or 1.5 units)**

This was another block seminar that lasted two eight-hour days. It focused on reframing situations for clients, always highlighting the positives rather than the negatives. Dr. Meyer Adams taught the class along with other CSULB professors during the HAW Hamburg/CSULB summer school. The course included interactive sessions, lectures, and exercises based on real-life scenarios. By the end of the two days, I felt confident in understanding how to apply strength-based interventions in my future practice. For the final assignment, the class was given the option to choose a case vignette and answer a few questions on applying strength-based interventions for the family.

- **Global Social Policy (4 ECTS or 2 units)**

This full-semester course met once a week for an hour and a half. The class mostly involved lectures where we explored various global issues such as women's rights, human rights to adequate housing, healthcare, and other important social topics. For example, we compared systems like universal healthcare in European countries to those in the United States, which helped us see what works and what doesn't in different places. We also looked at the homelessness crisis, which was eye-opening in terms of the different approaches and solutions being implemented globally.

There were no exams in this class. The only graded assignment was a 45-minute group presentation on a chosen global issue. In addition, I had to do an individual three-page research paper on the same topic as the group presentation. Although the workload was light, I would consider this class the most challenging because I had no prior knowledge of global social policies. There was a lot of information to understand, but it also helped me grow as a student and future social worker.

- **Discrimination Against Our Future Selves: Ageism as a Global Challenge (3 ECTS or 1.5 units)**

This full-semester course met once a week for an hour and a half. The professor was very approachable and created a welcoming learning environment. The course covered various issues related to ageism, such as beauty standards, the sex life of older adults, discrimination in the workplace, and challenges faced by the aging LGBTQ+ community. Our class consisted of lectures, group discussions, and in-class poster board assignments. The in-class assignments did not count toward the final grade, and there were no exams. For the graded assignments, the professor required a group presentation on a topic related to aging. Additionally, we had to write a 7-10 page research paper. The professor allowed us to use the same topic for both the presentation and the paper, which made writing the paper much easier since I had already done the research.

- **Community Work and Community Research for Social Justice (3 ECTS or 1.5 units)**

This was another one of my favorite classes. The professor was passionate about community work and social justice, which was evident in her teaching. The class met once a week for an hour and a half. Each session included videos, articles, and class discussions, and the professor made sure to listen to students' inputs and opinions on the topics covered. One highlight of the course was a field trip to a low-income immigrant community, which emphasized the importance of community work. My favorite part of the class were the discussions on mass incarceration and abolition. For the graded assignment, we were required to write a 10,000-character paper about our favorite topic from the course. This assignment allowed me to freely express myself about a topic I am passionate about and apply what I learned throughout the course.

- **Practicum (80 hours)**

As part of my social work program at CSULB, I was required to complete an 80-hour practicum. I was placed with an incredible agency named Pro*BEA, which was established in 2017 with the passing of the Prostitute Protection Act in Germany. Pro*BEA is responsible for providing sex workers with information, advice, and registration. They also grant permissions for prostitution businesses and monitor and control these businesses. Although the language barrier limited the amount of direct work I could do, I was able to observe and learn about Germany's progressive approach to sex work, which emphasizes safety, health, and legal protection for sex workers. I also witnessed the thorough process of reviewing business applications to grant permissions and monitoring the businesses to ensure compliance with regulations. I loved seeing how the social workers at the Hamburg location welcomed everyone without judgment and went above and beyond to meet the person's needs. I am grateful to have experienced how Germany's legal framework and support system help sex workers operate in safer environments while respecting human rights and self-determination.



Pro*BEA team at one of our bi-monthly police training sessions. These trainings covered a range of topics, from self-defense tactics to communication strategies and other methods to improve the agency's efficiency during control visits. Pro*BEA regularly visits brothels and other registered businesses where prostitution takes place to ensure compliance with regulations and to verify that they are providing safe and clean spaces for the workers.

Faculty and International Office Support

The international office staff was supportive in helping with things like getting a dorm, signing up for health insurance, connecting with a "buddy," and planning week of welcome as well as other events throughout the semester.

Accommodation

The accommodation process was straightforward: I received a contract, emailed it back, and sent a deposit. I was placed in the Gustav Radbruch Haus, which had a gym, laundromats, study rooms, a reading room, an art room, a music room, and even a bar where parties were held every other week. I shared a flat with two other females, one from Spain and the other from Latvia. The number of roommates can vary, depending on the dorm. I personally enjoyed the smaller, quieter space. In addition, my dorm was a 13-minute walk to campus, an 8-minute walk to a grocery store, and a 5-minute walk to the metro station Berliner Tor.

Welcome

Welcome week was really fun. The international staff and WeBuddy program organized fun and interactive events such as a Meet&Greet, bowling, a scavenger hunt throughout the city, an international dinner, and visits to museums.



The winning team of the scavenger hunt. Students from the U.S., Chile, Netherlands, Ireland and Israel.



Just a few of the dishes from our international dinner. Everyone brought a dish from their home country. I took this photo in the early stages of setting up, but these tables were filled with over 100 different dishes, snacks, and drinks worldwide.

WeBuddy Program:

The WeBuddy program was somewhat helpful. I was assigned a "buddy" to assist me throughout the semester. The person I was paired with was also a social work student and contacted me weeks before my arrival. I appreciated this as it gave me some peace of mind. He offered to pick me up from the airport, which was extremely helpful since I had three pieces of luggage and no idea how to navigate the metro system. For other tasks, such as opening a bank account, applying for a visa, and registering my address, I was able to figure them out on my own. This was fine with me, as it was part of the process of adapting to and navigating a new country.

Living in Hamburg:

One of the things I loved about Hamburg is that it was a very diverse city, with people from various cultural backgrounds living and working together. This diversity was reflected in the city's food, events, and general atmosphere. I also found the metro system within the city to be very reliable. The best part is that, unlike public transportation in California, the metro in Hamburg passes by every few minutes. So, if you miss your ride, you can be sure another one will arrive shortly. There is no need to run to make it on time.

Navigating the city and bureaucratic processes was initially confusing and complicated, but that's just like any new thing one encounters in life. Once I learned the ropes, life became much easier. In fact, packing up to fly back home was harder than I imagined it would be.



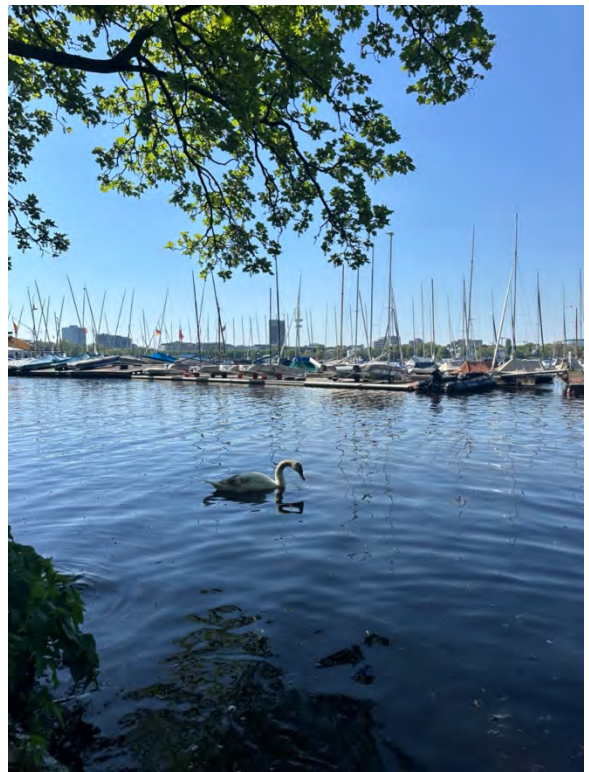
St. Peters Church



St. Nikolai Memorial



Alster Lake. A popular hangout spot where you can have picnics, ride bikes, paddleboard, kayak, and more.



Traveling

Traveling throughout Europe was more accessible and convenient than I expected. At first, I didn't think I'd be able to travel much during the semester, but the light workload made it easy to take 3-5 day trips during the school week. Just a 2-hour flight could take me to a different culture with its own language and food, which I enjoyed. I had the privilege of visiting:

Italy (Florence and Rome)





↑ London

Amsterdam ↓



Spain (Barcelona and Montserrat)





Santorini, Greece



Schwerin, Germany



Lübeck, Germany



Berlin, Germany



Overview of Costs

Once I committed to studying abroad, I immediately started planning my finances and applying for scholarships to support my journey. I applied for as many scholarships as possible. It is definitely worth taking the time to apply, even if you think you might not receive any awards. Every bit helps and can make a huge difference. I was fortunate to have received 3 generous scholarships in addition to the €1,000 stipend from HAW Hamburg. These scholarships were invaluable in supporting my journey and helping me make the most of my time abroad.

Scholarship	USD	EUROS
HAW Hamburg Stipend		1,000
ASI Study Abroad Scholarship (CSULB)	1,000	
Career Development Scholarship (CSULB)	1,000	
Gilman-DAAD Scholarship	5,000	
Total Scholarships		7,440

I also want to be transparent about my expenses, but I don't want anyone to be discouraged by the numbers. While my overall spending may seem high, a large part of it went towards travel, which was a personal choice I made to maximize my experience. My flights included seat upgrades and additional luggage, which also contributed to the overall cost. There are plenty of ways to keep costs low, and everyone's experience will be different. It's all about finding the balance that works for you.

Additionally, I was not required to get AOK health insurance because fortunately, I was provided health insurance through the Gilman-DAAD Scholarship, which helped cover that aspect of my expenses.

Expense	Cost (in Euros)	Total
Round trip flight (includes upgrades)	2,195	2,195
Rent (6-month contract)	380 per month + 500 deposit	2,780
Food	65 per week for 21 weeks	1,365
Foreign Travel Insurance	243	243
Semester Contribution (includes metro pass)	290	290
Health Insurance	0	0
Miscellaneous	1,500	1,500
Travel	7,000	7,000
Total Expenses		15,373

Total Expenses – Total Scholarships = NET EXPENSES of €7,933 or \$8,667

Final thoughts and tips for future students

Studying abroad has been an incredibly rewarding experience that has taught me more about myself and the world than I ever imagined. For anyone considering this journey, my advice is to go all in. Step outside your comfort zone. Don't be afraid to explore beyond the tourist spots and dive into the local culture. Embrace every opportunity to make international and local friends. These connections will enrich your experience by giving you a deeper understanding of different cultures. While you're learning about other cultures, don't forget to share your own. It is a great way to build mutual respect and understanding.

Lastly, be flexible and open-minded. Things won't always go as planned, and that's okay. Some of the most memorable experiences come from unexpected moments. And remember, studying abroad isn't just about academics; it's about personal growth, and sometimes the biggest lessons come from challenges you didn't anticipate.



Fourth of July in Hamburg