



Adventures in Hamburg

I first heard about the exchange program with Hamburg during a UNO filmmakers club meeting in the spring of 2009. Professor Wolfgang Willaschek attended our meeting and discussed the film program at the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences (HAW). He showed several student film projects and encouraged us to study abroad. I had already been pondering an exchange program with a university in Middlesex England that offered several film courses, but after listening to Mr. Willaschek speak I decided to gather more information on the HAW film program. Having German roots, I had always been interested in visiting and this seemed like the perfect opportunity. From what I read and heard, HAW seemed like a great place to study and broaden my horizons. I officially applied for the international exchange program before the beginning of UNO's fall semester in August of 2009.

I finally arrived at the Hamburg Airport on the last day of February. Waiting to greet me at the airport was my assigned "buddy", Stephen McElholm. The buddy system

that HAW has in place is absolutely wonderful. I cannot imagine how incredibly lost I would have been the first few weeks if it were not for Stephen. Among a host of other things he helped me set up a local bank account, register with the city, and complete the necessary paperwork for my visa. Throughout the course of the semester Stephen and I worked together on several film projects and became very good friends.

During my first two weeks in Hamburg I was enrolled in an all-day intensive German language program. While the program itself was relatively expensive, I believe I got my money's worth of knowledge. I learned some basic German survival skills that enabled me to order food, ask for directions, and discuss personal information, among other beginning level conversation skills.

The "Hamburg Program" is a good opportunity for exchange students to experience the city sights and meet fellow students all for a relatively inexpensive price. "Miniature Wonderland" was one of my favorite tours. It was a massive and intricate miniature railroad display. There were different room and set-ups designated for many

European countries. During my first weekend in Germany I joined the Hamburg Program for an exciting trip to Berlin. We stayed in a hostel, toured the city, went to museums and clubs, and made a lot of friends. The downside of Berlin was the



Hot currywurst in cold Berlin!

weather. It was bitter cold and windy outside our entire stay. I would definitely like to return to Berlin again in the summer months!

Regular classes began in the middle of March. I was enrolled in five courses: Practice Dramaturgy (Studio Hamburg), Sound Design, Video Technology, Camera Acting, and Perception. The class structure is very unlike anything I have experienced in American universities. At the HAW all courses are project based. There are no weekly graded assignments or tests; in fact the only grade you receive all semester is based upon your projects and presentations during the final two weeks of school. I found this new structure to be frustrating at times because I was never aware of my academic standing throughout the semester. However, I enjoyed being able to concentrate on bigger projects without having many school assignments in between.



The main campus was an easy five minute walk from my apartment.

I lived in a student housing apartment called the Gustav-Radbruch Haus and I shared a flat with two other roommates. The cost was a bit high because it included a weekly cleaning service as well. I would have preferred paying less and cleaning myself, although that option was not presented to us. The apartment location was very nice. It was nearby to the main film studies campus, the grocery store, and also very close to one of the major transportation terminals. The apartment actually had a very fancy restaurant attached to it also, though most students do not eat there because of the high prices.



Gustav-Radbruch Haus

Studying abroad can be a fun and engaging experience, but it's not without its share of challenges as well. Even from the beginning, my biggest concern was always my inability to speak the German language. However, I was assured many times that this would be no problem because the film courses would be in English and a large portion of the Hamburg population was fluent in English as a second language. However, I found this not to be quite true when the film courses began. In the beginning introductions were made in English and then the language quickly switched back to German for the remainder of the day. A lot of the language adjustment from the school's side could be attributed to the fact that I was among the first exchange students from the United States. As the semester continued the course instructors gradually began using more and more

English in their lectures.

Although even towards the end many class discussions were still held in German. I did learn a lot in my courses, though I am certain I could have learned so much more had I been capable of understanding German. In the



A faux news broadcast in Camera Acting.

outside class projects I normally had no problems with language barriers as I was commonly in groups containing English speakers as a majority.

The Studio Hamburg course was a very enjoyable learning experience for me. A story or concept is chosen to be produced as part of the course. The production is run by all students and overseen by the mentor Wolfgang Willaschek. Throughout the semester the students involved go through a typical film preproduction culminating in the film being shot inside the Studio Hamburg soundstage. During our first few class meetings the project was discussed and one of my short screenplays was chosen for production. As a class we decided to film two versions of my script, a comedy and tragedy, along with a live streaming television show about the production. I was involved in co-directing the tragedy version along with my German friend Silke Buse. The filming wrapped in mid-

July and a post-production team is working hard to ensure that the film is completed by early September.



It's a wrap! Co-directors and actors in Studio Hamburg.

Sound Design was an interesting class, although we rarely had actual classes for that course because it was often cancelled. I learned how to operate a sound recording booth and create new audio for films through the creative use of everyday objects. We also discussed sound theory in films and analyzed various scenes.

During most of my exchange I was very busy with film projects and could not afford much time off for travel. However, during the month of April I was fortunate enough to travel to Italy and stay with my lady-friend (also on a student exchange) in Florence. Europe offers many inexpensive forms of transportation. I was lucky enough to book a cheap flight on one of the discount airlines. I would definitely recommend

traveling to a surrounding country during an exchange. It was very interesting to compare and contrast two different European cultures.

The public transportation in Hamburg is the best of any city I have visited. There is an intricate network of trains, buses, and subways...even a ferry system. Overall the transportation is clean, efficient, safe, and reliable. Included in the price of your school admission is a transportation card that allows you to travel free in the city for the entire semester. Once you figure out the system, it's easy to get around in Hamburg.



Hanging out in Florence!



Many of the train stations are colorful and futuristic!



In my Video Technology course I teamed up with several students in an effort to produce a short underwater film. My part in the film was conceptualizing the story as well as being the head camera operator. The challenges of an underwater film became very apparent as we began preproduction. It was almost impossible to find a reasonably priced pool to shoot in and we eventually decided to film in a professor's garden pool. The weather and water temperature greatly impeded our filmmaking performance and we were unsuccessful in completing the film we originally set out to shoot. From the underwater footage we did capture we put together a documentary film about the experience. I believe we all came away from the project with a great amount of new knowledge concerning underwater filmmaking.



Setting up and testing the camera!

Many foreigners, like myself, visualize schnitzel, wurst, and beer when imagining stereotypical German cuisine. Needless to say I was very keen on trying these local foods and drink...and was not disappointed. Several of my favorite German foods and snacks

included those same clichés. I greatly enjoyed the currywurst and schnitzel. I also became an avid fan of the northern German Pilsner beer style. With Hamburg being a very diverse city, it was easy to find a variety of international cuisines as well. The Hauptbahnhof (Central Train Station) was a great place to indulge in inexpensive Indian food.



**Beer is an important social drink in Germany.
My apartment even had a beer vending machine!**



I always enjoyed discovering subtle differences between German and American culture. For instance in Germany it's common for drinking water to be carbonated, the orange Fanta tastes much more "real", cell phone use is much less apparent, and grocery stores rarely refrigerate eggs and juice. One of the less comfortable differences I noticed was the lack of indoor air conditioning. During the short summer heat waves the weather can really wear on you. Ice cream is the best answer!

Being in Europe during the same year as the World Cup, I got to experience the full fervor of the excited fans. The city of Hamburg set up massive television viewing screens at an outdoor stadium. This “Fan Fest” was immensely popular among the young locals and brought in huge crowds.

Though never seeing myself as a soccer fan beforehand, I found myself wrapped up in the excitement of the crowds and genuinely rooting for Deutschland to go all the way.



Fan Fest in Hamburg!

Studying abroad can be very expensive and budgeting your money wisely is important. Along with rent, insurance, groceries, travel costs, there are a multitude of other costs that spring up. For example in my last week of residence in mid-July I was told surprisingly that I would have to pay health insurance for the month of August as well.

Overall my student exchange at the HAW was a great experience. I made friends, ate delicious food, traveled, worked on interesting film projects, and learned a great amount both academically and about myself. One of the most important lessons I learned while studying in Hamburg came from the same person who encouraged me to go on the exchange, my good friend and teacher, Wolfgang Willaschek. In his words, “There are no problems...only challenges.”

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