

Interim Report January 2022

Arrival and Orientation week

I arrived at Lansing Airport on August 20th late in the evening after a connecting flight from Chicago. I can strongly dis advise this flight itinerary because I did not know enough about the local setup to navigate after a long flight in the dark easily. As a result, I was not aware that there are no official taxis at Lansing Airport, even though the website claims this. Because I had no American phone plan yet, I was effectively stranded until a stranger was kind enough to have his Uber driver pick me up as well. Instead of having to deal with such issues, I would recommend anyone traveling to Michigan State to fly into Detroit and take the Michigan Flyer bus that goes all the way to MSU's campus.

However, once I arrived at my dorm, South Wonders Hall, I was kindly greeted and shown to my room. I would recommend arriving a few days before the official orientation begins because that allows you to explore the huge campus beforehand and meet some other students. Once orientation started, I was greeted by very kind ASP&E organizers and was able to meet many international students. We were given a tour of the campus, received tips on how to rent a bike (which I recommend), and a brief overview of what to expect in the upcoming semester.

Housing

I was assigned to my dorm before I arrived in Michigan. This process was relatively easy because the ASP&E Team helped me complete the housing sign-up. During the sign-up, I was offered the choice of either communal or suite-style bathrooms. Communal bathrooms mean that there are sanitary facilities provided on every floor but not attached to your room. Suite-style bathrooms, on the other hand, are attached to your room. The South and East Neighborhood both have suite-style bathrooms, while all the other neighborhoods have communal bathrooms. I opted for the suite-style, which is why I live in the South

Wintersemester 2021/22

Michigan State University

Neighborhood. However, one thing to note about this form is that the bathroom is connected to both your own room and the room next to you, which surprised me as the sketches on the MSU website did not show this. In your room, you will find a desk, chair, wardrobe, and a lofted bed. This is all extremely basic and will not be very comfortable in the long run. I am lucky enough to have an American roommate, with whom I get along very well, who was able to bring a sofa, tv, fridge, and microwave along with other essentials that one needs.

The housing comes with a mandatory dining plan that provides access to all the dining halls on campus. A positive effect of this system is that you do not need to worry about cooking or shopping. However, the downside of this logic is that MSU does not provide a kitchen for you to cook yourself, which in turn means that you are forced to always eat at the dining hall. Nonetheless, though, this is not usually an issue because there are a lot of food options in the different dining halls so that everyone can find something they like.

Classes

Classes in the US are built up very differently than I was used to from Germany. For example, every class usually meets twice a week for an hour and twenty minutes or three times a week for 50 minutes. Furthermore, the classes require a lot more active participation, which is usually at least one assignment per class. However, the combination of the many small assignments and the midterm exams result in the final exam not being the exclusive assessment on which the final grade is based. Instead, all of the assignments and exams count towards the final grade. This different system took me some time to get used to, but after the first semester, I can confidently say that it allows the students to feel more in control of their grades and provides more opportunities to rectify a bad grade.

Like the housing, I was also able to choose which classes I wanted to take long before my arrival with the help of the ASP&E Team. This process worked very smoothly, and I got

Wintersemester 2021/22

Michigan State University

into almost all of my first-choice classes. The professors are usually very approachable and are always excited to have an exchange student in their class.

Covid-19 restrictions

The pandemic affected my year abroad very much because it was delayed an entire academic year. In August of 2021, though, I was finally allowed to come to MSU. At that time, the USA had a significantly more relaxed approach to Covid, as there was no official mask mandate for fully vaccinated people. However, the university chose to impose an indoor mask mandate regardless because a college is, as we all know, a place where very many people interact with each other, or in other words: the ideal breeding ground for an airborne virus. Nonetheless, coming from the far stricter restrictions in Germany, the University policy seemed very lax. Over the semester, perhaps unsurprisingly, many of my friends eventually caught Covid. I am lucky not to have contracted it as of yet, but the university dorms are obviously not a place one should be in if one is a high-risk person as the mask mandate is hard to enforce. Another restriction the university placed on the students is that anyone attending in-person classes and living on campus must be fully vaccinated. However, all one has to do is provide the vaccination dates, which means it is relatively easy to provide that information without it necessarily being true.

Different models are offered for classes, either in-person classes, synchronous online classes, or asynchronous online classes. For example, I had two in-person classes and two synchronous online classes in the winter semester. This spring semester, I have four in-person classes and two asynchronous classes. My experience with these models has been very positive because the professors put in a lot of effort to teach to the best of their ability, no matter in what model the class is taught. However, as in every online class in Germany, the student interaction is almost zero compared to in-person classes. That is why the friends I have made in classes have all come from the in-person models.

The hardest aspect of studying at MSU

One of the hardest aspects is probably actually getting on the plane that will take you halfway across the globe to live in a foreign country for the next nine months. Once you have done that, everything else is significantly easier. Nonetheless, there are, of course, some things that seem strange and foreign even when you are at MSU. For example, I struggle the most with the concept of having a roommate. This is very different from Germany as a roommate is not simply a WG-Mitbewohner, but instead truly lives in the same room as you do. The result is almost no privacy whatsoever. Since I did not know anyone at MSU before flying to Michigan, my roommate assignment was a gamble. I was fortunate because I get along extremely well with both my roommate and my suitemate. However, I have heard of other students that have not been as fortunate and had issues with their respective roommates. This is a real gamble, as it is hard to get a new room assignment and also a process one does not wish to experience during a year abroad. And even though I have a good relationship with my roommate, sharing a room and having no privacy is still a concept that I do not understand or support.

The best aspect of studying at MSU

One of the best aspects of studying in the USA, especially at MSU, is the incredible number of sports options. Numerous high-quality varsity teams compete against other schools. The most important ones at MSU are the Football Team, the Basketball Team, and the Ice Hockey Team. While it obviously is not possible to join the varsity teams during an exchange year, watching the home games is a real event that I can recommend to every exchange student! It is also possible to do a lot of sports yourself, as there is a club for almost every type of sport. Another option I enjoy very much is the IntraMural (IM) sport that allows students to form teams and then compete against other student teams in a tournament. Last semester, I competed

Wintersemester 2021/22

Michigan State University

in beach volleyball, indoor volleyball, and soccer with my roommate and his friends, which was a lot of fun!

All in all, my advice to anyone considering an exchange year in the USA, and especially at MSU, is to go for it! It will be a year that you will never forget, and you will make many new friends. In my opinion, it makes more sense to complete a full year instead of only one semester. This is because - going into my second semester - I can confirm that I do not simply feel like an exchange student anymore but instead like an integrated member of the MSU community.