

## Global Exchange: Final Report

University of Connecticut Fall 2023

Degree program in Freiburg: M. Sc. Applied Physics

Classes taken during the exchange in: Astrophysics, Machine Learning, Economics

- First days and weeks

All in all, I had a wonderful time in the US. I travelled the first week through some east coast cities before arrival on campus, so I came impressed, relaxed, and without jetlag to campus. On campus, we had two orientation days. There, I already got to know many other exchange students from all over the world and made friendships that last up to today. Those first days were already amazing, and there are so many fun things to do and explore. My advice is to take part in all the activities and events UConn hosts in the first days and weeks and to be open to meet friendly people!

- Class selection

Enrolling in classes at UConn is a bit tricky. The Experiential Global Learning team (EGL) will ask you to provide your preferences for classes a few months in advance, as they take care of enrolling you. However, not being able to enroll yourself on your own also means having less control. Many of us, including myself, ended up not having enough classes for the visa requirements or not the ones we wanted even right before arrival, which was causing stress. But here's the good news: don't stress too much. On campus, you can attend the first lectures of the classes you want to take, chat with professors, and ask for their permission to enroll. This approach works out in most cases and all the people I met were happy with their classes after the first week. So, my advice is not to worry too much about class enrollment before arriving. Treat it as something to sort out in the first week. Personally, I completely changed my schedule after the first week and got into interesting classes in astrophysics, machine learning, and environmental economics.

- Housing

At UConn, exchange students are guaranteed a housing spot on campus. This makes life easy, as you don't have to worry about looking for accommodation yourself. If you go to UConn, you should definitely take advantage of this. Every exchange student I know decided to live on campus and living off campus usually requires owning a car. Living on campus also facilitates meeting more people and provides better access to dining halls and campus activities.

I ended up in the North dormitories, which is regarded as one of the worse spots. Many exchange students end up there anyways since we are the last to choose rooms. If you do end up in north, try getting into Hurley Hall, McConaughy Hall or Baldwin Hall, as they are closest to the North and Northwest dining halls and the first two have direct access to the laundry room. Living in apartments usually means having nicer rooms but also being further away from campus. Location-wise I would suggest areas like Hilltop, Northwest, McMahon, and West. Ultimately, the dorms are all pretty similar anyways and you shouldn't stress too much about your choice. If you end up in a dorm that's further away, like Northwood, you can rent a bike at the Recreation center for the semester (\$60, worth it).

- What was the hardest aspect (if there are any) and what do you like especially about studying there?

The hardest aspect about the exchange was the application and preparation process. This process was very time-consuming, complex and had many unexpected, associated tasks, like learning for the TOEFL test. On top of this, financial uncertainty was stressful, as life in the US is expensive, costs are hard to estimate and the decisions on many scholarships come in quite late (2 months prior to leaving if I remember correctly). On the flip side, upon arrival at the UConn everything felt way more certain, and life was great as soon as made some friends in the first days. The time there was a blast and I think this is able to make up for the hassle during preparation.

In the US, classes are way more interactive, and they remind me more of school. This more engaging style of teaching helped me stay more dedicated and helped me to actually learn more than I would with the German style of teaching. Also, achieving good grades in the US is easier. The homework is usually easy compared to German tasks.

- How was the organisation of your exchange, how did you decide?

I decided for UConn, because of its academic reputation and its location in the US. Additionally, many reports of previous exchange students were (rightfully) positive and recommended the university.

The whole organization process was guided well by the University of Freiburg international office up to the decision that I got accepted for the UConn. Subsequently, the UConn Experiential Global Learning office provided a timetable for preparatory tasks like class selection and visa applications. They also hosted regular webinars on the current tasks. In addition to their guideline, I only organized a third-party health insurance and booked flights (the earlier the cheaper, obviously).

- What did you like best and what did you like least about the country/your studies there?

The biggest surprise for me was the huge enthusiasm about college sports. I wasn't too big of a sports fan back at home, but the energy and dedication of the UConn students was magical and made me want to go to all the games (tickets are free for students by the way!).

The most shocking experience for me was seeing so many Americans being completely careless when it comes to environmental consciousness. One example: It was normal for my roommate to leave the AC, the fan, and the lights on in our room when he left.

- Practical tips and final remarks

Attend as many preparatory events as possible! We had the opportunity to meet up with other Connecticut exchange students in advance in Heidelberg, and two UConn representatives joined the event giving us useful information.

If you are in doubt whether you should stay for one or two semesters, I would recommend staying for only one. Life is expensive there, and already get to see most of the interesting things in that time. Most exchange students that were at UConn together with me stayed for one semester and one student even shortened his stay from one year to one semester. For health insurance, I totally recommend getting a UConn health insurance waiver and taking out a third-party insurance. The UConn insurance is expensive and does not give benefits. I chose HanseMerkur YoungTravel. I was lucky enough not to need it, but it got accepted without any problems and it was recommended by many.