

# **Global Exchange: Interim Report**

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Fall 2023

Degree program in Freiburg: Economics (Bachelor)

Classes taken during the exchange in: Political Science, Sociology, Social Work

When I first arrived in Madison (I recommend Van Galder bus service from Chicago O'Hare), my roommate picked me up at the bus station and showed me around the city that evening. Due to jet lag, I woke up at six in the morning almost every day for the first week, so I used the time to explore the city and shop for things to furnish my room. Luckily, there was a WhatsApp group with all the exchange students coming to UW-Madison that semester, and through the group I met a lot of other international students before the orientation events. However, the orientation events for the exchange students were a bit disappointing because they only consisted of a campus tour and other information about the university that we were given. However, there is an organization called Madison Friend of International Students (MFIS), which is a private non-profit organization that arranges various activities and events, one of which is the Welcome Picnic, which I highly recommend. Since the university did not provide many activities for us, we organized our own activities in the beginning and also tried out some of the bars on State Street, which was also a lot of fun and where I met a lot of nice people that I became friends with throughout the semester.

Since I am in Madison for two semesters, I decided to take classes outside of my major for the first semester. Since these classes could accommodate a large number of students, I was able to take all the classes I wanted. Because they were introductory classes, they were fairly easy and I never had any problems or struggles throughout the semester, which was perfect for exploring the city and meeting other people from the U.S. and abroad. However, even though the classes were not really challenging, the workload was higher than I expected it to be, which was due to weekly assignments, essays, and midterms. Since I am used to having only one final exam in Germany, the assignments surprised and admittedly annoyed me at first. After a while, however, I realized that this was actually the better way for me to study because there

was less pressure on the final exams when you also have midterms and the final exams only count for 30% of your final grade. Even though I had a lot to do during the semester, I had enough free time to explore the city, the surrounding area (I recommend going to Devil's Lake), and the cities of Chicago and Milwaukee.

Finding housing in Madison proved to be a bit difficult for me. Although the university offered me the opportunity to apply for a dorm room, I decided to look on my own because I did not know in advance whether I would have gotten a single room or a shared room with up to three other people. In an exchange report, I read about the Facebook group "NEW UW Madison Sublet and Roommate Board", a group with more than 70,000 members where many people post information about available rooms and apartments. If you know WG-Gesucht, it works the same way. However, housing in Madison, or the U.S. in general, is expensive and many rooms cost close to a thousand dollars a month. Therefore, cheap rooms (cheap means 500 to 700 dollars) had many applicants and it was difficult for me to find one. Finally, I was able to find a very cheap option that was very central and where I would be living with two other roommates. After facetimeing with one of them, I signed the lease. After living there for a few months now, I would definitely encourage students to look for a room on Facebook, because in a dorm you are forced to sign up for a meal plan and overall, dorms tend to be much more expensive.

My favorite thing about studying in the U.S. and especially at UW-Madison so far has been the beauty of Lake Mendota with its lakeside cafés, and the sense of community at the university and on campus. Students in the U.S. tend to be much nicer than in Germany and they were really interested in international students, so it was easy for me to get to know Americans. Of course, I cannot speak for everyone and sometimes it can also feel a bit fake, but in general I had a strong feeling of being welcomed at the university. What I also really liked was the amount of activities you can do at the university (now I know where all the tuition money goes) from going to the gym, which is a huge indoor sports area, to joining countless of student clubs ranging from sports to social, political or cultural causes. What I definitely did not like were the prices of the dining halls at the university. Because each dining hall serves an all-you-can-eat buffet, and you cannot buy a single meal, you have to pay twelve to thirteen dollars for lunch, which is why I almost never ate there. Also, I highly recommend enjoying your last slice of bread before you come to the U.S. because there is only white bread here and good bakeries are expensive.

After living in Madison for four months, I now know the university and the city with some of its characteristics. Of course, there is still a lot to learn and experience, so I cannot wait to start my second semester at UW-Madison. Since most of the exchange students only came to Madison for one semester, I am now one of the only exchange students here (including those who will come for the spring semester), and now I feel like I am not just traveling to Madison for a few months, but that I am really living there as a sconnie (that is what people in Wisconsin call themselves).